

The Theology of Divine Providence – Part 2

Systematic Theology 101

Coast School of Theology; Pastor Earl Miles; August 12, 2018

A Definition (A Reformed Position)

‘God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them; (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes.’ – Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

Preservation

God keeps all created things existing and maintaining the properties with which He created them (Heb 1:3 Col. 1:17; Ps 103:19; Acts 17:28; Job 34:14-15; 2 Peter 3:7; Neh. 9:6; Ps 104:29)

Concurrence

God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do

- Inanimate creation (Ps. 148:8; Job 37:6-13; Ps. 135:6-7, Ps 104:14; Matt. 5 :45)
- Animals (Ps. 104:24, 27-29; Matt. 6:26, 10:29)
- Seemingly random or chance events (Prov. 16:33)
- Events fully caused by God and fully by the creature as well
- The affairs of nations (Job 12:23; Ps. 22:28; Acts 17:26; Dan 4:34-35)
- All aspects of our lives (Matt. 6:11; Phil 4:19; Ps. 139:16; Job 14:5; Gal. 1:15; Jer. 10:23; Prov. 20:24; Prov. 16:1; Ps. 33:14-15; Phil. 2:13)
- What about evil? (Gen. 45:5, 50:20; Ex. 4:21; Rom. 9:17-18; Ps. 105:25; Jos. 11:20; Job 1:21-22; Amos 3:6; Isa. 45:6-7; Lam. 3:38; 2 Thess. 2:11-12; Isaiah 63:17; Acts 4:27)
 - Scripture nowhere shows God as directly doing anything evil but rather ordaining that evil deeds come about through the willing actions of moral creatures.
 - Scripture never blames God for evil or shows God as taking pleasure in evil; and Scripture never excuses human beings for the wrong they do.

God and Evil

- God uses all things to fulfill his purposes and even uses evil for his glory and for our good. (Rom. 8:28; Gen. 50:20; Prov. 16:4)
- Nevertheless, God never does evil, and is never to be blamed for evil. (Luke 22:22; Matt. 18:7; James 1:13-14)
- God rightfully blames and judges moral creatures for the evil they do. (Isa. 66:3-4; Eccl. 7:29; Rom. 9:19-20)
- Evil is real, not an illusion, and we should never do evil, for it will always harm us and others. (Matt 6:13; James 5:19-20; 1 Pet 2:11, Rom 3:8)
- In spite of all the foregoing statements, we have to come to the point where we confess that we do not understand how it is that God can ordain that we carry out evil deeds and yet hold us accountable for them and not be blamed himself.

Government

God has a purpose in all that He does in the world and He providentially governs or directs all things in order that they accomplish His purposes (Ps 103:19; Dan. 4:35; Rom. 11:36; Eph. 1:11; Phil. 2:10-11; Rom. 8:28)

The Decrees of God

The eternal plans of God whereby, before the creation of the world, He determined to bring about everything that happens (Ps. 139:16; Job 14:5; Acts 2:23; Acts 4:28; Eph. 1:4; Eph. 2:10; Jude 4)

Importance of Human Actions and Other Applications

- We are Responsible for our Actions. - Gen 2:18; Ezek 18:20.
- We should never blame God for our sin. Bible doesn't allow it. - Gen 3:12; Rom 9: 19-20.
- Our actions have real results and do change the course of events. – Jonah 3:10
- Prayer is one specific kind of action that has definite results and does change the course of events. – James 4:2
- We Must Act! - 2 Samuel 10:12; Acts 18:9-11; 2 Tim. 2:10; Acts 27:22-24, 31
- Do not be afraid, but trust in God. - Matt 6:26, 31; Matt. 10:29-31; Ps. 4:8
- Be thankful for all good things that happen. - Ps. 103:2
- There is no such thing as “luck” or “chance.”; Prov. 16:33.

Response to Opposing Views

The Arminian position *maintains that in order to preserve the real human freedom and real human choices that are necessary for genuine human personhood, God cannot cause or plan our voluntary choices.*

- The scriptural passages cited by Calvinists describe ways that God is always at work providentially, not just in specific situations. - Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17; Acts 17:28; Eph. 1:11; Matt 6:11; Phil 4:19; Prov 20:24
- The Bible clearly speaks against the idea that God's providence somehow makes God responsible for sin. - Acts 2:23 (crucifixion); Gen 50:20; Ex. 4:21 (pharaoh); Jos. 11:20; Job 1:21-22; Amos 3:6; Isa. 45:7; Lam. 3:38; 2 Thess. 2:11-12; 1 Peter 2:8
- Scripture repeatedly affirms that our choices are real, that they have real results, and those results last for eternity. - Luke 10:28; John 3:16
- The view of providence in scripture emphasizes the need for responsible obedience, not fatalism.
- The unanswered questions of the Reformed view leave us with the ‘how’ of God's sovereignty over the real freedom of responsible and accountable creatures.
- The unanswered questions of the Arminian view move us in the direction of (a) denying God's omniscience and (b) implying that evil existed against his will and (c) undermining our confidence that He can keep His promises.