

The Sovereignty of God

God's Dominion

In Creation

Consider how God's authority is expressed in His creative works. Imagine the Wisdom of God in all the intricate details of the universe He has made! It is an amazing thing to consider how all the creative works of God exist in such perfect balance to speak a very loud word to us of God's Wisdom, Power and Beauty!

Psalm 19:1-6 - The heavens are **telling** of the glory of God; And their expanse is **declaring** the work of His hands. 2 Day to day **pours forth speech**. And night to night **reveals knowledge**. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, And **their utterances to the end of the world**. In them He has placed a tent for the sun, 5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course. 6 Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing hidden from its heat. NASB

This Sovereignty of God in Creation can be seen in many ways. When God made the world out of nothing, **He created out of His own pleasure and will** and made the heavens and the earth in all of their varied array in exactly the way he was pleased to do it. Consider the following quote from AW Pink.....

"In the great expanse of eternity which stretches behind Genesis 1:1, the universe was unborn and creation existed only in the mind of the great Creator. In His Sovereign majesty God dwelt all alone. We refer to that far distant period before the heavens and the earth were created. There were then no angels to hymn God's praises, no creatures to occupy His notice, no rebels to be brought into subjection. The great God was all alone amid the awful Silence of His own vast universe. But even at that time, if time it could be called, God was Sovereign. He might create or not create according to His own good pleasure. He might create this way or that way; He might create one world or one million worlds, and who was there to resist His will? He might call into existence a million different creatures and place them on absolute equality, endowing them with the same faculties and placing them in the same environment; or, He might create a million creatures each differing from the others, and possessing nothing in common save their creaturehood, and who was there to challenge His right?..... Behold then the exercise of Divine Sovereignty long before man ever saw the light. With whom took God counsel in the creation and disposition of His creatures? See the birds as they fly through the air, the beasts as they roam the earth, the fishes as they swim in the sea, and then ask, Who was it that made them to differ? Was it not their Creator who Sovereignly assigned their various locations and adaptations to them!"

Whatever God did in creation, he did all alone and consulted no one in its vast design....

Isaiah 44:24 - 24 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, "**I, the LORD, am the maker of all things, Stretching out the heavens by Myself, And spreading out the earth all alone,**" NASB

Consider that God has made everything so disproportionate, yet He holds it all in perfect balance! His authority is expressed in every aspect of His creation. Consider "**outer space**" for example...

1 Corinthians 15:40-41 - 40 There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. 41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; **for star differs from star in glory.** NASB

Or the earth.....

Proverbs 8:28-29 - 8 When He made firm the skies above, When the springs of the deep became fixed, 29 When **He set for the sea its boundary, So that the water should not transgress His command,** When He marked out the foundations of the earth; NASB

He is the one who endows His creatures with various powers as He see fit. Consider the germ or the ant, the elephant or the whale, or even mankind and angels. Behold with what Wisdom and Beauty God has fitted His creatures to have various powers and freedoms!

Genesis 1:20-23 - 20 Then God said, "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens." 21 And **God created the great sea monsters, and**

every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good. 22 And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." 23 And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day. NASB

Consider when God placed man upon the earth, the He Sovereignly did it as He saw fit, even determining the exact places where the nations would dwell and the specific time that they would occupy in the annals of History.....

Acts 17:24-27 - 24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. **26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.** NASB

Think with what **goodness** God has made His creation. The birds and bees, and the flowers and the trees, with what beauty He has graced the earth! And what about our bodies? How perfectly suited for our creative minds has He given us hands by which we can do our good pleasure. Or how about the flavor of your favorite meal, and even vittles to fill a hungry belly. Or the tingling rush of a hot fire on a cold winter's night, or the sweet butterfly kisses of precious young daughter! **Oh the magnificence of the goodness of God!** Volumes could not contain the expressions of the riches of His kindness to us! If we could spend a lifetime considering the loveliness of God's creation, **HOW MUCH MORE LOVELY IS THE ONE** from whom it all flows! How vast is the sum of His goodness? With what shall we respond to the Sovereign Majesty and Goodness of God? With simple gratitude and a heart of thanksgiving shall we acknowledge His wonderful goodness to us!

