Section 12
God's Providence

Intro: This week we are going to investigate the properties of God's providence. Traditionally providence is used to summarize God's ongoing relationship to his creation. Providence teaches that though God is actively related to and involved in the creation at each moment, creation is distinct from Him. A proper understanding of providence avoids four errors: deism, pantheism, evolution, and fate (determinism). Providence may be defined as follows: God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that He (1)) directs them to fulfill his purposes (government); (2) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them (preservation); and (3) cooperates with the created order and directs them as he sees fit (concurrence). Concurrence tells us how God is at work in creation.

I. GOD'S GOVERNMENT

A. Definition: Erickson states that it is "God's activity in the universe so that all its events fulfill his plan for it. . . . The emphasis is more fully on the purposive directing of the whole of reality and the course of history to God's ends. It is the actual execution, within time of his plans devised in eternity."[1]

B. Understanding God's Sovereignty

1. The term "sovereignty" refers to God's divine authority and power by which He rules over creation for His glory and for the good of those on whom He has chosen to show mercy (Rom. 8.28; 9.18; Eph. 1.10-12; Rev. 4.11).
2. God is the Creator which gives Him sovereign rights; that is, his kingdom is timeless and universal.

   a. Creator and ruler is a theme that is repeated throughout Scripture and maintains the unity of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.[2]

---

[1]Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 420.

[2]Scripture references which refer to God as the Creator, Most High, or responsible for creation and, therefore, having the right to rule are the following: Gen. 1.1,21,27; 2.3-4; 5.1-2; 6.7; 14.19,22; 18.25; Ex. 9.14,16; 19.5; Num. 14.21; Deut. 4.32; 32.8; Josh. 3.11,13; 1 Sam. 17.46; 2 Kings 5.15; 1 Chron. 16.14, 30; 29.11-12; Ps. 8.1; 10.16; 33.8; 47.2,7; 57.5; 66.4; 83.18; 89.12; 96.9; 97.9; 98.4; 102.18; 103.19; 104.30; 105.7; 108.5; 148.5; Eccls. 12.1; Isa. 10.14; 14.14; 25.8; 40.20-21,26,28; 41.20; 42.5; 43.1,7,15; 44.24; 45.7-9, 12, 18; 48.7, 13; 51.13; 54.5,16; Jer. 10.10; 31.22; Lam. 3.35, 38; Ezek. 21.30; 28.13,15; Dan. 4.17,25,32,34; 5.18,21; 7.18,22,27; Hos. 11.7; Hab. 2.20; Zeph. 3.8; Zech. 6.5; 14.9; Mal. 2.10; Mark 5.7; 13.19; Luke

b. The Scripture asserts that God spoke and creation leaped into existence from nothing.

1) By virtue of His creatorship, God is sovereign over everything and has the right to rule by edict or direct command.
2) An edict may apply to any part of creation or to the whole; that is God has the right to interact with individuals as well as society as a whole
3) The basis for this rule is the eternal principles or universal law which the nature of God expresses.
4) Because of God's special relation to mankind as Creator, the eternal principles of God (i.e. Law) are binding upon all mankind.

C. Scriptural evidence for the extent of God's jurisdiction: Ps 103.19 - His kingdom rule

1. Controls nature (Job 9.5-9; Pss 104.14; 135.5-7; Matt 5.45; Mark 4.39)
2. Directs the animal kingdom (Ps 104.21-29)
3. Determines human history (Dan 2.21; 4.24-25; Isa 10.5-12; Job 12.23; Pss 47.7-8; 66.7)
4. Sovereign over an individuals circumstances (1 Sam 2.6-7; Ps 31.14-15; Gal 1.15-16; 1 Cor 4.6-7; 12.4-11)

D. We were created for the glory of God.

1. Ephesians 1.6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.
2. Ephesians 1.12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.
3. Ephesians 1.14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

E. The Eternal Plan of God--His Decrees - The decrees of God are the eternal plans of God whereby, before the foundation of the world, He determined the overarching course of world affairs and permitted man to act freely[3] within these boundaries. For example, God ordained that Christ was to die for the sin of mankind before the foundation of the world, yet Peter under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit declared that it was a wicked act of man.

8.28; John 1.3; Acts 7.48; 16.17; Rom. 1.25; 9.17; 1 Cor. 11.9; Eph. 2.10; 3.9; 4.24; Col. 1.16; 3.10; 1 Tim. 4.3; Heb. 1.3; 7.1; 1 Pet. 4.19; Rev. 4.11; 5.6; 10.6.; William J. Dumbrell observed the creation motif in Isaiah's prophecies in Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology (Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1984), 192; See also Charles Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 223-24.

[3]These free decisions of man are foreknown by God in a non-determinative way so that God knows perfectly what will happen in the future (i.e. He is omniscient).

1. The overarching plan of God is unconditional
2. The decrees are both conditional and unconditional.
3. However, God does not have an unconditional plan for every particle, atom, or being within the universe.

    a. He created the "laws of nature" by which atoms, dust particles, rain, etc. move. The laws of nature are upheld or continue to exist because God continually causes these laws to exist.
    b. As the laws of nature regulate the behavior of the physical universe, so also natural law regulates the behavior of man (that written on the heart--things that can be known from nature; see Rom 2). It is these "natural laws" that our country's founding father found to be self-evident.
    c. This does not mean that God has a hands off policy like that espoused by Deists.
    d. God can and does actively work in the creation at all times.
    e. This does not mean that He is continually creating the universe, but rather that He is directing the affairs of the universe. This aspect falls under God's concurrence which is discussed below.

