

# Providence

Rocky Wyatt | April 23, 2017

# Definitions - Decrees of God

The eternal plans of God whereby, before the creation of the world, he determined to bring about everything that happens.

*Grudem*



# Definitions - Providence

The doctrine that 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.



*Grudem*

# Definitions - Providence

Providence is wiser than you, and you may be confident it has suited all things better to your eternal good than you could do had you been left to your own option.

*John Flavel, The Mystery of Providence*



# Definitions - Providence

The Heidelberg Catechism, Question 27:

***What dost thou mean by the providence of God?***

The almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as It were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven and earth, and all creatures; so that the herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things, come not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.”

(a) Acts 17:25-28; Jer.23:23,24; Isa.29:15,16; Ezek.8:12. (b) Heb.1:3. (c) Jer. 5:24; Acts 14:17. (d) John 9:3. (e) Prov.22:2. (f) Matt.10:20; Prov.16:33.



# Definitions - Providence

Providence may be defined as that continued exercise of the divine energy whereby the Creator preserves all His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end.

*Berkhof*

The providence of God means the continuing action of God in preserving his creation and guiding it toward his intended purposes.

*Erickson*



# Definitions - Providence

God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

*Reymond*



# Providence

## Providence and the Believer

Providence is in certain ways central to the conduct of the Christian life. It means that we are able to live in the assurance that God is present and active in our lives. We are in his care and can therefore face the future confidently, knowing that things are not happening merely by chance. We can pray, knowing that God hears and acts upon our prayers. We can face danger, knowing that he is not unaware and uninvolved.

*Erickson*





# Providence

## A Right Perspective

With its doctrine of providence the Church took position against both, the Epicurean notion that the world is governed by chance, and the Stoic view that it is ruled by fate. From the very start theologians took the position that God preserves and governs the world.

*Berkhof*



# Providence

## A Right Perspective

Augustine led the way in the development of this doctrine. Over against the doctrines of fate and chance, he stressed the fact that all things are preserved and governed by the sovereign, wise, and beneficent will of God. He made no reservations in connection with the providence of God, but maintained the control of God over the good and the evil that is in the world alike.

*Berkhof*



# General and Special Providence

Theologians generally distinguish between general and special providence, the former denoting God's control of the universe as a whole, and the latter, His care for each part of it in relation to the whole.

*Erickson*

## **John 17:2**

For you [the Father] granted him [the Christ] authority over all people [general providence] that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him [special providence].



# 3 Elements of Providence

1. Preservation
2. Concurrence
3. Government



# 3 Elements of Providence

But while we distinguish three elements in providence, we should remember that these three are never separated in the work of God. While preservation has reference to the being, concurrence to the activity, and government to the guidance of all things, this should never be understood in an exclusive sense. In preservation there is also an element of government, in government an element of concurrence, and in concurrence an element of preservation.

*Berkhof*



# Preservation

God keeps all created things existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them.

*Grudem*

Preservation may be defined as that continuous work of God by which He maintains the things which He created, together with the properties and powers with which He endowed them.

*Berkhof*



# Preservation

## **Hebrews 1:3**

And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

## **Colossians 1:17**

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.



# Preservation

## **Acts 17:28**

for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'

## **Nehemiah 9:6**

You alone are the LORD. You have made the heavens, The heaven of heavens with all their host, The earth and all that is on it, The seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them And the heavenly host bows down before You.





# Preservation

## **2 Peter 3:7**

But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

## **Job 34:14–15**

If He should determine to do so, If He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath, All flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust.



# Preservation

## **Psalm 104:29**

You hide Your face, they are dismayed; You take away their spirit, they expire And return to their dust.



# Concurrence

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

*Grudem*

Concurrence may be defined as the cooperation of the divine power with all subordinate powers, according to the pre-established laws of their operation, causing them to act and to act precisely as they do.

*Berkhof*



# Concurrence

Divine-human concurrence. You are making free moral choices while God is perfectly accomplishing exactly what He intends.

*Wragg*



## 2 Implications of Concurrence

1. That the powers of nature do not work by themselves, that is, simply by their own inherent power, but that God is immediately operative in every act of the creature. This must be maintained in opposition to the deistic position.
2. That second causes are real, and not to be regarded simply as the operative power of God. It is only on condition that second causes are real, that we can properly speak of a concurrence or cooperation of the First Cause with secondary causes.