1 Timothy 4:4-5 - 4 **For everything created by God is good**, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; 5 for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. NASB

Now God has done all of these things with great purpose and intricate detail. The **Scripture plainly declares** that when God has finished with first creation, he will destroy it and replace it with another.....behold then the Supreme Authority of God and His creation.....Dear reader I ask you, does not the potter have a right over the clay?

Hebrews 1:10-12 - 10 And, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the works of Thy hands; 11 They will perish, but Thou remainest; And **they all will become old as a garment, 12 And as a mantle Thou wilt roll them up; As a garment they will also be changed.** But Thou art the same, And Thy years will not come to an end. " NASB

Isaiah 51:6 - "Lift up your eyes to the sky, Then look to the earth beneath; **For the sky will vanish like smoke, And the earth will wear out like a garment,** And its inhabitants will die in like manner, But My salvation shall be forever, And My righteousness shall not wane. NASB

Behold then that God creates and destroys and does as He sees fit in all the heavens and the earth. It is because of God's own will and pleasure that He created and that things exist.

Revelation 4:11 - "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; **for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.**" NASB

He is the Creator, the Owner, the Governor and none shall say to Him "What hast Thou done?"

Daniel 4:34-35 - For **His dominion is an everlasting dominion,** And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. 35 "And 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 hast Thou done?' NASB

Another quote from AW Pink.....

"Learn then this basic truth, that the Creator is absolute Sovereign, executing His own will, performing His own pleasure, and considering nought but His own glory. "The LORD hath made all things FOR HIMSELF" (Prov. 16:4). And had He not a perfect right to? Since God is God, who dare challenge His prerogative? To murmur against Him is rank rebellion. To question His ways is to impugn His wisdom. To criticize Him is sin of the deepest dye. Have we forgotten who He is? Behold, "All nations before Him as are nothing; and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God?"(Isa. 40:17, 18)."

The Sovereignty of God

God's Dominion - In Providence

The Providence Of God Defined

Indeed the doctrine of God's Providence is one of the great mysteries of the Bible. However, it is found on almost every page of Scripture. In fact, Providence is assumed and implied constantly by biblical writers, as we shall see. So what does Providence mean, and how is it described in the Bible? The best definition that I have seen of God's Providence comes from Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology, it reads.....

"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."

Now consider just how profound this statement really is....in so doing we will break it down and look at the biblical evidence of each of its parts. We will start with the first section, it is called **"Preservation"**

"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;

Here Providence is described as God's "continual involvement." God has not left the world to spin of its own power, but He is constantly maintaining its activity by His own hand...

Hebrews 1:2-3 - 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, **through whom also He made the world.** 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.** NASB

Here the Scripture says of God that He "upholds all things." Could there be a more explicit statement of His "continual involvement?" Well, consider Colossians 1:17....

Colossians 1:16-17 - 16 For by Him all things were created, **both in the heavens and on earth,** visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- **all things have been created by Him and for Him.** 17 And He is before all things, and **in Him all things hold together.** NAS

Here the context of both the Hebrews and Colossians passages make it crystal clear that the scope of this **"Preservation"** is **"all of the created order of matter and beings."** It would be wrong to think that God is somehow merely holding the planet in orbit, but not men and angels. This is continually affirmed in Scripture.....

Acts 17:28 - 28 **for in Him we live and move and exist.** NASB

Job 34:14-15 - 14 "If He should determine to do so, **If He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath,** 15 **All flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust.** NASB

Therefore, when we think about God's activity of Providence in His world, we should think of it as **"continual involvement."** God is outside and separate and distinct from His creation, yet He is governing it by a mighty Providence. God is not somehow abstractly intervening in the events of History when He thinks its time to do something, but rather He is literally "the glue which holds it all together" and is constantly at work in the universe to hold everything together. God is not the creation(Pantheism), nor has God abandoned the creation to run by itself(Deism). Rather, God *"keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them."*

The second section the is what we call **"Concurrence."** It is stated as....

(2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do;

Here we are saying that God **"cooperates."** God is not everything, but rather cooperates with everything. He is separate and distinct from everything and further is cooperating with the things He has made is such a way as to **"direct them."** This is seen is so many places in the Bible that it

can hardly be mistaken. God is literally in control of Nature and History in such a way that He is involved in *“every action, directing”* them. Let us look at the testimony of Scripture.