4. Jack Cottrell wrote:

    What kind of creation did God purpose to make? One that has no capability of acting independently of God in any way whatsoever? One in which he must predetermine every specific motion, no matter how minute? Or one that has been freely endowed with a measure of freedom concerning individual movements, decisions, and actions? I, along with most non-Calvinists, have opted for this latter model. But if this was the kind of world God decided to make, then this was his decree, and it was a sovereign decree. This is the kind of world he wanted; so this is the kind of world he decreed and made.[4]

F. God's eternal plan with respect to mankind.

1. Hebrews 2.10 For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.
2. Hebrews 9.8-15 The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which *was* a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed *on them* until the time of

---

[4]Jack W. Cottrell, "The Nature of Divine Sovereignty," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. by Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1989), 107.

reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions *that were* under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

3. Ephesians 1.18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints (See also 1 Peter 1.4)
4. Nothing will change the plan to bring many sons to glory which God has purposed from eternity.

G. Order of decrees

1. God decreed to create. (All nature runs according to ordained laws of nature which God in His providence uses to accomplish His purposes.)
2. God permitted sin and the fall. (Sin was not necessary; that is, God did not cause it. He did foreknow that it would occur, yet he did not prevent it from occurring. - Gen 2.17; Ex 34.7; Ps 106.15; Acts 14.16; cf. 17.30)
3. God determined to overrule sin for the good according to His holy will. (Ps 33.10; Gen 50.20; Dan 3.19-30; Rom 8.28; Heb 11)
4. God decreed to provide redemption through Christ sufficient for all.
5. God commanded (permissive - this allows man the "right" of contrary choice) all men everywhere to repent.
6. God decreed to send the Spirit to bring men to salvation. (The enlightenment allows the elect to make a favorable response to God. God's grace enables the sinner to respond: Rom 2.4; Titus 2.11; implied by exhortations to turn to God: Prov 1.23; Deut 30.15-20; Josh 24.15; Ezek 14.6; 18.32; Joel 2.13-32; Marr 18.3; Acts 3.19; to repent: 1 Kings 8.7; Matt 3.2; Luke 13.3; Acts 2.38; 17.30; to believe: 2 Chron 20.20; Isa 43.10; John 6.29; 14.1; Acts 16.31; Rom 4.3-5; Phil 1.29; 1 John 3.23.)
7. God decreed to reward His servants and punish the rebellious.

H. No Distinctions in the will of God.

1. Calvinism speaks of God's

   a. Providential will = that which God chooses to do.
   b. Prescriptive or permissive will = what God regards as proper conduct. People may violate God's permissive will.

2. The Modified position states that God's moral will or revealed will gives us standards by which we should conduct ourselves.

II. PRESERVATION

A. Hebrews 1.3 informs us that God upholds the universe by the word of His power.

1. The verb "uphold" is the Greek word *"phero"* (φερώ) which means "to bear or carry."
2. Examples:

   a. Luke 5.18 - the paralyzed man was carried to Jesus.
   b. 2 Timothy 4.13 - the books and cloak were brought to Paul.
   c. Acts 27.15 - the winds of Euroclydon drove the ship.

3. It does not mean to "sustain," but has the sense of active, purposeful control over the thing being carried from one place to another.
4. Jesus is continually carrying all things along in this universe by the word of His power. [TDNT - to uphold is to rule the universe by His word.[5]]
5. The laws of nature (i.e. gravity, etc.) by which this universe operates continue to function because they are being upheld by the word of God as mentioned above.

B. Colossians 1.17 declares that by Him all things consist.

1. All things refer to every created thing in the universe
2. This verse affirms that Christ keeps all things existing.
3. The conclusion of this and the above verse is that if Christ were to cease his continuing activity of sustaining all things in the universe, then all except the Triune God would instantly cease to exist.[6]

C. God's preservation is continuous

1. God, in preserving all things he has made, also causes them to maintain the

---

[5]Gerhard Friedrich, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed.and trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), S.v. "φερώ," by Konrad Weiss.

[6]According to Wilhelm Kasch, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, S.v. "συνίστημι," the word "consist" has 5 basic meanings in the New Testament. The meaning appropriate for this verse is "to exist." The verb (perfect) is intransitive (meaning it does not have an object), therefore, all of creation exists presently because of Christ; that is, all things have their existence in Him. The laws of nature, which God ordained and by which all things are held together, these laws, find their source and reason for being in Christ.

properties with which He created them. (Grass continues to act like grass, water like water, etc.)

2. God's preservation is not a continuous new creation. He does not create new atoms and molecules for every existing thing every moment.
3. God's preservation provides the basis for science. God has made the universe in a particular way and sustains that universe so it acts in predictable ways according to the laws which He designed.

III. CONCURRENCE

A. God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do. In Ephesians 1.11 Paul says that God accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will. Like preservation, God's work of concurrence is not clearly evident from observation of the natural world around us.

B. Inanimate creation - many things around us we consider natural occurrences. They operate according to natural principles which we can learn and study through science. Yet, God **can override the laws by his mighty power to accomplish his purposes**.

1. Ps 148.8 - Fire, hail, snow, frost, stormy wind, etc.

    a. By the natural laws which he has created and sustains, it will snow, there will be frost, wind, etc.
    b. We can discover El Ninos and El Ninas which influence the rain, but only God can turn the heavens to brass so that it does not rain for three years (See 1 Kings 17.1; cf Deut 28.23-24)
    c. When God sees fit, He can intervene as in Ex 7-11 (plagues on Egypt).

