

Personal Choice within God's Sovereignty

Lesson 2– Providence of God

January 25 & February 1, 2015

This lesson utilizes material based on part from Gruden's Systematic Theology, Chapter 16, "God's Providence".

Historical Models for God's Sovereignty:

1. Creator of the world, people and all; He then spun the world into existence like a top and then steps back and watches
2. More of a Time to time intervention in the world and people's life, but occasional and special situations
3. God created, planned and influences all within to achieve His desired outcome
4. God created, planned and directs everything on earth

Defining differences between Providence and Fate, scriptural definitions and meanings:

Providence

1. Foreseeing care and guidance of God or nature over the creatures of the earth.
2. God directing the universe and the affairs of humankind with wise benevolence.
3. Manifestation of divine care or direction.
4. Prudent management of resources; prudence.
5. Foresight; [provident](#) care.

Fate

1. Something that unavoidably befalls a person; fortune; lot
2. Universal principle or ultimate agency by which the order of things is presumably prescribed
3. That which is inevitably predetermined; destiny
4. Prophetic declaration of what must be
5. Classical Mythology of three goddesses of destiny
6. Synonyms Expanded:
 - a. karma, chance, luck
 - b. destiny, idea of a fortune, usually adverse, that is predetermined and inescapable
 - c. Fate stresses the irrationality and impersonal character of events
 - d. Destiny emphasizes an unalterable course of events
 - e. Foreordain, preordain.

Definition of God's Providence:

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.

Under the general category of Providence, we have three subtopics according to the 3 elements above:

1. Preservation
2. Concurrence
3. Government

There has been considerable doctrinal debate and differing views historically within the church, particularly with respect to the willing choices of moral creatures within God's Will. These tend to be centered on either the Reformed (Calvinist) position or the Arminian position

1. Preservation:

Hebrews 1:3

3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven

Colossians 1:17

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Elihu in his wisdom says of God "If he should take back his spirit to himself, and gather to himself his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust" (Job 34:14-15)

Key Points:

- Refers to every created thing in the universe
- Christ keeps all things existing
- God continues to give us breath each moment
- By maintaining, he preserves the properties he originally created
- God made and continues to sustain the universe

2. Concurrence:

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

- a) Inanimate Creation
 - a. "Natural occurrences" such as fire, hail, snow, frost, stormy winds; grass to grow; directs the stars in heaven; Sun coming out in the morning
- b) Animals
 - a. Created, feeds all animals in the field
- c) Seemingly random or chance events
 - a. Proverbs 16:33 – The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from the Lord
- d) Events fully caused by God and Fully Caused by the Creature as well
 - a. Incorrect for us to reason that if we know the natural cause of something in the world, then God did not cause it.
 - b. God directs all occurrences and works through the unique distinctive properties of each thing he created; so that those people or things themselves bring about the results
 - c. In one sense you could say 100% of events are fully caused by God and 100% caused by His creatures
 - d. Divine causes of each event are invisible; behind the scenes influencing or directing "cause"; the "primary cause" that plans and initiates
 - e. Created things bring about actions in ways consistent with the creature's own properties, carefully observed and scientifically documented processes
- e) The Affairs of nations
 - a. God "makes nations great and he destroys; He enlarges nations and leads them away" - Job 12:23
 - b. "Dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations" - Psalm 22:28