God’s control of Nature

When we speak of God’s control of nature we are saying that He is in control of planetary movements, weather patterns, animals and people, angels and demons, and every creature He has made. At the command of God burst forth the great springs of the deep in the days of Noah. With His voice opened He the heavens to pour down rain for 40 days and nights. Tornado and tempest, lightning and thunder, winds and waves- each one the servant of God sent to do His bidding and performing all His good pleasure. There is not a maverick storm in all the ages that He did not command its every whim!

Job 37:1-13 - "At this also my heart trembles, And leaps from its place. 2 "Listen closely to the thunder of His voice, And the rumbling that goes out from His mouth. 3 "Under the whole heaven **He lets it loose, And His lightning to the ends of the earth.** 4 "After it, a voice roars; He thunders with His majestic voice; And He does not restrain the lightnings when His voice is heard. 5 "God thunders with His voice wondrously, Doing great things which we cannot comprehend. 6 "**For to the snow He says, 'Fall on the earth,' And to the downpour and the rain, 'Be strong.'** 7 "**He seals the hand of every man, That all men may know His work.** 8 "Then the beast goes into its lair, And remains in its den. 9 "Out of the south comes the storm, And out of the north the cold. 10 "**From the breath of God ice is made,** And the expanse of the waters is frozen. 11 "Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud; He disperses the cloud of His lightning. 12 "And it changes direction, turning around by His guidance, That it may do whatever He commands it On the face of the inhabited earth. 13 "**Whether for correction, or for His world, Or for lovingkindness, He causes it to happen.** NASB

Psalm 135:6-7 - Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. 7 **He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; Who makes lightnings for the rain; Who brings forth the wind from His treasuries.** NASB

Mark 4:38-41 - 38 And He Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" 39 And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And **the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.** 40 And He said to them, "Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?" 41 And they became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" NASB

Job 38:12-13 - 12 "Have you ever in your life **commanded the morning, And caused the dawn to know its place;** 13 That it might take hold of the ends of the earth, And the wicked be shaken out of it? NASB

Psalm 103:20 - 20 Bless the LORD, you His angels, Mighty in strength, **who perform His word, Obeying the voice of His word!** NASB

God’s control of events in History

Not only does God control Nature, but because of this is *“in every action directing”* the events of History. The **Scripture plainly declares** that God is the primary cause behind everything that happens.

Lamentations 3:37-38 - 37 Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, **Unless the Lord has commanded it?** 38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth? NASB

Isaiah 45:7 - 7 The One forming light and creating darkness, **Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.** NASB

Consider the words of Jonathan Edwards on this matter...

“God decreed from all eternity all the evil that He ever does permit, because God’s permitting is God’s forbearing to act or to prevent. It can be made evident by reason that nothing can come to pass but what is the will and pleasure of God should come to pass.”

Now the fact that events are seen to be under the control of God is plainly evident in Scripture. In fact **this is the main theme of the whole Bible!** God is Providentially working His will in all things to accomplish His own purposes for the display of His own Glory, Name and Power!

Ephesians 1:9-11 - 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a **view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.** In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,** NASB

Examples from the Old Testament

Many examples could be cited from the Old Testament, here are a few.....

- **The Creation Account** – Genesis chapters 1-2
- **The Flood** – Genesis chapters 6-8
- **The Confounding of the Languages** – Genesis chapter 11
- **The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah** – Genesis chapter 19
- **The Plagues of Egypt** – Exodus chapters 7-12
- **The Exodus, Red Sea, Manna, Water from the Rock** – Exodus chapters 14-17
- **Mt Sinai and the Giving of the Law** – Exodus chapters 19-20
- **Defeat of Sihon and Og** – Numbers chapter 21
- **Conquest of Canaan** – Joshua
- **Numerous interventions in Judges** – Judges
- **Defeat of Sennacherib and 185,000 Assyrians** – 2 Kings chapter 19

Now concerning the doctrine of “**Concurrence**”, remember that God....

(2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do;

See now from the above passages that the Old Testament is literally riddled with accounts of God’s constant “*directing of things to act as they do.*” The **Scripture plainly declares** that God controls the events of History to achieve His own purpose and will. Further, consider that....

God’s providence over the nations is explicitly taught in the Scripture.