2. Ps 104.14 - God causes the grass to grow.

    a. We know that if a person fertilizes his grass it grows faster and looks healthier than if he lets it eek out a living on red Georgia clay. But, a limit does exist on what we can do with the lawn.
    b. Lev 25.1-4,20-22 - God is able to make a land produce through his blessings (cf. Deut 28:1-14).

3. Job 9.9 (See also 38.31-32) - God expands the heavens and assembles the constellations.
4. Matthew 5.45 - He makes the sun rise and sends rain on just and unjust according to principles he established.
5. Ps 135.6 - The Lord does as he pleases in heaven, on earth, etc.

    a. Ex 14 - God parts the Red Sea. The natural laws that make the Red Sea do what the Red Sea does were not suspended or abrogated in order for

the waters to part, but these principles were superceded by a greater law.

b. Joshua 10.12-13 - God was not satisfied to let the normal events of natural law continue, so the Lord intervened and the sun stood still.
c. Deuteronomy 11:14 - God promises to give Israel the former and latter rains if they obey Him. Unfortunately, Israel did not keep the covenant commands, therefore, the showers have been withholden, and there hath been no latter rain according to Jeremiah 3:3.
d. God is very much aware (i.e. He knows) of what "natural" events will occur because He upholds the laws which bring them about. If God is satisfied with the "natural" he will allow it, if He chooses to do otherwise, He is sovereign. God is at work in the affairs of man to bring about the events He chose before the foundation of the world

6. Animals

a. Ps.104.27-29 - God feeds the wild animals of the field
b. Job 38.39-41 -
c. Matthew 6.26 - the Heavenly Father feeds the birds of the air.

1) Matthew 10.29 - Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground "without your Father." [knowing] The parallel passage in Luke 12.4-6 declares "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?
2) The picture of God feeding the animals is an anthropomorphism.

d. Exodus 23:28 - God put together an army of hornets to drive out the Hivites.
e. Numbers 22:23-33 - Balaam is reproved by his donkey.
f. Jonah 1.17 - God prepared a great fish for Jonah
g. Matthew 17.27 - God is able to provide tax money from a fish's mouth.
h. When God has need of the animals, they respond to His beck and call.

7. Seemingly "random" or "chance" events

a. Proverbs 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof *is* of the LORD.
b. The casting of lots was a common practice for Old Testament Israel because it was given to Israel by God as a means to know His will. The casting of a lot was not a game of chance. When the lot was cast by the proper representative (priest, king, etc.) for the proper purpose, God so directed the outcome that Israel could know the mind of God. The lot

would only be perfect as long as Israel relationship to God was right. When Israel sin separated them from God, the lot was no better than gambling.

1) Lev 16:8-10 And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat. (9) And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD'S lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. (10) But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.
2) Numbers 33:54 And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families: *and* to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance: every man's *inheritance* shall be in the place where his lot falleth; according to the tribes of your fathers ye shall inherit.
3) Joshua 19:51 states These *are* the inheritances, which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel, divided for an inheritance by lot in Shiloh before the LORD, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. So they made an end of dividing the country.
4) 1 Samuel 14:41 Therefore Saul said unto the LORD God of Israel, Give a perfect lot. And Saul and Jonathan were taken: but the people escaped.
5) Jon 1:7 And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. In this account, God intervened in what usually was just a game of chance for the pagan.
6) Acts 1:26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (See v. 24)

c. Allen P. Ross wrote: The Lord controls the decisions that are submitted to Him. The passage (Prov 16.33) concerns the practice of seeking divine leading through casting lots. Every decision is from the Lord.

8. The affairs of nations.

a. Job 12:23
b. Psalms 22.28
c. Acts 17.26 (cf. 14.16)
d. Daniel 4.34-35
e. Response: Daniel 4:17 This matter *is* by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men. If God

sees fit to let man carry out his decisions then man will do what he pleases. However, if God objects to the action of man, man will still do as he pleases, but God as sovereign will override man's decision (Proverbs 21:1). See Numbers 23:5-11; Daniel 3.19-25; 4.29-30; Isaiah 36; Luke 4.16-30.

9. All aspects of our lives

   a. Matthew 6.11 - our daily bread
   b. Philippians 4.19 - my God shall supply all your needs.
   c. Psalms 139.16 - God plans our days before we are born.
   d. Job 14.5 - the number of man's day are determined.
   e. Galatians 1.5 - God set Paul apart before he was born.
   f. Acts 17.28 - In him we live and move and have our being.
   g. Psalm 75.6-11 - success and failure is of God.
   h. Psalm 127.3 - children are an heritage of the Lord.
   i. Philippians 2.13 - God works in the believer both to will and to do his good pleasure.
   j. 1 Corinthians 4.7 - what do you have that you did not receive

C. The conclusion of the matter can be summed up in the phrase God overrides natural law and human will when He sees that it is right to do so. In John 5.17, Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

1. The whole of Scripture is a testimony of God at work in time. This is why the Bible is referred to as salvation history.

   a. Isaiah 55:11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.
   b. Daniel 9:2 In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

2. Many examples exist where God is at work in time.

   a. Creation
   b. The fall of Adam
   c. Call of Abraham
   d. Plagues upon Egypt
   e. Covenant of God with Israel
   f. Balaam

3. But the larger question is does God override the free will of man to accomplish his purposes. The answer is clearly yes.

a. Joseph sold into slavery (Gen 37.26-28; 50.20); Balaam (Deut 23.5); Nazarenes (Lk 4.29).

