

Dr. Gary Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 13, The Role of Providence Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 13, The Role of Providence, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. Gary Meadors introduces the concept of **providence** within a series on discerning God's will, building upon previous discussions about conscience and the Holy Spirit. Meadors advocates for the **classical view of God's sovereignty**, where God knows and controls all things, contrasting it with open theism. He emphasizes that while God is at work in all events, including negative ones he terms "**negative providence**," humans should not attempt to discern God's secret actions or blame God for their own failings. Instead, believers are called to focus on God's revealed will in scripture and acknowledge the mysteries inherent in God's orchestration of history, even in the face of evil and unanswered prayer.

**2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 13 – Double
click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (Theology → Knowing the Will of God).**



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3. Briefing Document: Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 13, The Role of Providence

Briefing Document: Dr. Gary Meadors on the Role of Providence

1. Introduction and Context:

This session (Lecture 13) focuses on the theological concept of **Providence** within the broader framework of "Knowing God's Will." Dr. Meadors acknowledges the complexity and difficulty of this topic, placing it as significantly more challenging than previous discussions on conscience and the Holy Spirit. He emphasizes that the goal of this lecture is to provide an overview and encourage further personal research, rather than offering exhaustive answers.

Key Quote: "Wow, if you think of the Holy Spirit or even conscience, conscience is a piece of cake compared to some of these things, and they're all easy compared to the issue of providence."

2. Review of Previous Discussion (Holy Spirit):

Before diving into providence, Meadors briefly revisits the discussion on the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the following key points:

- **Shift in God's Mode of Guidance:** During the apostolic period, God used revelatory guidance for redemptive-historical purposes, similar to the direct communication and prophetic ministry in the Old Testament.
- **The Bible as the Infallible Rule:** In the current church era, "God's Word is our only infallible rule." Extra-biblical revelation should not be sought.
- **Sufficiency of Scripture:** God's Word is "perfect and sufficient" for managing life, even if it doesn't address every specific cultural situation directly. Christians may differ in their interpretations due to God's allowance of diversity.
- **Rejection of Direct Revelatory Guidance:** Meadors argues against the expectation of direct, specific guidance outside of Scripture, stating, "God's will is not lost. It's not hidden. God's will is found as we adjudicate life's issues through biblical teaching."
- **Intertwined Role of Conscience and the Spirit:** Both conscience and the Holy Spirit operate in the mind, acting as internal witnesses to our worldview and values, leading to conviction.

- **Difficulty in Distinguishing Voices:** Due to their shared domain in the mind, "it is impossible to distinguish the voices we claim to hear" as either solely from conscience or the Holy Spirit.
- **Spirit Conveys Conviction, Not Content:** The Holy Spirit convicts regarding our worldview and values but does not provide new revelatory or interpretive content. Seeking direct answers on interpretive matters through the Spirit is deemed inappropriate.

Key Quote: "Because conscience and the Holy Spirit operate in the mind, it is impossible to distinguish the voices we claim to hear."

3. Introduction to Providence:

Meadors defines **providence** as the activity of a sovereign God working out things in history. He distinguishes between:

- **Sovereign (noun):** The nature of God as all-powerful.
- **Sovereignty (adverbial):** How God acts.
- **Providence:** The actions of God.

He acknowledges that a simplistic understanding of providence as "God did it" for all events, including personal mistakes, is "flippant" and avoids personal responsibility.

Key Quote: "We have a sovereign God, and providence is his activity."

4. The Continuum of Sovereignty (Providence):

Meadors outlines two contrasting views on providence:

- **High View (Classical View):** Held by figures like Augustine, Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards, this view asserts that "God knows all, God controls all." It also suggests that free will is bound by nature. Meadors aligns himself with this view.
- **Low View (Open Theism):** Proponents like John Saunders view humanity as totally free, with God not knowing all things in advance but dealing with events with wisdom as they occur. Meadors expresses his disagreement and lack of expertise in this view.

He argues that the "easy answers" provided by the low view are likely incorrect and recommends the high, classical view. He suggests Spiegel's "Benefits of Providence" as a resource for understanding this perspective.

Key Quote (Classical View): "They assert God knows all, God controls all." **Key Quote (Open Theism):** "God does not know all things in advance, but he deals with them with his wisdom as they occur."

