

God's Providence: Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom
God's Sovereign Control and Mankind's Responsible Obedience.
CHBC Berean Class 7-21-13
Bill Parsons

-John Calvin, in his treatise *Institutes (1.16.1)* regarding God's providence:

"But faith ought to penetrate more deeply, namely having found him Creator of all, forthwith to conclude he is also everlasting Governor and Preserver- not only in that he drives the celestial frame as well as its several parts by a universe in motion, but also in that he sustains, nourishes, and cares for everything he has made, even to the least sparrow."

-God providentially manages His created world. He providentially oversees all the affairs of man.

-God's providential care for His creation is described in **Psalm 104:10-35**

-Psalm 104 includes relevant verses regarding God's providential role in preservation, governance, and concurrence. We will consider these 3 roles in greater detail.

A. Divine **preservation**: This is God's role to uphold, sustain or conserve. God is Preserver. God is Sustainer; God keeps created things existing/going/operating and maintains the properties with which he created them.

-Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ is "*upholding the universe by his word of power*" or in the NIV version, Christ is "*sustaining all things by his powerful word.*"

-The theological reason that the scientific method (of predictable verifiability) is valid is not because man pronounces it valid, but because God providentially ordains in His Word that He is Sustainer of His Creation...*sola Scriptura*.

B. Divine **governance**: This is God's role as guide. God is Governor. God is the Divine Director; God directs created things to fulfill His purposes/His Will.

- "*His kingdom rules over all*" Ps103:19

- "*from Him and through Him and to Him are all things*" Rom11:36.

- So God is sovereign over all things and works out His purposes in every event that happens.

- Paul declares that "*God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him, to those who are called according to His purpose*" Rom8:28 NASB.

C) Divine **concurrence**: In addition to being the Divine Sustainer and Governor, God is also the Divine Cooperator; God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do.

-Paul says in Ephesians 1:13 that God "*works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will.*" No event falls outside of His providence...I list 7 such matters under His concurrence:

1. Events of Inanimate creation

2. Provision for Animals

3. The casting of lots/the rolling of dice

4. Events fully caused by God and, yet, in another sense fully caused by the creature

5. The affairs of nations (all human affairs)

6. All aspects of our individual lives (God's providence extends over ongoing provisions for our sustenance, our actions, our thought life and how we make willing choices)

- Particularly among believers, God "*fashions*" our hearts...the location of our inmost thoughts and desires (Ps33:14-15). God guides our desires and inclinations "*both to will and to work for His good pleasure*" Ph2:13.

-By His providential work of concurrence, God is the behind-the-scenes "Primary Cause" of our words, our steps, our movements, our hearts, and our abilities. They are all from the Lord.

-But scripture also says that we humans really do cause events. We make real choices that bring about real results. God has created us with the property of **willing choice**.

-According to Grudem, our theology should "*affirm that God causes all things to happen, but that He does it in such a way that He somehow upholds our ability to make willing responsible choices, choices that have real and external results, and for which we are held accountable. Exactly how God combines His providential control and our willing and significant choices, Scripture simply does not explain to us.*"

7. Our relationship to evil, and our responsibility in making willing choices

?Could a righteous God allow and plan for evil to occur?

-God ordained the most evil deed of all history, the crucifixion of Christ. This is recounted in Acts 4:27, where Luke says that God "*anointed*" Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the Jews "*to do whatever [God's] hand and [God's] plan had predestined to take place.*"

Peter says in Acts 2:23: "*This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless of men*".

-It appears that God, in His providence, can bring about His perfect plan through the willing choices of human beings. And God holds human beings responsible for their willing choices.