1) The actions of man do not fit in God's plan, so He literally overrules the free decision.
2) In Joseph's case, God allows the selling of Joseph into Egypt because that is what He desires. God, however, does not allow Joseph to be killed there (that did not fit His plan).

b. Deut 23.5 - Balaam makes a free choice but cannot even do more than think about it. God overrules Balaam's plan immediately. Balaam thinks to pronounce a curse upon Israel, but out of his mouth comes a blessing. (See also Neh 13.2)
c. Gen 20.6 - Abimelech had taken Sarah to be his wife (i.e. part of the harem) and God prevented Abimelech from touching Sarah.
d. Dan 3.19-25 - Nebuchadnezzer proposes to destroy the three Hebrew children, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, but God disposes of the plan.
e. Dan 6 - The presidents and the princes engineer a plan which they know will bring a death sentence upon Daniel. Everything happens just exactly the way they planned it except God closes the mouths of the lions and overrules the plan of the presidents and princes.
f. Luke 4.29 - Jesus introduces himself as the Messiah to his hometown Nazarene people and they pick him up and carry him out of town to throw him over the brow of a hill. Needless to say this does not fit with God 's plan. At the brow of the hill Jesus walks through their midst.
g. God restrains evil (John 16.18; 2 Thes 2.7; cf. Rev 6). When God removes his restraining hand, one-third of the earth's population will perish in approximately three years.

IV. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

A. Evil can be divided into two types: “natural” disaster, which involves acts of God in nature and the acts of the animal kingdom; and human rebellion.
B. If God does all things according to his will which was settled in eternity before the foundation of the world, does this make God responsible for evil? See the following article.

Send a Message to God

He has gone too far this time.
By Heather Mac Donald
Posted Monday, Jan. 10, 2005, at 11:59 AM PT

In the wake of the tsunami disaster, it's time for believers to take a more proactive role in world events. It's time to boycott God.

Centuries of uncritical worship have clearly produced a monster. God knows that he can sit passively by while human life is wantonly mowed down, and the next day, churches, synagogues, and mosques will be filled with believers thanking him for allowing the survivors to survive. The faithful will ask him to heal the wounded, while ignoring his failure to prevent the disaster in the first place. They will excuse his unwillingness to stave off destruction with alibis ("God wasn't there when the tsunami hit"—Suketu Mehta) and relativising ("for each victim tens of thousands yet live"—Russell Seitz), even if those excuses contradict God's other attributes, such as omnipresence or love for each individual life.

Where is God's incentive to behave? He gets credit for the good things and no blame for the bad. Former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft is fond of thanking God for keeping America safe since 9/11; Ashcroft never asks why, if God has fended off terrorist strikes since 9/11, he let the hijackers on the planes on the day itself. Was God caught off guard the first time around, like the U.S. government? But he is omniscient and omnipotent.

So slavishly do his worshipers flatter God that they give him credit for things he didn't even do. Let a man rape and murder a child, and it's the man's offense; but if someone tends to the sick or shares his wealth, it's God's hand at work. The Most Rev. Gabino Zavala from the Los Angeles Roman Catholic Archdiocese rejects any suggestion that God forsook the tsunami victims, according to the Los Angeles Times, but he credits God with the subsequent charity: "You can see God in the people's response—how they're reaching out."

It is a sad fact of human relations that unqualified adulation often produces from the adored one contempt and a kick in the chops, rather than gratitude and kindness. Apparently, the same applies to human-divine relations.

So, let the human race play hard to get. Imagine God's discombobulation if, after the next mass slaughter of human life, the hymns of praise and incense do not rise up. He checks the Sunday census; the pews are empty. Week after week, the churches and mosques are unattended; the usual gratitude for his not wiping out even more innocent children does not pour forth.

He starts to worry. Has he gone too far this time? Maybe he should've exercised his much heralded powers of intervention, the same powers that his erstwhile worshipers presupposed every time they prayed for him to cure a cancer victim, or get them into law school.

And so, no longer guaranteed an adoring public, he starts to make nice. He calls back avalanches poised to wipe out whole villages; he brings rain to drought-stricken communities; he cures fatally handicapped babies in the womb, or prevents such flawed conceptions before they happen. He presents tokens of his love to malaria victims and children paralyzed by auto accidents. Africa blooms with peace and prosperity.

It might not work. But the "I'm rotten-You're divine" syndrome isn't too functional, either. It's worth a try; there is nothing to lose.

Heather MacDonald is the author of *Are Cops Racist*?

C. Five point Calvinsist, having placed God in this dilemma, have devised two approaches to free themselves from the charge that God does evil.

1. They attempt to solve the problem by using an "end justifies the means" argument. Their argument would go as follows: 1) God works all things out for good - notice the disregard for the context; 2) What ever God does, it is for an ultimate good. They claim that it is alright for God to commit murder because his ultimate purpose is to bring about good. In this argument, evil is not absolute but relative. 3) Therefore, what would be evil for a man to do is not evil for God. They argue that what is evil for us is not evil for God because in the end His goal is ultimately to brings about good. Two arguments are used to "prove" this point.

   a. They state that the crucifixion was an "evil" act that was ordained by God before the foundation of the earth. Yet, ultimate good came out of the death of Christ, therefore, what looks like evil to us is really not evil when God does it. The argument fails because God did not murder his Son rather Christ voluntarily offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin. Jesus said no man takes my life. He freely chose to lay it down (Jn 10.15-17; 13.38; 1 Jn 3.16; and Mk 10.45). Yet, the Scripture indicates that he was crucified by wicked hands (Acts 2.23). The act of crucifixion was evil in that those who crucified him wanted to kill him. They hated him from the beginning of his ministry. They would have gladly killed him sooner. The "problem" God had was not working it out so that man would kill the Lord. Rather, the "problem" was to keep Christ from being killed before his time. His own country men would have gladly thrown him over a cliff at the very beginning of his ministry (Lk 4.29). To say that God murdered his Son is to is to twist the words of Scripture. From the divine side the crucifixion of Christ was not murder but rather sacrifice: the Father gave the Son; the Son voluntarily laid down his life. The human side of the crucifixion was clearly a free-will choice on the part of man to "take" the life of Christ because they hated Him. This was an act of premeditated murder.

