

Blueprints for Belief

Laying the Theological Foundations for Constructing Your Faith

Westminster Confession of Faith 5.1-5.7 – August 13, 2025

1. God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

- Nothing happens by accident, luck, or mechanical fate. God is in control, and He governs everything with purpose and wisdom. He didn't just create the world and walk away. He has a perfect plan and all His actions point us back to Him.
- "He upholds the universe by the word of his power." (Hebrews 1:3)
- "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases." (Psalm 115:3)
- "The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble." (Proverbs 16:4)

2. Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

- God uses nature, the decisions of men, and other events to secure the outcomes He desires. Some things are necessary (like gravity). Other things appear accidental to us, but they are not. Human choices are real, but God causes everything to work together for His purposes.
- "He covers the heavens with clouds; he prepares rain for the earth; he makes grass grow on the hills." (Psalm 147:8)
- "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat... shall not cease." (Genesis 8:22)
- "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will." (Proverbs 21:1)
- "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13)
- "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." (Proverbs 16:33)

3. God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure.

- God may also work in extraordinary ways. Miracles, etc.

4. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in his providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering, and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.

- God permits our sin, makes use of it, and sets limits on it. But God is not the author of sin, nor does He approve of it. We are responsible for our actions.
- "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good..." (Genesis 50:20)
- "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above." (John 19:11) – Jesus to Pilate.
- "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." (James 1:13)

5. The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave, for a season, his own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and, to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.

- God's people may experience suffering and sin, but God uses it as a means of discipline and growth.

- “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.” (Psalm 119:67)
- “...to keep me from becoming conceited... a thorn was given me in the flesh.” (2 Corinthians 12:7)
- “He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.” (Hebrews 12:10–11)

6. As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as a righteous Judge, for former sins, doth blind and harden, from them he not only withholdeth his grace whereby they might have been enlightened in their understandings, and wrought upon in their hearts; but sometimes also withdraweth the gifts which they had, and exposeth them to such objects as their corruption makes occasions of sin; and, withal, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan, whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, even under those means which God useth for the softening of others.

- God sometimes allows good things to happen to bad people. He also keeps bad people from being as bad as they could be. These blessings do not mean God is happy with their sin. In other words, the Bible doesn't teach karma.
- “The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts.” (1 Samuel 2:7)
- “For Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’” (Romans 9:17)
- “...for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matthew 5:45)

7. As the providence of God doth, in general, reach to all creatures; so, after a most special manner, it taketh care of his church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof.

- In a special way, God providentially cares for His church.
- “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)
- “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6)

Objections

“If God controls everything, then I am not responsible for what I do.”

But God does not force or coerce us into sin. This is a philosophical assumption known as fatalism. Providence is not fatalism.

“If God controls everything, then things will turn out the same no matter what I do.”

But God controls both the means and the ends, meaning that our actions are extremely important.

“If God controls everything, then he must be the author of sin.”

This objection usually starts with the sin of Adam. Why did God plan the fall? It is a version of the philosophical problem of evil. If God is both sovereign and good, why does evil exist at all? Eastern religions teach that evil is an illusion. Atheists believe everything happens by chance. The Bible teaches that evil is real, but it has a purpose. We do not fully understand why God did it the way He did, but we do know he is good and we can trust him.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Which brings you more comfort and why: everything happens by chance, by fate, or by the providence of God?
- 2) Very often, the Bible applies God's providence by telling us not to fear. Why?
- 3) Can you think of a time in your life when you saw God at work in something difficult?
- 4) The best answer to the problem of evil is the cross. Why?