Isaiah 40:22-25 - 22 It is He who sits above the vault of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. **23 He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless. 24 Scarcely have they been planted, Scarcely have they been sown, Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, But He merely blows on them, and they wither, And the storm carries them away like stubble.** 25 "To whom then will you liken Me That I should be his equal?" says the Holy One. NASB

Job 12:16-22 - 16 "With Him are strength and sound wisdom, The misled and the misleader belong to Him. 17 "He makes counselors walk barefoot, And makes fools of judges. **18 "He loosens the bond of kings, And binds their loins with a girdle. 19 "He makes priests walk barefoot, And overthrows the secure ones.** 20 "He deprives the trusted ones of speech, And takes away the discernment of the elders. 21 "He pours contempt on nobles, And loosens the belt of the strong. 22 "He reveals mysteries from the darkness, And brings the deep darkness into light. NASB

Here is seen **God’s Providence over the economic and religious systems of the world....kings and priests....** God is seen to be Sovereign over the wise and the foolish, the strong and the weak....

Job 12:23-25 - 23 "**He makes the nations great, then destroys them; He enlarges the nations, then leads them away.** 24 "He deprives of intelligence the chiefs of the earth's people, And makes them wander in a pathless waste. 25 "They grope in darkness with no light, And He makes them stagger like a drunken man. NASB

Even the very spiritual darkness of the nations is said here to be God’s doing, as is also the case in Romans 11:32. Here we see also that when a nation becomes great and powerful, it is God’s doing. And when a nation is destroyed, it is God’s doing. This is an irrefutable reality.... **God is Sovereign over the nations of the earth!** They belong to Him and exist for His purposes and for the good pleasure of His will. This fact is clear from man places in the bible like **Psalm 22:28, 82:8 or 47:78** which says....

Psalms 47:7-8 - 7 For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful psalm. 8 **God reigns over the nations.** God sits on His holy throne. NASB

Note then that the **Old Testament plainly declares** that God providentially directs the outcome of the rise and fall of nations and explicitly teaches that God is constantly directing the affairs of the History of mankind.

Examples from the New Testament

Consider that the entire life and ministry of Jesus the Christ is a manifestation of God's Providence in the affairs of History. Examine just a few of the accounts in the gospels....

- **The Virgin Birth of Jesus the Christ** – Luke chapters 1-3
- **The Calming of the Raging Sea** – Matthew 8:26
- **The Lame Walk** – John chapter 5
- **The Blind See** – John chapter 9
- **The Dead Live Again** – John chapter 11
- **The Resurrection** – Matthew chapter 28

Many other examples of “Concurrence” could be cited from the New Testament, here are a few.....

- **The Coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost** – Acts chapter 2
- **Numerous Signs and Wonders done by the hand of the Apostles** – Acts
- **Peter's Deliverance from Prison** – Acts chapter 12
- **The Conversion and Calling of Saul of Tarsus** – Acts chapter 9
- **The Death of Herod** – Acts chapter 12
- **The Trumpet and Bowl Judgments** – Revelation chapters 7-11, 16
- **The Beast, False Prophet thrown into the Lake of Fire** – Revelation chapter 19

Further, think of how God mysteriously works in the free choices of men to accomplish His purposes. This “Concurrence” is most clearly seen in the passages in Acts.....

Acts 2:22-24 - 22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know — 23 **this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.** 24 "And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. NASB
Acts 4:27-28 - 27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 **to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.** NASB

Note then that the **New Testament plainly declares** and explicitly teaches that God is constantly directing the affairs of the History of mankind.

What about Evil? Does God cause Evil? Does God ordain evil?

Grudem wisely states..... *“If God does indeed cause, through his providential activity, everything that comes about in the world, then the question arises... “What is the relationship between God and evil in the world?” Does God actually cause the evil actions that people do? If he does, then is God not responsible for sin? 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”* ...and also the following.....

- Scripture **nowhere shows God as directly doing anything evil** but rather as bringing about evil deeds through the willing actions of moral creatures.
- Scripture **never blames God for evil** or shows God as taking pleasure in evil
- Scripture **never excuses human beings for the wrong they do.**

However we understand God's relationship to evil, we must **NEVER**.....

- come to the point where we **think that we are not responsible for the evil** that we do
- or that **God takes pleasure in evil** or is to be blamed for it.

“There are literally dozens of Scripture passages that say that God (indirectly) brought about some kind of evil. I have quoted such an extensive list (in the next few paragraphs) because Christians often are unaware of the extent of this forthright teaching in Scripture. Yet it must be

remembered that in all of these examples, the evil is actually done not by God but by people or demons who choose to do it.”