   b. God does "evil" because he told Abraham to kill his son Isaac. This once again demonstrates that what may be evil for man is not evil for God. Two things need to be kept in mind concerning this event. First, Isaac was the promised child through whom the nation of Israel would come. It was impossible for Isaac to die or God would be a liar. God would not be able to keep his promise that he confirmed with a covenant in Genesis 15. According to Hebrews 11.11-19, Abraham understood that Isaac, the child of promise, could not die. Second, God was establishing one of the clearest types in the Old Testament to demonstrate both the Father giving the promised Son and his vicarious substitutionary death. The offering of Isaac was not an act of murder because it was not done out of malice. It was an act of obedience done out of love for God and love for Isaac. Third, Abraham by his obedience procured upgraded blessings for his descendents.

c. The definition of evil cannot mean one thing for the creation and another thing for God. Can we play fast and loose with definitions? Can we say that the act of murder is good if God does it and evil if man does it? Can we say that God has a greater good that will come out of this murder so that makes it right? If God made man in his image (Gen 1.26; 9.6) and prohibits mankind from taking innocent life, is it good for God to whack the creation He made in his image? Can we change the definition of good to mean one thing for God and another thing for man? If so what does it mean to say God is good? What does it mean to have an absolute standard of right and wrong?

2. The other explanation which in their opinion protects God from the charge of doing evil is secondary agency. Here also, as with the lower creation, God's providential direction as an unseen, behind-the-scenes, "primary cause," should not lead us to deny the reality of our choices and actions. Again and again Scripture affirms that we really do cause events to happen. We are significant and we are responsible. We do have choices . . . . It seems better to affirm that God causes all things that happen, but the he does so in such a way that he somehow upholds our ability [the secondary agent] to make *willing, responsible choices*, choices that have *real and eternal results*, and for which *we are held accountable*. [Italics are the authors] Macbeth example: In the play, who killed king Duncan? Ans: Shakespeare [the primary cause]. He wrote the play. But it was Macbeth [the secondary agent] that killed the king. In this way we can say God fully causes things in one way (as Creator), and we fully cause things in another way (as creatures). Lets examine this argument.

   a. Calvinists state that God determined that Jeffrey Dahmer was going to invite a young boy into his house for lunch. What Dahmer could not finish of the boy, he stuck in the freezer for later. God wanted that boy killed for some ultimate good. To accomplish this act without any guilt to himself, God "prewired" Dahmer in such a way which He knew would cause Dahmer to commit murder if placed in the proper setting of orchestrated events. Since Dahmer did not know the events were orchestrated and since Dahmer did not know that he was conditioned to respond to these events in only one way (i.e. murder), Dahmer freely chose to commit the crime. God is the ultimate cause, but He is not guilty of the murder. Does anyone see a problem with this?
   b. Acts of God - We call an "event" such as the hurricanes Charley, Francis, or Ivan which passed through last September 2004 an act of God. The reason for this is an event is impersonal because it cannot rationally premeditate the damage it causes. The event itself lacks intentionality. The God of Christianity, however is "sovereign" which to Calvinists in particular means that God is responsible for everything that happens. The reason Charley, Francis, or Ivan hit the coast of Florida is because God charted the course of those storms, carefully planning their routes.

Therefore, the death and destruction caused by those storms was what God wanted to happen. Their defense is that God did not do the damage, it was the storm that did the damage (secondary agent). But does not the agent who carefully plans to bring a category 5 hurricane ashore know that it will cause death and destruction. If he does it anyway, then does this not mean that the one who directs the storm intended the dire consequences brought by the storm to happen? Since God intended to destroy and harm, would this not mean that God perpetrated an evil act?

c. What about secondary agents like Jeffrey Dahmer, Ted Bundy, Hitler, Nero and a host of others? Does secondary agency free God from the charge of sin? If there is a causal connection between God and the agent then God would be considered guilty by the courts of this land. A passage that contradicts secondary agency would be Ps 11.4-7.

D. Summary of the Positions on God's Relationship to Evil.

1. Wayne Grudem (a 5 point Calvinist) concluded:

a. God uses all things to fulfill His purposes and even uses evil for His glory and for our good.
b. Nevertheless, God never does evil, and is never to be blamed for evil.
c. God rightfully blames and judges moral creatures for the evil they do.
d. Evil is real, not an illusion, and we should never do evil, for it will always harm us and others.
e. In spite of the foregoing statements, we have to come to the point where we confess the we do not understand how it is that God can ordain the evil deeds which we carry out and yet hold us accountable for them and not be blamed Himself.

1) Notice how the Calvinist has painted himself into a corner. His theological presuppositions has led him to a contradiction which he then passes off as a paradox. A paradox is something that looks contradictory to a finite human mind, but is not in the infinite being of God. Therefore, this paradox falls into the category of the secret things of God.
2) Before the "secret things of God" explanation is invoked, the inquirer should check his presuppositions and see if a contradiction has been artificially contrived because of his theological beliefs. In other words, Does Scripture really paint this paradoxical position or can we understand the Scripture another way without twisting its meaning which resolves this conflict?

