

# Systematic Theology: Theology Proper

Providence

(From Dr. Stephen Wellum's notes on Systematic Theology)

## What does GCBC teach?

We teach that God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace. He is the creator of all things. As the only absolute and omnipotent ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption. ... He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass. He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events. In His sovereignty, He is neither author nor approver of sin, nor does He abridge the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures.

## What are we talking about?

**Providence:** God's prior \_\_\_\_\_ of and \_\_\_\_\_ for the world.

### The Difference Between Sovereignty and Providence:

Sovereign is what God \_\_\_\_\_, providence is what God \_\_\_\_\_.

## What has the Church throughout history taught?

*Early Church*

*Augustine*

*Thomas Aquinas*

*John Calvin*

*Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609)*

## What does the Bible say?

### The Three Aspects of Divine Providence.

1. *Preservation:* Preservation is God's \_\_\_\_\_ by which he \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ all things that he has created.  
Job 34:14-15; Nehemiah 9:6; Dan 4:34-35; Isaiah 46:9,10. Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3; 2 Peter 3:7.
2. *Government:* Government means that God has a \_\_\_\_\_ in all that he does in the world and he providentially \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ things in order that they accomplish his \_\_\_\_\_. See Ps 103:19; Rom 11:36; Eph 1:11; Phil 2:10-11; Rom 8:28-29.
  - a) *Distinctions in the will of God.* It is often under the heading of "government" that theologians make distinctions concerning the *will* of God.
    - i) \_\_\_\_\_ *will* ('revealed will'): the teaching of Scripture.
    - ii) \_\_\_\_\_ *will* ('providential government'): the details of God's plan that are *not* revealed to us – details regarding future events, etc. (Dt 29:29).
  - b) *What God governs:*
    - i) \_\_\_\_\_ *matter:* Genesis 6:17, Joshua 10:13-14
    - ii) \_\_\_\_\_ *creatures:* Genesis 2:19, 1 Kings 17:2-4
    - iii) \_\_\_\_\_ *and* \_\_\_\_\_: 1 Chronicles 21:15, 27
    - iv) \_\_\_\_\_: Acts 17:28, Proverbs 21:1.

3. *Concurrence*: Concurrence refers to the relation between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ activity by which God cooperates with created things (=secondary causes) in every action, directing their distinctive \_\_\_\_\_ to cause them to act as they do. In other words, the powers of nature do not work by themselves, but God is immediately at work in every act of the creature. This does not mean that secondary causes are not real. We will look at this below. See Eph 1:11; Prov 21:1; Phil 2:12-13.

## What does this mean?

Listen to this excellent sermon by Pastor Jeff which really delves well into the tension between Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: <http://gcbc.mn/TruthsInTension>.

1. *The Biblical Givens*. Scripture teaches 3 propositions (=givens) simultaneously:
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup>: God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty never functions in such a way that human responsibility is \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, or \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. 2<sup>nd</sup>: Human beings are morally \_\_\_\_\_ creatures – they significantly choose, rebel, obey, believe, defy, and make decisions – and they are rightly held accountable for such actions; but this characteristic never functions so as to make God absolutely contingent. (*Contingent* means depends upon something else.)
  - c. 3<sup>rd</sup>: Despite everything Scripture says about God’s sovereignty, the Bible insists that God is \_\_\_\_\_. God is *never* presented as an accomplice of evil, or as secretly malicious, or as standing behind evil in exactly the same way that he stands behind good. The goodness of God is a *non-negotiable* in Scripture (see Dt 32:4; Hab 1:13; 1 Jn 1:5; Rev 15:3-4).
2. *Biblical Evidence for the Biblical Givens*.
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup>: *God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty never functions in such a way that human responsibility is curtailed, minimized, mitigated*.
    - i. *General texts*: Ps 115:2-3; 135:6; 139:16; Isa 14:24-26; 46:9-11; Dan 4:34-35.
    - ii. *God’s specific sovereignty in providence*. God not only assigns time and places to people (Acts 17:26), but so reigns that even the most mundane natural processes are ascribed to his activity (Ps 104:14; 148:8; Mt 5:45; 6:26, 30). The writer of Ecclesiastes knows of the water cycle but biblical authors prefer to speak of God sending the rain than to say, ‘It is raining.’ God is the one who opens and shuts, who kills and brings life, who raises up and puts down kings. He calls the stars by name, and keeps track of the number of hairs on each head (Mt 10:29-30). God’s rule is so broadly inclusive that it is not surprising to find, say unintentional manslaughter (Ex 21:13) and family misfortune (Ruth 1:13, 20) both related to the will of God, as well as seemingly chance events (Prov 16:33; 1 Kgs 22:1-28, esp. 28 and 22:34, 38).
    - iii. *God’s sovereignty over the human will* (Prov 16:9; 19:21; 21:1, 30-31 – cf. Ezr 1:1; 6:22; Ps 105:25; Jer 10:23-24).
    - iv. *God’s sovereignty over evil*. Where this occurs, the authors *never* ascribe evil to God, but they do make it clear that even evil cannot escape God’s sway. Sin and rebellion exist but no matter how difficult the questions that are thereby called into being, the sweep of God’s sovereignty is not curtailed or qualified. Examples abound, but the best example is found in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

- b. *2<sup>nd</sup>: Human beings are morally responsible creatures – they significantly choose, rebel, obey, believe, defy, make decisions – and they are rightly held accountable for such actions; but this characteristic never functions so as to make God absolutely contingent. See Josh 24:14-15; Rom 10:9-11. Humans are tested by God who wants to find out what is in their hearts (Gen 22:12; Ex 16:4; 2 Chron 32:31). Human responsibility arises out of God’s initiative in election (Ex 19:4-6; Dt 4:5-8; 6:6ff; Hos 13:4; Mic 3:1-12). God utters moving pleas for human repentance and finds no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Isa 30:18; 65:2; Lam 3:31-36; Ezk 18:30-32; 33:11; Hos 11:7ff).*
- c. *3<sup>rd</sup>: Despite everything Scripture says about God’s sovereignty, the Bible insists that God is perfectly good. God is never presented as an accomplice of evil, or as secretly malicious, or as standing behind evil in exactly the same way that he stands behind good (=permission). The goodness of God is a non-negotiable (see Dt 32:4; Hab 1:13; 1 Jn 1:5; Rev 15:3-4).*
- d. *Summary: The three biblical givens side-by-side (see Gen 50:19-20; Isa 10:5-17; Jonah 1:14-15; 2:3; John 6:37-40).*

## How does this doctrine relate to the Gospel?

Acts 2:23-24 and 4:27-28.

## What difference does it make?

How does this truth about God make a difference in our lives as we suffer in the present time?

Romans 8:18-25.

## How should we respond?

## ANSWER KEY

### What are we talking about?

Knowledge, provision

is, does

### What does the *Bible* say?

continuous activity, maintains, existence

purpose, governs, directs all, purposes.

Moral

Secret

Inanimate

Irrational

Angels, Demons

Mankind

Divine, human, properties

### What does this mean?

curtailed, minimized, mitigated.

responsible

perfectly good