- **Genesis ch 37-45** ... A very clear example is found in the story of Joseph. Scripture clearly says that Joseph’s brothers were wrongly jealous of him (Gen. 37:11), hated him (Gen. 37:4, 5, 8), wanted to kill him (Gen. 37:20), and did wrong when they cast him into a pit (Gen. 37:24) and then sold him into slavery in Egypt (Gen. 37:28). Yet later Joseph could say to his brothers, “*God sent me before you to preserve life*” (Gen. 45:5), and “*You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today*” (Gen. 50:20). Here we have a 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 were accomplished. Both are clearly affirmed.
- **Exodus ch 4-14**... The story of the exodus from Egypt repeatedly affirms that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh: God says, “I will harden his heart” (Ex. 4:21), “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 7:3), “the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh” (Ex. 9:12), “the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 10:20, repeated in 10:27 and again in 11:10), “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 14:4), and “the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Ex. 14:8).
What was God’s purpose in this? Paul reflects on Exodus 9:16 and says, “For the scripture says to Pharaoh, “I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so **that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth**” (Rom. 9:17). Then Paul infers a general truth from this specific example: “So then he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills” (Rom. 9:18). In fact, God also hardened the hearts of the Egyptian people so that they pursued Israel into the Red Sea: “I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen” (Ex. 14:17). This theme is repeated in Psalm 105:25: “He turned their hearts to hate his people.”
- **Joshua 11:20**... “For it was the LORD’s doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be utterly destroyed” (Josh. 11:20; see also Judg. 3:12; 9:23).
- **Judges 14:4**... And Samson’s demand to marry an unbelieving Philistine woman “was from the LORD; for he was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel”
- **1 Samuel 2:25**... We also read that the sons of Eli, when rebuked for their evil deeds, “would not listen to the voice of their father; for it was the will of the LORD to slay them”
- **1 Samuel 16:14**... Later, “an evil spirit from the LORD” tormented King Saul
- **2 Samuel 24:1, 1 Chronicles 21:1**... Still later in David’s life, the Lord “incited” David to take a census of the people (2 Sam. 24:1), but afterward David recognized this as sin, saying, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done” (2 Sam. 24:10), and God sent punishment on the land because of this sin (2 Sam. 24:12–17). However, it is also clear that “the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel” (2 Sam. 24:1), so God’s inciting of David to sin was a means by which he brought about punishment on the people of Israel. Moreover, **the means by which God incited David is made clear in 1 Chronicles 21:1: “Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel.**” In this one incident the Bible gives us a remarkable insight into the three influences that contributed in different ways to one action: God, in order to bring about his purposes, worked through Satan to incite David to sin, but Scripture regards David as being responsible for that sin.

In the story of **Job**, though **the LORD gave Satan permission** to bring harm to Job's possessions and children, and though this harm came through the evil actions of the Sabeans and the Chaldeans, as well as a windstorm (Job 1:12, 15, 17, 19), yet Job looks beyond those secondary causes and, with the eyes of faith, sees it all as from the hand of the Lord: "the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; *blessed be the name of the LORD*" (Job 1:21). The Old Testament author follows Job's statement immediately with the sentence, "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong" (Job 1:22). Job has just been told that evil marauding bands had destroyed his flocks and herds, yet with great faith and patience in adversity, he says, "*The LORD has taken away.*" Though he says that the LORD had done this, yet he does not blame God for the evil or say that God had done wrong: he says, "Blessed be the name of the LORD." To *blame* God for evil that he had brought about through secondary agents would have been to sin. Job does not do this, Scripture never does this, and neither should we.

"Elsewhere in the Old Testament we read that **the Lord "put a lying spirit in the mouth" of Ahab's prophets** (1 Kings 22:23) and sent the wicked Assyrians as "the rod of my anger" to punish Israel (Isa. 10:5)."

"In many of the passages mentioned above, God brings evil and destruction on people in judgment upon their sins: They have been disobedient or have strayed into idolatry, and then the LORD uses the following to bring judgment on them..."