E. The Modified view states

1. In the case of Human Evil:

a. God has created "free" moral agents who may act contrary to the will of God.
b. The human agent is responsible for what he does because he actually chose to do the act without coercion; that is, this act was not predetermined before the foundation of the world to happen.
c. God can and does overrule man's bad behavior.
d. God defines "good" and this good is consistent with God's nature. Our perception of good is the same as God's perception of good because we were made in the image of God, have the law of God written on our hearts, and have a God-given conscience. Therefore, good is the same for both God and his creation.
e. God is not responsible for evil, He does allow man to commit evil acts because He has given man freedom of choice.
f. God has only promised to restrain evil not cancel it. He has also determined that man's evil acts will not destroy His children for he will work out the evil for good to them that love Him.

2. In the case of Acts of God

a. God created laws of nature which govern the operation of His universe.
b. The operation of these laws in the original creation environment only brought about good.
c. The judgment of God (flood) upon the wickedness of man brought about changes in the earth's climatic conditions which now allow storms such as Charley, Francis, and Ivan. The flood events destroyed the harmony of the creation.
d. The laws which existed before the flood which made earth a paradise, now are the cause of "acts of God." The laws remained the same yet the new environmental circumstances changed the results of those laws.
e. God does not cause these acts as Calvinists proclaim. Rather "acts of God" occur because of the laws of nature.

F. The problem with evil is that we know God can override it, but chooses not to do so in all cases. Why does God allow evil to continue? ANS:

1. The very good creation which was meant to be a blessing to mankind and provide and environment suitable for a very good person to flourish also seems to be an environment suitable for a person, who has chosen to rebel against God, to become very bad (See Genesis 6).

a. God in his mercy judged mankind to put an end to the very bad behavior thus preventing the spread of evil to the next generation. The judgment included not only immediate punishment, but a shortening of his life span. The evil that can be invented over a 900 year life span is staggering.

b. The change in the environment that would decrease man's life span altered the outcome of the natural laws established by God during the creation week. The laws that once produced a very good environment under the primal conditions now produce less than good results under the new, post-flood conditions.
c. Animal behavior, thorns and thistles, weather patterns, shorter life span, and other fall-related changes prevent wickedness from triumphing as it did before the fall.

2. The "you made you bed, now lay in it" principle.

a. Isaiah 53:6 - All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.
b. Psalms 81:12 - So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.
c. Romans 1:24 - Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:
d. Luke 19:14 - But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.

3. God allows man to rebel against him, but he never gives up his rights as sovereign.

4. Evil has value for depraved humanity.

a. Sin brings about bad consequences.
b. If God removed the consequences of sin; then since there is pleasure in sin, man would have no reason to turn from sin.

V. GOD'S SOVEREIGN CONTROL

A. God choice of the kind of world He was going to create imposed some limitations upon Himself.

1. The question arises can a limitless God be limited. At first glance, the obvious answer is Of course NOT! Upon further thought, however, we know that God is consistent with or bound by His character (i.e. His goodness, rationality, and transcendent greatness)

a. God can not be weak, stupid, or evil
(NOTE: Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac is said to be an evil act because God told Abraham to kill Isaac. In response to that allegation, first, the

inspired Scripture in Hebrews 11.17 says it was an act of faith. Abraham clearly understood that whatever happened on that mountain, Isaac was going to accompany Abraham back down that mountain (11.19). The reason for Abraham's absolute assurance was Isaac was the promised seed from whom the nation of Israel would arise (11.18). Second, God was establishing one of the greatest types in the OT--God the Father was going to sacrifice His Son and raise him from the dead.)

b. Millard Erickson states that God cannot make a triangle with four corners.

c. John Frame stated that "there is, therefore, no *carte blanche* sovereignty, sovereignty without any limits at all.

d. For example, the covenants of God are self-limiting. God never cut off Israel because of the Sinaitic covenant. From Mount Sinai to the death of Jesus, the Jews were God's covenant people. Even when they broke the covenant, God's *hesed* faithfulness to the covenant was evident.

2. The limitations of God are divine self-limitations.

a. God created a world that is run on the laws of nature, though He sustains these laws (Heb 1.1-3).

b. God created instinct within the animals so that they could function without Him ordaining every action of the creature.

c. God created a man who is free to act without his every move being determined. God respects both the freedom that He gave to human beings, and the integrity of His own sovereign choice to make free creatures.

1) This mean that a free-will creature can sin against God (Amos 4.6-11; Haggai 1.5-11; Ps 81.8-16; Matt 23.37).

2) God has created man in His image which means that God has given man volition and the power to act on it.

3) What freedom does not mean is that individual who has chosen to do contrary to God's will can in fact carry out that decision.

4) Da 4:35 And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

d. Any statement of intention on God's part, binds Him to carry out the stated plan.

3. While God's sovereignty may be self-limited, He remains in complete control of everything.

a. God's control is not based on the degree of man's freedom--He is in total control.

b. He maintains control through His foreknowledge. The doctrine of concurrence states that God is at work in history and does whatever is necessary to accomplish His plan (Jn 5.17). Though God ordinarily works by means (i.e. laws of nature, etc.), he is not tied to them. When it pleases him, He can do His own work without them.

c. Remember the above examples:

1) Joseph sold into slavery (Gen 37.26-28; 50.20); Balaam (Deut 23.5); Nazarenes (Lk 4.29).

a) The actions of man do not fit in God's plan, so He literally overrules the free decision.
b) In Joseph's case, God allows the selling of Joseph into Egypt because that is what He desires. God, however, does not allow Joseph to be killed there (that did not fit His plan).

