

Providence and Creation: Teaching Guide

What Does the Bible Say?

Genesis 1-2: God creates all of Creation with intention, purpose, design, and a goal. Creation is good, and humanity is very good. Nature has limits, but man tries to circumvent those limits and is consequently expelled from the Garden. Sin and death persist.

Psalms 145:14-21: God helps those who fall and raises up the oppressed. He satisfies the desires of every living thing. He is righteous in all His ways, faithful, near to those who call upon Him, fulfills the desires of those who fear Him, saves them, and destroys the wicked.

Genesis 50:20: In Joseph's story, humanity plans for evil, but God plans for good, ensuring the survival of many.

Colossians 1:15-17: All things, visible and invisible, were created by God, through Him and for Him. He pre-exists all, and His providence sustains all of Creation.

Romans 8:28-30: For those who love God, all things work for good according to His purpose. We are His adopted children, predestined, conformed to His image, called, justified, and glorified for His glory.

Matthew 6:25-34: Do not worry about tomorrow, food, water, or clothing. God provides for the birds and flowers and cares even more for His children, acting providentially in their lives.

What Has the Church Said?

Augustine contributed early theological doctrines of Providence and Creation. Aquinas expanded on this with five arguments for God's existence, emphasizing a structured, participatory view of Creation. In his metaphysical framework, everything apart from God exists by participation in His being, with special emphasis on matter and humanity.

Luther and Calvin rejected Augustine's view of instantaneous Creation, instead affirming the six-day Genesis narrative. Augustine maintained that the Creator is distinct from Creation, which includes both spiritual and physical components—a dualistic view encompassing both the visible and invisible.

John Calvin believed that all of Creation is the theater of God's glory. Providence, in the theological sense, is God actively directing all things with His incomprehensible wisdom, vastly surpassing human understanding.

How Does It All Fit Together?

Divine Providence is God's ongoing activity in the world after the Creation event. Creation includes everything that exists apart from God, created ex nihilo (out of nothing) with intentionality and a purpose: to glorify God. Creation has structure, order, and limits set by God. Nature is good; humanity, in its original state, is very good. Sin and evil are not distinct created things but the absence or distortion of God's goodness—akin to darkness or coldness, which are defined by the absence of light or heat.

God acts providentially in all things for His glory. He upholds righteousness, satisfies the desires of the living, remains near to His Creation, judges the wicked, and protects the righteous. God governs natural laws and spiritual purposes, providing both common and special grace. While the rain falls on the just and the unjust, salvific graces are uniquely extended to His children.

Though interpretations of the specifics of the Creation narrative may vary, faith and science are not inherently at odds. Certain boundaries, such as the historicity of Adam and Eve, remain crucial. Modern pursuits like transhumanism, which aim to transcend human limitations, conflict with the sufficiency of Christ's saving grace.

Ministry Application

- Preach a personal, involved God who actively participates in Creation, rather than a distant, indifferent Creator.
- Defend against false doctrines that conflate Creator and Creation or attribute salvation to human efforts or technology.
- Emphasize the goodness of Creation, especially the Imago Dei—the image of God in humanity. Creation and humanity, in their original states, are inherently good. Sin and death are responsible for the corruption of shalom (peace and wholeness).
- Elevate the importance of hospitality and stewardship over Creation, space, and time, recognizing their value in worship.
- Acknowledge that limitations and suffering, though challenging, can serve a divine purpose by drawing us closer to God.