- **evil human beings**
- **demonic forces**
- **"natural" disasters**

"Therefore, when God brings evil on human beings, whether to discipline his children, or to lead unbelievers to repentance, or to bring a judgment of condemnation and destruction upon hardened sinners, none of us can charge God with doing wrong. Ultimately all will work in God's good purposes to bring glory to him and good to his people. Yet we must realize that in punishing evil in those who are not redeemed (such as Pharaoh, the Canaanites, and the Babylonians), God is also glorified through the demonstration of his justice, holiness, and power" (see Ex. 9:16; Rom. 9:14–24). End Grudem's commentary here.....

Distinctions in God's Will - Is everything that happens God's will?

As we have seen, God's will is seen as the final authority and the ultimate reason for everything that happens. God's "**permitting**" or "**preventing**" in Providence is the determining factor. But is everything that happens God's will? This can be a very puzzling question unless you make a distinction which is clearly seen in Scripture. The distinction is between God's Sovereign will and God's Moral will. Many times in Scripture we see that God's desire for our moral conduct is violated by the free choices of mankind, yet God does not prevent but rather permits this to occur. So then it is not His "**moral will**" that evil should take place, but in His "**Sovereign will**" He has permitted it to happen. We find out God's "**moral will**" by simply reading His "**precepts**" and "**commanded will**" about what we should do or how we should behave. We find out God's "**Sovereign will**" when events actually happen and the "**secret**" counsel of God is "**revealed**", the things He has planned and "**decreed**" from all eternity. So when we ask questions like, "Is it God's will for me to do this or that," we simply look to God's revelation in Scripture about what He desires for us to do. But when events actually occur, we see what the secret counsel of God's Sovereign will, what he has ordained and approved (what He has permitted or prevented to occur) as it is revealed in time and space. Therefore it is important when discussing these matters to

make a clear distinction in the **“will of God”** for the sake of properly understanding one another when we make statements about God’s will. See the table below on the **“Two Wills of God.”**

<h2 style="margin: 0;">The Two Wills of God</h2> <p style="margin: 0;">Deuteronomy 29:29 - "The <u>secret</u> things belong to the LORD our God, but the things <u>revealed</u> belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law. NASB</p>	
SOVEREIGN WILL	MORAL WILL
<p>Also called..... SECRET WILL WILL OF DECREE</p>	<p>Also called..... REVEALED WILL COMMANDED WILL WILL OF PRECEPT</p>
<p><i>God's Sovereign will includes God's hidden decrees by which He governs everything that happens. We find out God's Sovereign will when events actually happen.</i></p>	<p><i>God's moral will expresses God's general desire concerning things and usually contains God's commands about our moral conduct.</i></p>
<p>Ephesians 1:11 James 4:15 Genesis 50:20 Matthew 11:25-26 1 Corinthians 4:19 Acts 2:23, 4:28,21:14 Romans 1:10, 9:18, 15:32 1 Peter 3:17, 4:19</p>	<p>Exodus 20:1-17 Ephesians 5:17 Romans 2:18 1 John 5:14 Matthew 6:10, 7:21, 12:50, 18:14 1 Timothy 2:4 2 Peter 3:9 Ezekiel 33:11</p>

Examples of distinctions in God’s will are clearly seen in Scripture or in the world around us. Many times it is NOT God’s will(His moral will, His general desire) for evil to take place, but his **permitting and NOT preventing** obviously makes it His Sovereign will(His will of Decree or Secret will), that which He determined should happen from all Eternity. Consider the following.....

- **Genesis 50:20 – Joseph and his brothers**
 Genesis 50:20 - 20 "And 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. NASB
- **Acts 2:23 – The murder of Jesus**
 Acts 2:23 - 23 this Man, delivered up **by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God,** you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. NASB
- **Genocide in War**
- **911- The Twin Towers**

In light of this knowledge, consider afresh the statement we looked at by Jonathan Edwards...
“God decreed from all eternity all the evil that He ever does permit, because God’s permitting is God’s forbearing to act or to prevent. It can be made evident by reason that nothing can come to pass but what is the will and pleasure of God should come to pass.”

Know then that the **Scripture plainly declares** a distinction in the will of God between His Sovereign(Secret or Decreed) and Moral(Commaned or Revealed) will.

Finally, we have come to the third part of our definition of Providence which is referred to as **“Governement”** - (3) *directs them to fulfill his purposes.*” Grudem further defines this third aspect in the following way....

“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.”