2) Deut 23.5 - Balaam makes a free choice but cannot even do more than think about it. God overrules Balaam's plan immediately. Balaam thinks to pronounce a curse upon Israel, but out of his mouth comes a blessing. (See also Neh 13.2)
3) Gen 20.6 - Abimelech had taken Sarah to be his wife (i.e. part of the harem) and God prevented Abimelech from touching Sarah.
4) Dan 3.19-25 - Nebuchadnezzer proposes to destroy the three Hebrew children, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, but God disposes of the plan.
5) Luke 4.29 - Jesus introduces himself as the Messiah to his hometown Nazarene people and they pick him up and carry him out of town to throw him over the brow of a hill. Needless to say this does not fit with God 's plan. At the brow of the hill Jesus walks through their midst.

d. These verses illustrate the principle that while God has limited Himself in the sense that God is going to allow his creatures to make real decisions, he maintains absolute control.

VI. THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

A. The Arminian view states that God in his foreknowledge (prescience) foresaw those who would respond to his offer of salvation and actively elected them to salvation. A popular way of describing this foreknowledge is God looked through a tunnel of time and saw those who would believe. In election, God has determined to save those who aided by prevenient grace accept his Son and the proffered salvation.

B. The Calvinistic view of election is a sovereign act of God whereby He chose out from sinful human race certain to be the recipients of His special saving grace. It is solely His sovereign pleasure and on account of no foreseen merit in those chosen.

1. Election for a Calvinist the ground for an individual's salvation.

2. This election is an act of God without respect to the individual being elected.
3. God saw nothing in the individual which commended that person to God because all men hate God and love their sin. This is so because man's will is viewed as dead to God and in bondage to his sin nature.
4. God chose some anyway. The basis of God's choice of these people lies outside of them. Augustine in *City of God* suggested the reason God chose some was to replace the fallen angels. Maybe he needed to fill a certain number of mansions in heaven. Whatever the reason, it had nothing to do with the person who was saved.
5. Because that person is elect before the foundation of the earth, that person will be regenerated sometime during his lifetime.
6. Since a person is totally depraved = total inability = an insensitivity to God because he is dead, that person must be made alive (regenerated) in order for him to even hear God.
7. Regeneration now makes it possible for a man to hear God. God gives man faith which makes it possible for man to accept what he hears that God has done for him. Man has nothing to do with his salvation. It is all of God.

C. The modified view of the Calvinist position states that God from eternity past foreknew (to know before hand 1 Peter 1.2) in an intimate, loving way those who He knew would enter into a relationship with Him. God did not know because he looked down time and saw what man would do, but God actively knows (Ps 139.15-16) in and of Himself. Those individuals with whom God foreknew He would have a relationship (i.e. those "in Christ" or under Christ's headship) were predestinated (based upon His non-determinative foreknowledge) to be conformed to the image of His Son. Those "in Christ" are the elect (Eph 1.4-5). Notice where Paul said the process of election occurs--in Christ. Election is not a choosing for salvation, but rather a choosing of individuals for Himself based upon criteria clearly set by God.

1. Election is a choice of individuals whom God knows will believe on the Lord.
2. The reason behind election is a man has come to God the way God ordained man to come to Him.
3. That way is by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ; that is, the work that Christ has provided is sufficient to save an individual and bring him to God. Salvation comes through faith.
4. Calvinism states that God gives man faith. Is faith an entity that can be dispensed like candy? Something that can be added or taken away from a man? According to the NT, to have faith = to believe. Faith or belief is a rational thinking process. Salvation requires a change in one's thinking (this is what repentance is). According to Calvinism regeneration makes the person alive to God so that God can save him. If salvation requires a rational thought process, then regeneration in the Calvinist scheme of things requires a reprogramming of the person's mind without that person's consent.
5. The Scripture states that whosoever wills may come (Matt 11.28-30; Jn 3.16;

12.46; Acts 2.21; Rom 10.11,13; Rev 22.17). Is reprogramming willing acceptance? The Calvinistic view of election maintains that the elect person will be saved. It does not matter what the person thinks because God will reprogram that person's thinking. The person is irrelevant to his salvation.

6. Scripture indicates that salvation involves the person's volition. God convicts a person of their sin and that person who now understands the truth because of the Holy Spirit's work in him repents (a choice made because he now knows the truth) and believes or places his faith in God (a genuine act of the person's will--he was free to reject God).

D. A point to consider is that what God knows before the foundation of the world still has to be worked out in time. The following model based upon Romans 5.12-21 is presented to explain the relationship between free will and election.