*Berkhof*



# Concurrence

## **Genesis 45:5**

Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

## **Exodus 4:11–12**

The Lord said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? “Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say.”



# Concurrence

## **Joshua 11:6**

Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow at this time I will deliver all of them slain before Israel; you shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire.”

## **Proverbs 21:1**

The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.



# Concurrence

## **Ezra 6:22**

And they observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the Lord had caused them to rejoice, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

## **Deuteronomy 8:18**

But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.





# Concurrence

## **Isaiah 10:5**

Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hands is My indignation,

## **Ephesians 1:11**

also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,



# 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.

*Grudem*

Government means that God is actively engaged in achieving his purposes in his creation and that sin cannot thwart those purposes.

*Erickson*



# God's Government Affirms 2 Things

1. The absolute sovereign lordship of God over creation
2. We are all dependent – not autonomous



# God's Governing

## The Universe at Large

### **Psalm 103:19**

The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all.

### **Daniel 4:35**

All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'.



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

## The Universe at Large

### **Ephesians 1:11**

also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

## The Physical World

### **Psalm 135:6**

Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

### **Job 37:10**

From the breath of God ice is made, And the expanse of the waters is frozen.



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

## The Physical World

### Psalm 104:14

He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the labor of man, So that he may bring forth food from the earth,



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

## The Brute Creation

### **Psalm 104:21**

The young lions roar after their prey And seek their food from God.

### **Matthew 6:26**

Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*



# God's Governing

## The Brute Creation

### Matthew 10:29

Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing The Affairs of Nations

## **Job 12:23**

He makes the nations great, then destroys them; He enlarges the nations, then leads them away.

## **Matthew 10:29**

For the kingdom is the LORD'S And He rules over the nations.



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing The Affairs of Nations

## **Acts 17:26**

and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

## Man's Birth and Lot in Life

### 1 Samuel 16:1

Now the LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons."



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

## Man's Birth and Lot in Life

### Psalm 139:16

Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

## Man's Birth and Lot in Life

### Galatians 1:15–16

But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

## Success and Failure

### **Psalm 75:6–7**

For not from the east, nor from the west, Nor from the desert comes exaltation; But God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another.

### **Luke 1:52**

He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble.



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

**Things Seemingly Accidental or Insignificant**

**Proverbs 16:33**

The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.

**Matthew 10:30**

But the very hairs of your head are all numbered



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*



# God's Governing

## The Protection of the Righteous

### Psalm 4:8

In peace I will both lie down and sleep, For You alone, O LORD, make me to dwell in safety.

### Psalm 5:12

For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O LORD, You surround him with favor as with a shield.



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

## The Protection of the Righteous

### Romans 8:28

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

## Supplying the Wants of God's People

### Genesis 22:8

Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

### Deuteronomy 8:3

He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

## Supplying the Wants of God's People

### Philippians 4:19

And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

## Giving Answers to Prayer

### **2 Chronicles 33:13**

When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.

### **Matthew 7:7**

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

## Giving Answers to Prayer

### Luke 18:7–8

now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? “I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”



*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*

# God's Governing

## The Exposure and Punishment of the Wicked

### Psalm 7:12–13

If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready. He has also prepared for Himself deadly weapons; He makes His arrows fiery shafts.

### Psalm 11:6

Upon the wicked He will rain snares; Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup.

*A Scriptural Defense (taken from Cairns Dictionary of Theological Terms)*



# The Problem of Evil

Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians, and Arminians raise a serious objection to this doctrine of providence. They maintain that a previous concurrence, which is not merely general but predetermines man to specific actions, makes God the responsible author of sin. Reformed theologians are well aware of the difficulty that presents itself here, but do not feel free to circumvent it by denying God's absolute control over the free actions of His moral creatures, since this is clearly taught in Scripture.

*Berkhof*





# The Problem of Evil

## **James 1:13–14**

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

## **1 John 2:16**

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.



# The Problem of Evil

We can begin by looking at several passages that affirm that God did, indeed, cause evil events to come about and evil deeds to be done. But we must remember that in all these passages it is very clear that Scripture nowhere shows God as directly doing anything evil but rather as bringing about evil deeds through the willing actions of moral creatures. Moreover, 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.

*Grudem*



# The Problem of Evil

## **Genesis 45:5**

Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

## **Genesis 50:19–20**

But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”



# The Problem of Evil

## **Exodus 9:16–17**

But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth. Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go.