5. Nature of God's Providential Actions:

- **Irresistible Actions:** Meadors quotes Job 42:2 ("I know that thou canst do all things and that no purpose of thine can be restrained") to illustrate the irresistible nature of God's providence.
- **Observed After the Fact:** Providence is something we experience and observe, usually after it has occurred.
- **Within God's Control:** Nothing is outside of God's control, including negative events like natural disasters. God may choose not to intervene.
- **God's Norm is Non-Intervention:** Generally, "God typically does not choose to intervene in life." The deaths of righteous individuals, even John the Baptist, illustrate this.
- **Negative Providence:** Meadors uses this term to describe negative experiences like underemployment, disease, and tragic accidents, emphasizing that these also occur within God's providential order.
- **Secondary Causes:** God uses many means, including secondary causes, to achieve his ends. The interplay between God's sovereign decree and secondary causes is a crucial area for further philosophical and theological study.

Key Quote: "I know that thou canst do all things and that no purpose of thine can be restrained."

6. Limits of Human Understanding of Providence:

Meadors highlights the limitations of human understanding regarding God's providential actions, referencing Deuteronomy 29:29 ("The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever").

- **Secret vs. Revealed:** God's sovereign actions are largely secret, while his moral will and the words of the law are revealed and are our domain of responsibility.
- **No Access to God's Secret Actions:** We are not encouraged or meant to seek specific knowledge of the future or God's detailed plans.

- **Recipients, Not Declarers:** We may see the results of God's actions but lack the authority to definitively declare the reality or reasons behind them.
- **Overstepping Boundaries:** Attributing specific negative events directly to God's judgment for disobedience is often an overstep.

Key Quote: "The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God. But the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

7. Implications of Providence:

- **Assume God is Always at Work:** Even in difficult circumstances, we should assume God is active, although this doesn't necessarily mean immediate intervention to remove pain.
- **Rest in God:** We can find rest in the understanding of God as our "shepherd king."
- **Focus on Revealed Will:** Our primary focus should be on God's revealed will in his Word, as we will be judged on how we respond to it.
- **Difficulty in Explaining Negativity:** While declaring God's sovereign providence is easy, explaining the negative aspects and their implications is a significant challenge requiring serious study.

Key Quote: "We are to focus on God's revealed will, his word. We are judged on the basis of how we deal with that."

8. Classic Issues for Reflection:

Meadors lists several enduring challenges related to providence that require deep philosophical and theological engagement:

- The Problem of Evil
- The Challenge of Unanswered Prayer
- The Seeming Silence of God
- Our Puzzlement Over Life's Reality

He acknowledges the complexity of these issues and the ongoing struggle to understand them, distinguishing between understanding (grasping the assertions) and comprehension (fully grasping).

Key Quote: "I can understand a lot of things that I do not comprehend. There's a big difference between understanding and comprehension."

9. Conclusions (for now):

- The study affirms the classical view of God's sovereignty and sovereign providence.
- Meadors uses the terms "positive providence" and "negative providence" descriptively, without claiming to fully explain causality.
- The study of sovereign providence is deeply challenging and requires honest inquiry, rather than simply trying to "theoditize" or protect God's reputation.

10. Resources:

Meadors recommends Spiegel's "Benefits of Providence" and Frame's work as valuable resources for further study on the topic of providence.

11. Preview of Next Session:

The next lecture will briefly address "prayer and God's will," promising further questions and points for reflection.

4. Study Guide: Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 13, The Role of Providence

Knowing God's Will: The Role of Providence - Study Guide

Quiz:

1. According to the lecture, what is the only infallible rule for Christians in the current church era, and what does "sufficient" mean in this context?
2. Describe the relationship between conscience and the Holy Spirit as presented in the lecture. What is the key function they share?
3. Why does the lecturer argue that it is impossible to definitively distinguish between the voice of one's conscience and the voice of the Holy Spirit?
4. What is the lecturer's view on seeking extra-biblical revelation to discern God's will? Explain his reasoning.
5. Define providence as presented in the lecture and differentiate between a "sovereign God" and God's "sovereignty" or "providence."
6. Briefly describe the "high view" (classical) and "low view" (open theism) regarding God's providence and knowledge of the future.
7. What does the lecturer mean by "negative providence," and what caution does he offer regarding interpreting negative events as direct judgment from God?
8. Explain the significance of Deuteronomy 29:29 in the context of God's revealed will versus his secret actions.
9. According to the lecture, what is the primary role of the Holy Spirit in relation to our understanding of God's will? What does the Spirit not do?
10. What is the lecturer's perspective on our ability to fully comprehend God's providence and the problem of evil? What approach does he suggest instead?