1. In this passage both Adam and Jesus are the federal heads of their respective groups. (Federal headship means whatever the head does that action is imputed to or charged to the account of each individual of that group.)
2. Rom 5.12 - Adam is our federal head; that is, Adam's action is imputed to every individual whom Adam represents--all men. Adam's action is to be thought of as if I did it myself. He acted on my behalf. Because all are under Adam's headship, sin has been imputed to each individual, therefore, all have sinned. (vs 12)
3. Following Paul's argument, he states in verse 16 that sin came upon all and the free gift came to all. The anti-parallelism which Paul creates at this point sets the offense in antithesis to the free gift. As the offense was charged to the many, so also the free gift goes out to the many. The offense brings condemnation, but the free gift brings justification. This passage is not to be understood as teaching that Adam sin was imputed to every man so also is the free gift imputed to every man. That would result in universalism. Notice it is the free gift that has been made available to all.
4. Verse 17 substantiates the fact that God giving the free gift to all is not giving salvation to all. Paul says that on the one hand by one man's (Adam's) offence death reigned by that one; but, on the other hand, those who receive the free gift shall reign in life by one Jesus Christ. Those who receive the free gift are now represented by Jesus Christ. Belief causes a change in headship from Adam to Christ.
5. Verse 18 is the conclusion of the matter. Those in (that is all) Adam are condemned; but Christ has provided the free gift to all which can result in justification for all men. By the action of Adam many were made sinners, but by the action of Jesus Christ many shall be made righteous (vs 19).
6. When does the Scripture say election occurred according to Eph 1.4? God has chosen every individual in Christ as the elect. Election does not do away with belief for it is belief that causes the change in headship. Election occurs after belief in the time line of history even though God knew this before the foundation of the earth when we did not even exist. Election after belief is the reason why no unsaved person in the NT is called the elect.

7. The modified view gives priority to the work of Jesus Christ. Instead of saying as the Calvinists do that God chose individuals for some reason which we do not know, the Modified position says God chose individuals who were "in Christ." The work of Christ is the grounds or reason why God chose individuals. Election does have a basis. It is Christ.

E. When the event actually occurs in history, the person is making free-will decisions not a pre-programmed decision. Though God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1.4), notice: 1) any individual in Christ did not even exist except in the mind of God, who intimately knew each of them then; 2) when those individual "in Christ" were born into history physically, they were in Adam not in Christ; 3) when whosoever will was invited to come to Christ, they responded just like God knew (non-determinatively) anyway.

F. God intimately knows every detail of our life and know how we will react in every circumstance but what He knows is not determinative for those whom he has decreed to have a free will. God will not take from man what He has decreed should be. The parent-child relationship provides a crude analogy of God's foreknowledge. A parent can tell a child not to do a particular act and yet know for certain that the child will do it (in some cases even where, when, and how).

VII. SALVATION IN TIME

A. God must draw man in order for him to be saved (Jn 6.44, 65). Jesus said if I be lifted up I will draw all men unto myself (Jn 1.9; 12.32; Titus 2.11)

B. Every sinner has the opportunity to be saved (Acts 14.17; 2 Peter 3.9; 1 John 2.2; Rom 10.13; Titus 2.11; but Matt 23.37; John 5.40).

1. Men are not saved because human action has closed the door of opportunity for some not because God left them to their own just destruction.

   a. Mt 23:13,15 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. . . .Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Israel is in blindness today not because God has withholds the gospel from them, but rather, because of their own hardheartedness. (Same is true for Iran, Iraq, etc.)
   b. See Luke 11:46
   c. Jonah
   d. Sins of the fathers

2. Men are not saved because they reject opportunity they have.

   a. Lu 11:32 The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this

generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

b. Mt 11:23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

c. Lu 10:13 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.

d. Reason why Jesus spoke in parables

1) Disciples came to Jesus and asked him for an explanation
2) Parables confirmed to his detractors that Jesus was mad or demon possessed. They would not come to Jesus for an explanation.

3. What about Acts 13.48? (Ordained = tasso)

a. These are those in Christ. It is a perfectly acceptable thing to say.
b. Romans 8

C. Spirit enlightens (John 16.8-11; Heb 6.4)
D. "Whosoever will" simply acquiesces before God and acknowledges Jesus as Lord and Savior. (Rom 4.5). Belief precedes regeneration (Jn 1.12-13; 3.18,36; Acts 2.38; 16.14,31; 17.4-5; Rom 3.22; 4.5; Gal 2.16; 3.6-9; Heb 3.7-19).
E. These persons were ordained to salvation (Acts 13.48; 2 Thes 2.13).
F. God gives these elect to His Son (John 5.19-23, 26-27; 6.37; 17.2, 6, 9).
G. Romans 8. 29-30.

For Further Study

Basinger, David, and Randall Basinger, eds. *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views,* by John Feinberg, Norman Geisler, Bruce Reichenbach, and Clark Pinnock. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986. The authors run the spectrum from affirming that God ordains all things (Feinberg) to affirming that God does not even know all things (Pinnock).

Craig, William Lane. *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987. Evangelical philosopher attempts to popularize sophisticated arguments for affirming God's omniscience while vigorously denying foreordination (which he labels "theological fatalism").

_____. *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience.* Leiden & New York: E. J. Brill, 1990. More scholarly presentation of Craig's argument.

Farley, Benjamin Wirt. *The Providence of God.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987. Historical theological study of the doctrine of providence.

Geissler, Norman

Helm, Paul. *The Providence of God,* Contours of Christian Theology. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994. Philosophical and theological study of the doctrine.

Packer, J. I. *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1961. Classic little book arguing that all Christians at their best know that God is sovereign in salvation.

Pinnock, Clark H., ed. *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*. Minneapolis: Bethany, 1989. Some good articles by William Lane Craig and Jack W. Cottrell.

Pinnock, Clark H., et. al. *The Openness of God. A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994. Recent collection of essays denying the biblically correct position of God's foreknowledge of human beings' future choices.

Pink, Arthur W. *The Sovereignty of God.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959. Older but traditional Calvinistic biblical defense of a strong view of divine sovereignty.

Rice, Richard. *The Openness of God. The Relationship of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will.* Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985. Denies God's foreknowledge of human beings' future choices.

Schreiner, Thomas R., and Bruce A. Ware. *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge and Grace*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.

Journals

Chisholm, Robert B. Jr. “Does God ‘Change His Mind’?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (October-December 1995): 387-99.