The **Scripture plainly declares** that everything that happens is happening ultimately under the Sovereign Authority of God as He **directs them** so that **in the end His purposes are fulfilled.**

Psalm 103:19 - 19 The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; And **His sovereignty rules over all.** NASB

Paul affirms that God works **“all things after the counsel of His will”** and to His **“ends.”**

Ephesians 1:11-12 - 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to **His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end** that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. NASB

Romans 8:28 - 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. NASB

Romans 11:36 - 36 For **from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.** To Him be the glory forever. Amen. NASB

The **Scripture plainly declares** this same truth in the Old Testament.

Ecclesiastes 7:13-14 - 3 Consider the work of God, For **who is able to straighten what He has bent?** 14 In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider- **God has made the one as well as the other** So that man may not discover anything that will be after him. NASB

Daniel 4:34-35 - For **His dominion is an everlasting dominion,** And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. 35 "And 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 hast Thou done?' NASB

Psalms 135:5-6 - 5 For I know that **the LORD is great, And that our Lord is above all gods. 6 Whatever the LORD pleases, He does.** In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. NASB

And lastly, that **“all things”** have been placed by God the Father **“in subjection”** the Sovereign Authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son. The **Scripture plainly declares** that everything in the universe, seen and unseen, is under Christ’s personal dominion.

1 Corinthians 15:27 - 27 For **He has put all things in subjection under His feet.** But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. NASB

Ephesians 1:20-22 - 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far **above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named,** not only in this age, but also in the one to come. 22 And **He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things** to the church, NASB

Philippians 2:9-11 - 9 Therefore also **God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,** 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, 11 and that **every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,** to the glory of God the Father. NASB

Summary

In summary we have seen that the **Bible clearly teaches** that God is Providentially implementing His Sovereign Rule over His entire creation and that He is directing Nature and History to fulfill His own purposes. His Providence is the greatest display of His Sovereignty(Authority) that exists. Dear reader, here now the word of the Lord!

Deuteronomy 4:39 - 39 Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, **that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.** NASB

One helpful thing to remember is the element of **“mystery”** in God’s Providence. Grudem wisely states.. **“What If We Cannot Understand This Doctrine Fully? Every believer who meditates on God’s providence will sooner or later come to a point where he or she will have to say, “I cannot understand this doctrine fully.” In some ways that must be said about every doctrine, since our understanding is finite, and God is infinite (see chapter 1, pp. 34–35; cf. p. 150). But particularly is this so with the doctrine of providence: we should believe it because Scripture teaches it even when we do not understand fully how it fits in with other teachings of Scripture.”**

Application

How do we apply this doctrine to our life and/or how does it affect us, our thinking and living?

We must recognize Him as Providential in our lives by.....

- Believing He is providential
- Appreciating His wise providential purposes and rule
- Being Thankful for God's good providence
- Never complaining against His providence disrespectfully
- Humbly submitting to His will
- Trusting in God's good promises to His people

Believing God is Providential

Dear reader, consider how you already believe in God's Providence. Is it not your assumption each time you pray for God's intervention in your life? Indeed it is, for when you bow the knee or head or heart to Almighty God, you first recognize His Sovereign Authority, then you consider how God has the power and right to change things, and lastly you make humble request for Him to do exactly that. Therefore we are to not only believe that God is Almighty and in control of all things, but our belief should find it rest in trusting God.

Isaiah 26:3-4 - "The **steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in Thee.**

4 "Trust in the LORD forever, For in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock. NASB

Proverbs 3:5-6 - 5 **Trust in the LORD with all your heart,** And do not lean on your own understanding.

6 **In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.** NASB

Appreciation of Providence

Dear reader, consider that God is highly exalted and has created us primarily for the purpose of worshipping Him and enjoying Him forever! As the Catechism's state.....

"The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!"

More than this, all of the Law and the Prophets says Jesus, is summed up in the great commandment.....

Matthew 22:37-38 - **'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'** 38 "This is the great and foremost commandment. NASB

Shall we then love God and *not* love His Almighty rule over the world? Shall we adore Him with everything that is within us and *not* worship and magnify the astounding Wisdom of His providence in the world? May it never be! Consider what benefits befall us in God's providence. Thomas Watson wisely states.... *"Without this wise providence of God there would be anxiety and confusion in the whole world, just like an army when it is routed and scattered. The providence of God infuses comfort and virtue into everything we enjoy. Our clothes would not warm us, our food would not nourish us, without the special providence of God. And does not all this deserve your admiration of providence?"*

The understanding of God's providence should cause us to greatly magnify the honor of His name and worship Him with Holy fear and rejoice with trembling!