Quiz Answer Key:

1. God's Word is our only infallible rule in the current church era. "Sufficient" means that while the Bible doesn't address every specific situation in ongoing cultures, it provides enough principles (directly stated, implied, and through creative constructs) to guide our lives.

2. The lecture states that both conscience and the Holy Spirit operate in the mind and serve as internal witnesses to our worldview and values. Their key shared function is to convict us when we violate these values or seem to be off track.
3. Because both conscience and the Holy Spirit operate within the realm of our minds, the lecturer contends it's impossible to definitively distinguish the source of our convictions. We are essentially talking to ourselves, and it's unclear whether a conviction originates solely from our conscience or is prompted by the Spirit.
4. The lecturer advises against looking for extra-biblical revelation. He argues that God has chosen not to operate in this way in the current era and that demanding such guidance contradicts God's mode of operation, as God has given us our minds to think and make decisions based on biblical teaching.
5. Providence is defined as God's actions in working out things in history. A "sovereign God" refers to God's nature as all-powerful and in control, while "sovereignty" or "providence" describes how God acts or the outworking of his control in the world.
6. The "high view" (classical) asserts that God knows all things, controls all things, and that human free will is bound by nature. The "low view" (open theism) views humanity as totally free and suggests that God does not know all things in advance but deals with situations as they occur.
7. "Negative providence" refers to the negative or difficult events in life, such as suffering, disease, and natural disasters. The lecturer cautions against assuming these events are direct punishment or judgment from God, stating that such interpretations often overstep our understanding of God's secret actions.
8. Deuteronomy 29:29 highlights the distinction between God's secret things, which belong to Him and are not revealed to us, and the things that are revealed (God's moral will and the words of the law), which are our domain of responsibility to understand and obey.
9. The primary role of the Holy Spirit, according to the lecture, is to convict us in relation to our worldview and values. The Spirit does not convey new revelatory content or interpretive content; we are expected to do our own study and thinking based on Scripture.

10. The lecturer believes that we cannot fully comprehend God's providence and the problem of evil. He suggests that instead of trying to figure it all out, we should focus on God's revealed will in Scripture, rest in His care as our "shepherd king," and approach these challenging questions with honesty and serious study.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Discuss the implications of the lecturer's assertion that Christians should not seek extra-biblical revelation for discerning God's will. How does this view shape the understanding of the role of Scripture, conscience, and the Holy Spirit in decision-making?
2. Compare and contrast the "high view" (classical) and "low view" (open theism) of God's providence as presented in the lecture. What are the key theological differences between these perspectives, and what are some of the challenges associated with each?
3. Analyze the lecturer's concept of "negative providence." How does this idea attempt to reconcile the existence of suffering and evil with the sovereignty of an all-good and all-powerful God? What are some potential strengths and weaknesses of this framework?
4. Explore the relationship between God's revealed will (as found in Scripture) and his sovereign providence (his secret actions) according to the lecture. How are these two aspects of God's will distinct, and how should Christians navigate the tension between them in their lives?
5. Critically evaluate the lecturer's perspective on our ability to understand God's providence and the problem of evil. To what extent do you agree with his assertion that we should "give up" trying to figure it all out? What role does faith, reason, and ongoing theological reflection play in engaging with these complex issues?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Providence:** God's active involvement in the world and his direction of all things towards his ultimate purposes. It refers to how God sovereignly orders and governs his creation.
- **Sovereignty (of God):** God's ultimate authority, power, and control over all things. It emphasizes that God is the supreme ruler and that nothing happens outside of his ultimate will and permission.
- **Infallible Rule:** A standard or guide that is completely trustworthy and incapable of being wrong. In this context, it refers to God's Word (the Bible) as the only such rule for Christian faith and life.
- **Sufficient (of Scripture):** The idea that the Bible provides all that is necessary for salvation, godliness, and understanding God's will for our lives, even if it doesn't address every specific situation directly.
- **Conscience:** An internal moral compass or awareness of right and wrong, shaped by one's worldview and values, which can cause feelings of guilt or affirmation.
- **Extra-biblical Revelation:** Communication or guidance from God that is not found within the pages of the Bible. The lecturer cautions against seeking this in the current church era.
- **Classical View of Providence (High View):** The theological perspective, exemplified by figures like Augustine and Calvin, that God knows all things (including the future) and controls all things, while still allowing for secondary causes and human responsibility.
- **Open Theism (Low View):** A theological perspective that emphasizes human free will to such an extent that it posits God does not know the future exhaustively but learns and responds to human choices.
- **Negative Providence:** The concept used by the lecturer to describe the negative or difficult events in life (suffering, tragedy, evil) as being within God's sovereign control and purpose, without necessarily attributing direct causation or judgment.
- **Theodicying:** The attempt to justify God's goodness and power in the face of evil in the world. The lecturer suggests approaching the issue of providence with honesty rather than primarily trying to "protect" God.