- c. He has determined the time of existence and the place of every nation on the earth; “He made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation” – Acts 17:26
 - d. Nebuchadnezzar’s repentance and praise of God; “He does according to his will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth” – Daniel 4: 34-35
- f) All Aspects of our lives
- a. Amazing to see to what extent scriptures affirms that God brings various events in our lives:
 - 1) Supply every need; Philippians 4:19
 - 2) Plans our days before we are born; Psalms 139:16 “In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them”
 - 3) Our days are determined; Job 14:5 “days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his bounds that he cannot pass”
 - 4) Set apart before born; Galatians 1:15 “had set me apart before I was born”
 - 5) A man’s steps are directed:
 - 1. Jeremiah 10:23 – “I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps”
 - 2. Proverbs 20:24 – “a man’s steps are ordered by the Lord”
 - 3. Proverbs 16:9 – “a man’s mind plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps”
 - b. Success and failure come from God
 - 1) Ps 75:6-7 – “For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up; but it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another”
 - c. Talents and abilities from God
 - d. God influences rulers in their decisions
 - 1) Proverbs 21:1 “the king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will”
 - 2) Ps 33:14-15 “on all the inhabitants of earth...fashions the hearts of them all”
 - e. God guides the desires and inclinations of believers
 - f. Work of Concurrence extends to our words, our steps, our movements, our hearts, and our abilities
 - g. Guard against misunderstanding: Scripture affirms that we really do cause events to happen. We are significant and responsible;
 - h. We own the property of willing choice
 - i. Options:
 - 1) Our choices are real, they cannot be caused by God
 - 2) (Preferred) God causes all things that happen, but that he does so in such a way that this somehow upholds our ability to make willing, responsible choices that have real, eternal and accountable results
- g) What about Evil?
- a. Scriptures never say God is directly doing anything evil; but allowing evil deeds to be brought about through the willing actions of moral creatures
 - 1) Many scriptures supporting this: Joseph (Gen 37:11,20, 24, 28; 45:5)
 - 2) Combination of evil deeds brought about by sinful men who are rightly held accountable for their sin and the overriding providential control of God whereby God’s own purposes are accomplished. Both are positions are clearly affirmed.
 - 3) Pharaoh hardening of heart Exodus 4:21(several interpretations)
 - 1. Pharaoh hardened his own heart Exodus 8:15, 32; 9:34; God’s hardening was in response to the original free will rebellion and decisions; God is intensifying the evil desires and choices that were already present in his heart

2. God did this for His plan and used Pharaoh in the process to accomplish His end; Promise from God comes in scripture before Pharaoh's personal decisions
3. Romans 9:17 is a further clarification from Paul on this "So then he has mercy upon whoever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whoever he wills"
 - 4) Canaanites, David, Job, Ahab other examples
 - 5) Crucifixion of Christ
- b. Scripture never blames God for evil or shows God as taking pleasure in evil
- c. Scripture never excuses human beings for the wrong sinful decisions they do
- h) Verses Dealing with God and Evil
 - a. God Uses all things to fulfill His Purposes and Glory
 - b. God never performs evil or blamed for Evil
 - c. Blames and judges moral creatures for evil choose
 - d. Evil is Real, it will harm us
 - e. Difficult to understand how it is that God can ordain that "we carry out evil deeds throughout choices" and yet "hold us accountable for them" and not be blamed Himself
- i) Are we "free", do we have "free Will"
 - a. Scriptures nowhere says that we are "free" in a sense of being outside of God's control or being able to make decisions that are not caused by anything
 - b. Scriptures do not say that we are "free" in the sense of being able to do right apart from God
 - c. Free to make willing choices that have real effects
 - d. Scripture seems to affirm that there are no restraints on our will from God when we make decisions
 - e. Without the power of choices, we can easily fall into the error of fatalism or determinism where our choices do not matter
 - f. We do not have the free will choices, the kind of freedom that is outside of God's providential control of all things

3. Governance:

Daniel 4:35

35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

Psalms 103:19

19 The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.

1 Corinthians 15:27

27 For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.

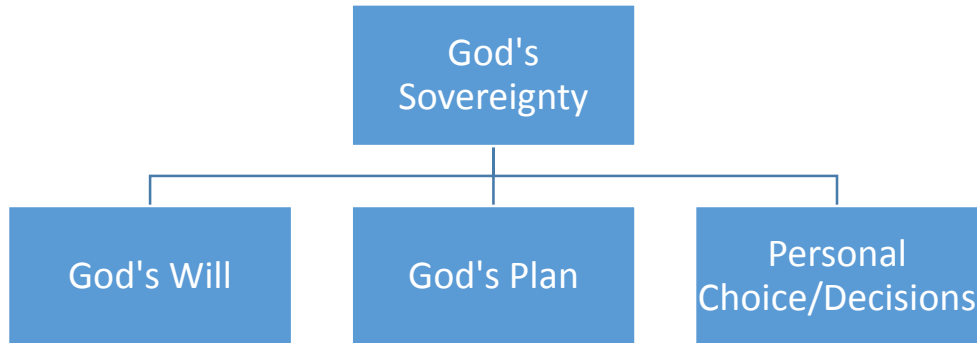
God has a purpose in all that he does in the world and he providentially governs or directs all things in order that they accomplish his purposes. God is sovereign over all people and works his purposes in every event that happens.

