

**Lecture 22 – Providence (cont.)**

“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.” James 1:13-14

**Key Terms**

God and sin, miracles

**Objectives**

- \*Defend the doctrine of God’s providence in light of human sin.
- \*Discuss the purpose and function of miracles.
- \*Assess Diemer’s view on miracles.
- \*Consider the implication of Diemer’s view on miracles for Christian life and ministry.

**Providence (cont.)**

Review of doctrine of concurrence

## IV. Providence and Human Sin

- A. God is holy.
  1. God is not the author of sin.
  2. God is not the planner of sin.
- B. God’s relationship to sin
  1. God prevents sin.
  2. God permits sin.
  3. God directs sin (turning evil to the good).
  4. God limits sin.
- C. The complexity of the issue and the limitations of our temporal horizon
  1. Augustine: Sin is both contrary to God’s will and God permits sin
  2. John Calvin: The secret and revealed wills of God
  3. Jonathan Edwards: The problem of historical perspective

## V. Miracles

The work of Johann Diemer, *Natuur en Wonder* (1944)

- A. Diemer’s polemic against supernaturalism
  1. The post-Enlightenment response to deism
    - a. Supernaturalism accepted the deistic idea of an autonomous natural order.
    - b. Interventionist supernaturalism
    - c. Common understanding of miracle in 18<sup>th</sup> century:
  2. Diemer’s critique of supernaturalism
    - a. It is dualistic.
    - b. It entertains a secularistic and rationalistic concept of nature.
    - c. It actually impoverishes the special activity of God.
    - d. It is inherently Gnostic in its understanding of God’s relationship to the order of nature.
- B. Diemer’s view: A Christian-philosophical analysis of nature
  1. God governs through creational ordinances.
  2. The miraculous is not a suspension of creational ordinances.
    - a. Miracles take place in accordance with the order of creation.

- b. There is no release from creational order under lapsarian or soteric circumstance.
- 3. Miracles do not violate, but rather reveal new dimensions of creation.

*“With the signs and miracles of God’s providence in the history of mankind no laws or fixed relationships are circumvented. But under other than ordinary, well known conditions, other powers are opened up.”*

- 4. Miracles are the restorative power of the eschaton. They are the expression of God’s natural dominion over creation.
  - a. God does not work in opposition to an autonomous process.
  - b. No “God of the gaps”
  - c. All power is God’s, and by His power all things are done.
- 5. Miracles call forth the powers “which sleep in creation.”
 

Thus a miracle is not a categorically different kind of act than creation; just a different goal (restoration).
- 6. All phenomena are miraculous. The signs and wonders of the gospel story are of one piece with the balance of created reality.
- 7. The restorative event transcends fallen reason and is known only by faith.
  - a. All things are known by faith. Nature is never a raw given, capable of being exhausted by autonomous reason.
  - b. Miracle is new dimension of reality
- C. An analysis of Diemer’s proposal
  - 1. Subsumes sin and redemption to creation
  - 2. The law structures of creation do not necessitate the restorative act of God. Grace is not a gift if it is natural or required.
  - 3. Confuses law and grace
  - 4. Does not do justice to the wonder of miracle
  - 5. Good points of Diemer
- D. Other options for understanding miracle
  - 1. C.S. Lewis’ notion of countervailing force
    - a. Normal processes are not suspended but overruled
    - b. Allows for distinction between miracle and everyday processes
  - 2. Relativization of “the laws of nature”