5. FAQs on Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 13, The Role of Providence, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Knowing God's Will and the Role of Providence

1. How did God guide believers in the past compared to the present church era? During the Old Testament and the apostolic period, God employed direct communication, working through prophets and apostles with revelatory guidance for redemptive-historical purposes. This was an open revelatory process where scriptures were in development. However, in the current church era, God's Word, the Bible, is presented as our sole infallible rule. We no longer have access to extra-biblical revelation in the same way. While individuals may claim spiritual experiences, these are considered subjective and not infallible.

2. If the Bible is our only infallible rule, is it sufficient for navigating all of life's decisions? Yes, according to the source, God's Word is perfect and sufficient. While it may not explicitly address every specific situation in our contemporary cultures, it provides a sure foundation through direct, implied, and creative constructs to manage our lives and discern God's will on various issues. The diversity of Christian interpretations on certain matters is acknowledged, suggesting that God, in his decrees, has allowed for this variation.

3. What is the relationship between our conscience and the Holy Spirit in guiding us? Both conscience and the Holy Spirit operate within the mind and serve as internal witnesses to our worldview and values. Both also convict us when we violate these values. The source suggests it is impossible for us to definitively distinguish whether a conviction originates solely from our conscience or directly from the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, both prompt us to examine our worldview and values in light of biblical teachings, emphasizing the importance of a transformed mind.

4. Does the Holy Spirit provide new revelations or interpretations to guide us in specific decisions? The source argues that the Holy Spirit's primary role is to convict, not to communicate new revelatory or interpretive content. We should not expect the Spirit to directly tell us which of several options is the correct one. Instead, we are called to diligently study God's Word, do our homework, make decisions based on our adjudicated biblical worldview and value system, and then live with the consequences, being open to re-evaluation if necessary.

5. What is "providence" as discussed in the lecture? Providence is described as God's activity, the way in which a sovereign God works out things in history. It encompasses God's irresistible actions and the orchestration of all events in human history and the cosmos toward his glorious ends. The source distinguishes between a sovereign God (the kind of God he is) and providence (how God acts).

6. What are the different views on the scope of God's providence? The lecture briefly outlines two contrasting views: the classical high view (associated with figures like Augustine, Calvin, and Edwards) which asserts that God knows all and controls all, with human free will being bound by nature; and the open theism low view, which emphasizes human freedom and posits that God does not know all things in advance but responds with wisdom as events occur. The lecturer aligns with the classical high view.

7. How should we understand negative events like suffering, disease, and natural disasters in light of God's providence? The source introduces the concept of "negative providence" to describe such events. It suggests that nothing is outside God's control, and these occurrences, even if devastating, are within his providence. While God could intervene, he often chooses not to, and his reasons for allowing these things to happen are often unknown to us. Attributing specific negative events directly to God's judgment for disobedience is cautioned against as potentially overstepping our understanding.

8. What is our role in understanding or discerning God's providence in our lives? The lecture emphasizes that access to God's secret actions and the specific workings of his providence is not our domain. We are recipients of its results, often observing them after the fact. We should assume God is always at work, even in difficult circumstances, and rest in his role as our shepherd king. Our primary focus should be on God's revealed will in his Word, as we will be judged on how we engage with and live according to that revealed truth, rather than trying to decipher the intricacies of his sovereign providence.