Distinctions Concerning the Will of God

- Moral will of God, sometimes called his "Revealed Will"
 - Standards of scripture
 - How we should act and conduct ourselves before God

- Providential Governance, sometimes called his “Secret Will”
 - Events of history
 - Evil acts
 - Individuals

Seemingly contradictory elements of will in man’s wisdom and understanding



Literally means foresight, but is generally used to denote God's preserving and governing all things by means of secondary causes (Ps. 18:35; 63:8; Acts 17:28; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). God's providence extends:

1. natural world (Ps. 104:14; 135:5-7; Acts 14:17)
2. creation (Ps. 104:21-29; Matt. 6:26; 10:29)
3. affairs of men (1 Chr. 16:31; Ps. 47:7; Prov. 21:1; Job 12:23; Dan. 2:21; 4:25)
4. individuals (1 Sam. 2:6; Ps. 18:30; Luke 1:53; James 4:13-15)
5. free actions of men (Ex. 12:36; 1 Sam. 24:9-15; Ps. 33:14, 15; Prov. 16:1; 19:21; 20:24; 21:1)
6. things sinful (2 Sam. 16:10; 24:1; Rom. 11:32; Acts 4:27, 28)
7. good actions (Phil. 2:13; 4:13; 2 Cor. 12:9, 10; Eph. 2:10; Gal. 5:22-25)
8. Regarding sinful actions of men, they are represented as occurring by:
 - a. God's permission (Gen. 45:5; 50:20. Comp. 1 Sam. 6:6; Ex. 7:13; 14:17; Acts 2:3; 3:18; 4:27, 28)
 - b. Controlled (Ps. 76:10)
 - c. Overruled for good (Gen. 50:20; Acts 3:13)

God does not cause or approve of sin, but only limits, restrains, and overrules it for good. The mode of God's providential government is altogether unexplained. We only know that it is a fact that God does govern all his creatures and all their actions.

4. Our Personal Decisions and Actions:

- a) We are responsible for our Actions
- b) Our actions have real results and do change the course of events
- c) Prayer has definite results and changes course of events
- d) We must act and not sit back in idleness awaiting “God’s Outcome of Events”
- e) Don’t be paralyzed in making decisions or be indecisive; Trust in God and Go
- f) Be thankful for all things and circumstances
- g) There is no such thing as luck or chance

5. Calvinists and Armenian World View of Providence:

Differences between the Arminian and Calvinist positions are not merely differences in terminology but are substantive. Pages 337-351 cover in detail with some key arguments of the positions stated below (I am not taking sides as much as writing about the different theological arguments):

a) Armenian Arguments and Problems with Calvinist View:

1. God's Providential Control are Exceptions and do not describe the way that God Ordinarily works in Human Activity
2. Calvinist position viewed as wrongly making God "responsible" for Sin; This is an issue of who "controls" the choice
3. God himself never sins, but how do you explain His Will being brought about through secondary causes of sin?
4. Choices caused by God cannot be real choices that carry eternal consequences and judgment
5. Arminian View encourages Responsible Christian Living while the Calvinist view encourages a dangerous Fatalism

b) Calvinist Arguments and Problems with Armenian View:

1. Where does scripture say that a choice ordained by God is not a real choice?
2. God working through our will, our power to choose, our personal volition; on what basis can we say that this is not a real choice?
3. God has made us in such a way that he ordains all we do but we also exercise our personal will and make real choices

6. Questions for Small Group Discussion

1. Discuss the different models of God's Sovereignty on page 1. While general, do you have a tendency to believe one over the other? Why?
2. Discuss Providence verses Fate. Why should Christians reject Fate as a legitimate thinking?
3. Does God directly cause events to happen? Both natural occurrences and seemingly random events in people's lives?
4. Discuss "divine intervention" behind the scenes directing a cause, how does this actual happen?
5. Does God actually change or cause something to happen or does each person through choices drive the outcome?
6. Does God cooperate, influence or directly cause events according to His will?
7. Can God's will have evil included? Discuss how this can happen if God does not directly cause or initiate evil?
8. Is God responsible for allowing evil to occur on earth?
9. Discuss your "free will" to make personal decisions?
10. Discuss how "free will" personal decisions can fit within "God's Providence for Your life"?