# The Problem of Evil

## **Romans 9:17–18**

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.” So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

## **Psalms 105:25**

He turned their heart to hate His people, To deal craftily with His servants.



# The Problem of Evil

## **Joshua 11:20**

For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, to meet Israel in battle in order that he might utterly destroy them, that they might receive no mercy, but that he might destroy them, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.



# The Problem of Evil

## **Judges 3:12**

Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord.



# The Problem of Evil

But if the sinful actions of humans are not caused by God, what do we mean when we say that they are within his governing activity? There are several ways in which God can and does relate to sin.

He can:

- Prevent it
- Permit it
- Direct it
- Limit it



*Erickson*



# The Problem of Evil

## God Can Prevent Sin

### Genesis 20:6

Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her.

### Psalms 19:13

Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.



# The Problem of Evil

## God Does Not Always Prevent Sin

### Acts 14:16

In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways;

### Romans 1:24

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.



# The Problem of Evil

**God Does Not Always Prevent Sin**

**Psalm 81:12–13**

So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, To walk in their own devices. Oh that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways!



# The Problem of Evil

## God Can Direct Sin

### Genesis 37:21–22

But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, “Let us not take his life.” Reuben further said to them, “Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father.

### Genesis 45:8

Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.



# The Problem of Evil

## God Can Direct Sin

### Acts 2:36

Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.

### Romans 11:25

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;



# The Problem of Evil

## God Can Limit Sin

### Job 1:12

Then the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.” So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord.

### Job 2:6

So the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.”



# The Problem of Evil

## God Can Limit Sin

### 1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.



# God's Governing Authority - Conclusions

- God's governing authority is universal. Rom 8:28; Isa 44-45
- God's providence does not extend merely to His own people
- God is good in His government
- God is personally concerned about those who are His
- Our activity and God's activity are not mutually exclusive
- God is sovereign in His government





# God's Governing Authority - Conclusions

The Heidelberg Catechism, Question 28:

**What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by His providence doth still uphold all things?**

That we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move.



(a) Rom.5:3; James 1:3; Ps.39:9; Job 1:21,22. (b) Deut.8:10; 1 Thess.5:18. (c) Ps.55:22; Rom.5:4. (d) Rom.8:38,39. (e) Job 1:12; Job 2:6; Acts 17:25,28; Prov.21:1.

# Concluding Thoughts

## The Christian and Suffering

Suffering complicates and tests our surrender to God. As Psalm 34:19 says, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous,” so Thomas Brooks (1608-1680) observed, “God, who is infinite in wisdom and matchless in goodness, hath ordered troubles, yea, many troubles to come trooping in upon us on every side.” Sorrows create a grave dilemma for the Christian, for he does not want to deny either the sovereignty or the goodness of God. If we desire to walk humbly with our God (Mic.6:8), then, as Owen said, we must fall down before God and acknowledge that He has the sovereign right to do as He pleases...



# Concluding Thoughts

## The Christian and Suffering

...We must believe that He acts with wisdom, and righteousness, goodness, love, and mercy in all that He does, even though it may be difficult to see that in the confusing vicissitudes, dizzying changes, and deep distresses of life.

*Beeke and Jones, A Puritan Theology*



# Concluding Thoughts

## The Christian and Suffering

Hopkins warned that if human reason attempts to track the logic of divine providence, it will find itself in “entangled mazes and labyrinths,” just as if we try to search out God’s eternal decree of election. He wrote, “We may sooner tire reason in such a pursuit than satisfy it.” It is far better to bow in worship and exclaim with Paul, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Rom. 11:33)

*Thomas Brooks, The Mute Christian Under the Smarting Rod*



# Principles to Remember:

- God is in control of the universe.
- God is working out His perfect purposes, also in my life.
- God is not my servant.
- God's ways are far more mysterious and wonderful than I can understand.
- God is always good; I can always trust Him.
- God's timetable is not the same as mine.
- God is far more interested in what I become than what I do.



*Beeke, J. R., & Jones, M. (2012). A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life (p. 177). Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books.*

# Principles to Remember:

- Freedom from suffering is not promised in the Christian gospel.
- Suffering is an integral part of the Christian life.
- God works through suffering to fulfill His purposes in me.
- God's purposes, not mine, are what bring Him glory.
- God enables me to read His providences through the lens of His Word.
- I have few greater pleasures than tracing the wonders of God's ways.



*Beeke, J. R., & Jones, M. (2012). A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life (p. 177). Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books.*