

**WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH  
SHORTER CATECHISM**

**LESSON # 11 (Q1LES11) - PROVIDENCE  
QUESTIONS# 11 & 12**

**1. Prayer**

**2. Bible reading:** Isaiah 46: 3 - 11

**3. Review:** In questions 7 & 8 we learned about the decrees of God, that for his own glory he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. We learned that God executes his decrees in two ways, His works of creation, and His works of providence.

In our last lesson we learned, in SC questions 9 & 10, about God's works of creation. We learned that God created all things, of nothing, by the word of His power, speaking all things into existence. He did this in the space of six days, and when complete, all things were "very good", or without sin. God created man male and female, in His own image. God is a spirit, without physical body, so "in his own image" means his spiritual characteristics, or knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

**3. Introduction:** This week we will talk about God's works of providence. God's works of providence are covered in the SC, in two questions

Question 11. **What are God's works of providence?**

Answer: **God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.**

Question 10. **What special act of providence did God exercise toward man in the estate wherein he was created?**

Answer: **When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of live with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death.**

**4. GOD'S WORKS OF PROVIDENCE**

- a. The WCF devotes a whole chapter to “providence”, chapter 5. It is an interesting chapter, and we will use it in our discussion.
- b. If we are going to talk of providence, we should know what it is. Would anyone like to take a shot at “providence”?

Again, the “Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary” defines “providence” as “The act of providing, provision; preparation” and “the care or benevolent guidance of God or nature”.

And Provide is defined as “to furnish the means of support”.

So God’s works of providence would be his supporting us.

- c. Chapter 5 of the WCF, para 1, says “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.”
- d. How does the answer to SC q11 break down God’s works of providence?

1. Preserving – (**Psalm 36:6** *“O Lord, thou preservest man and beast”*)
2. Governing - (**Psalm 67:4** *“Thou shalt govern the nations upon the earth”*)

- b. Preserving - how does God preserve his creation? What is meant here?

1. When he continues and upholds them in their being. (**Ps 119: 89 – 91** *“(89)For ever, o Lord, thy word is settled in heaven. (90)Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. (91)They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.”*)
2. When he maketh provision of things needful for their preservation. (**Ps 145: 15-16** *“(15)The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. (16)Thou openest thine hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing.”*)

- c. WCF c5p3 says; *“God in his ordinary providence maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at His pleasure.”* What does this mean:

- “maketh use of means” means the normal way things work. When you strike a match, you get fire.

- “yet is free to work without, above, and against them” He can do it his way, He is not bound by normal means. When you strike a match, instead of fire, God can give you frozen flame.
- d. Governing – Parts of this are difficult to understand, so let’s work in it together. WCF, Ch5, para 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 buy 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.”* We are back to God, in his power, wisdom and goodness, **allowing permission** to sin, even back to the first fall.

WCF c5p2 says; *“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.”*

Does God limit man in his sin? (**Ps 76:10 “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.”**) and (**2 Kings 19:28 “Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.”**)

- d. The LC, q20 expands upon the things over which God exerted His providence with Adam and Eve. The answer to LC q20 begins; *“The Providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created, was the placing him in paradise, appointing him to dress it, giving him liberty to eat of the fruit of the earth; putting the creatures under hi dominion, and ordaining marriage for his help; affording him communion with himself; instituting the Sabbath;”*
- e. WCF, ch 5, para 5 states: “The most wise, righteous, and gracious God **doth oftentimes leave for a season** His own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their 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:” (**2 Chron 32:25-26, 31 “<sup>(25)</sup>But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. <sup>(26)</sup>Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the price of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.”**)

## 6. God's Special act of Providence

a. Both SC q12 and LC, Q20 talk about a "special act of providence" which God entered into with man.

b. What was the special act of Providence which God entered into with man?

Covenant of life.

c. What is a covenant? TV Covenant is a mutual agreement and engagement, between two or more parties, to give or do something.

Therefore God's covenant with man is his engagement, by promise, of giving something, with a stipulation, or something to be done on man's part.

d. There are many covenants mentioned in the Bible, such as God's covenant with Abraham. What are the two primary covenants which God entered into with man?

1. Covenant of works
2. Covenant of Grace

e. When did God enter into the covenant of works with man?

Immediately after creation.

f. What was the agreement?

God would give man life in exchange for obedience. (**Gen 2:17 "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."**)

g. What kinds of life did the life God promised man consist of?

1. Natural life: union of the soul and the body.
2. Spiritual life: union of God and the soul.
3. Eternal life: Perfect, immutable and eternal happiness, both of soul and body, through a perfect likeness unto and an immediate vision and fruition of God, the chief good.

g. What was the condition God required of man in His first covenant?

**Perfect obedience - (Gal 3:10 "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.")**

h. What was the thing forbidden in the covenant of works?

Eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Gen 2:16-17

i. What death was promised to man for his sin?

1. Temporal death - separation of soul from body
2. Spiritual death - separation of soul from God
3. Eternal death - exclusion of man from the comfortable and beatific presence of God in glory forever - effecting most horrible anguish in the soul, and in the extreme tortures in every part of the body, eternally in hell.

j. When did the covenant of works end, and the covenant of grace begin?

At the fall.