

**Chapter 16: God's Providence**

If God controls all things, how can our actions have real meaning? What are the decrees of God?

**Explanation and Scriptural Basis (315)**

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.

A) Preservation (316-317)

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

a) God is *not* continually re-creating everything; rather he preserves what has already been created. Therefore, all created things are *real* and have *real* properties.

B) Concurrence (317-331)

1) God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do. (Eph. 1:11)

2) Inanimate Creation (Ps. 148:8; Job 37:6-13; Ps. 135:6-7, 104:14; Matt. 5 :45)

3) Animals (Ps. 104:27-29; Matt. 6:26, 10:29)

4) Seemingly "Random" or "Chance" Events (Prov. 16:33)

5) Events Fully Caused by God and Fully Caused by the Creature as Well

a) God directs, and works through the distinctive properties of each created thing, so that these things themselves bring about the results that we see.

6) The Affairs of Nations (Job 12:23; Ps. 22:28; Acts 17:26)

7) 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) (analogy: Macbeth and Duncan)

8) 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. 45:7; Lam. 3:38; 2 Thess. 2:11-12; 1 Peter 2:8)

a) Scripture nowhere shows God as directly doing anything evil but rather ordaining that evil deeds come about through the willing actions of moral creatures.

b) 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.

9) Analysis of Verses Relating to God and Evil

a) 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)

b) Nevertheless, God never does evil, and is never to be blamed for evil. (Luke 22:22; Matt. 18:7; James 1:13-14)

c) God rightfully blames and judges moral creatures for the evil they do. (Isa. 66:3-4; Ecd. 7:29; Rom. 9:19-20)

d) 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 Peter 2:11; Rom. 3:8)

e) 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.

10) Are we "free"? Do we have "free will"?

a) Scripture nowhere says that we are "free" in the sense of being outside of God's control. But we are free in the greatest sense that any creature of God could be free—we make willing choices, choices that have real effects.

- C) Government (331-332)
  - 1) 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)
  - 2) Distinctions Concerning the Will of God
    - a) Moral Will (Revealed Will)
    - b) Providential Government (Secret Will)
- D) The Decrees of God (332-333)
  - 1) The eternal plans of God whereby, before the creation of the world, he determined to bring about everything that happens. (Ps. 139:16; Acts 2:23; Eph. 1:4; Eph. 2:10)
- E) The Importance of Our Human Actions (333-336)
  - 1) We are still responsible for our actions. (Rom. 9:19-20)
  - 2) Our actions have real results and do change the course of events.
  - 3) Prayer is one specific kind of action that has definite results and that does change the course of events. (James 4:2; John 16:24)
  - 4) In conclusion, we must act! (Acts 18:9-10; 2 Tim. 2:10)
  - 5) What if we cannot understand this doctrine fully?
- F) Further Practical Application (336-337)
  - 1) Do not be afraid, but trust in God. (Matt. 10:26-31; Ps. 4:8; 1 Peter 1:6-7)
  - 2) Be thankful for all good things that happen. (Ps. 103:2)
  - 3) There is no such thing as "luck" or "chance."
- G) Another Evangelical View: the Arminian Position. (337-341)
  - 1) Those who hold an Arminian position maintain 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.
  - 2) The verses cited as examples of God's providential control are exceptions and do not describe the way that God ordinarily works in human activity.
  - 3) The Calvinist view wrongly makes God responsible for sin. (James 1:13; 1 John 1:5; Ps. 92:15)
  - 4) Choices caused by God cannot be real choices. (1 Cor. 10:13)
  - 5) The Arminian view encourages responsible Christian living, while the Calvinistic view encourages a dangerous fatalism.
- H) Response to the Arminian Position (342-351)
  - 1) Are these Scripture passages unusual examples, or do they describe the way God works ordinarily? (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17; Eph. 1:11)
  - 2) Does the Calvinistic doctrine of God's providence make God responsible for sin?
  - 3) Can choices ordained by God be real choices?
    - a) We look to what Scripture says to determine what is and what is not reality.
  - 4) Does a Calvinistic view of providence encourage either a dangerous fatalism or a tendency to "live like Arminians"?
  - 5) Additional Objections to the Arminian Position
    - a) On an Arminian view, how can God know the future?
    - b) On an Arminian view, how can evil exist if God did not want it?
    - c) On an Arminian view, how can we know that God will triumph over evil?
    - d) The Difference in the Unanswered Questions