Psalms 96:9-13 - 9 **Worship the LORD in holy attire; Tremble before Him, all the earth. 10 Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns;** Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity." 11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; Let the sea roar, and all it contains; 12 Let the field exult, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy 13 Before the LORD, for He is coming; For He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, And the peoples in His faithfulness. NASB

God rebukes those who do not adore His mighty providence.....

Jeremiah 5:22-23 - 22 **'Do you not fear Me?' declares the LORD.' Do you not tremble in My presence?** For I have placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, An eternal decree, so it cannot cross over it. Though the waves toss, yet they cannot prevail; Though they roar, yet they cannot cross over it. 23'But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; They have turned aside and departed. NASB

And He commands us to tremble and praise Him because He is highly exalted!

Psalm 99:1-3 - **The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble** ; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake! **2 The LORD is great in Zion, And He is exalted above all the peoples. 3 Let them praise Thy great and awesome name; Holy is He.** NASB

The understanding of God's providence is worthy of our admiration and praise. It has many glorious benefits upon our life and worship of God. Understanding Providence....

- Increases our gratitude to God
- Increases our trust in God
- Changes the way we view our world
- It helps understand that evil not outside of the control of God but that He is using it for the ultimate end of all of His good purposes.
- It causes to *rest in God's promises* as we consider *future events*, knowing that even if we faces dreadful suffering, that God will work it for our good. Romans 8:28
Psalm 23:3-4 - He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. **4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me;** Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. NASB
- It helps us to see that *God has an ultimate end in everything* that is happening and He will indeed destroy evil forever and we will lie down in peace.
Isaiah 11:9 - **They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,** For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea. NASB
- God's providence is the *foundation of Hope* because we are looking to that day of glorious rest and eternal happiness and bliss in God's Heaven.
Revelation 21:3-4 - 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, 4 and **He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain;** the first things have passed away. " NASB

Oh Christian consider that His eye is on the sparrow and He watches over you! Yours is a special providence, being in the company of God's dearly beloved and chosen people!

Romans 8:28 - 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.** NASB

Thomas Watson further teaches us.... "*God's providence reaches to all persons, especially the persons of the godly, who in a special manner are taken notice of. God takes care of every saint in particular, as if he had none else to care for. 'He careth for you,' 1 Peter 5:7. i.e., the elect in a special manner. 'The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him; to preserve them from death, and to keep them alive in famine.' Ps 33:18,19. God by his providential care shields off dangers from his people, and sets a life-guard of angels about them. Ps 34:7. God's providence keeps the very bones of the saints. Ps 34:20. It bottles their tears. Ps 56:8. It strengthens the saints in their weakness. Heb 11:34. It supplies all their wants out of its alms basket. Ps 23:5. Thus Providence wonderfully supplies the wants of the elect.*"

Let us therefore appreciate God's providence to the point that we worship and magnify God's great name because of it, and seek to always acknowledge His "invisible hand" of guidance.

Submission to Providence

It is important then that we acknowledge God's good providence by humbly submitting to it. Are we happy that God is in control? Then let us also be happy with what He gives and also with what he takes away. Remember God's good promise to never allow us more than we can bear, but will bring us safely to His heaven....

1 Corinthians 10:13 - 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, that you may be able to endure it. NASB

2 Timothy 4:18 - 18 **The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom;** to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. NASB

1 Peter 1:3-5 - 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in

heaven for you, 5 **who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation** ready to be revealed in the last time. NASB

John 10:27-29 - 27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and **I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.** 29 "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." NASB

Consider the example of the saints who have gone before us. Even though they faced great trials, and the hand of Providence seemed to be against them at times, yet they trusted God and humbly submitted to His will. Watson quotes again... "*God is to be trusted when his providences seem to run contrary to his promises. God promised to give David the crown, to make him king; but providence ran contrary to his promise. David was pursued by Saul, and was in danger of his life, but all this while it was David's duty to trust God. Pray observe, that the Lord by cross providences often brings to pass his promise. God promised Paul the lives of all that were with him in the ship; but the providence of God seemed to run quite contrary to his promise, for the winds blew, the ship split and broke in pieces. Thus God fulfilled his promise; upon the broken pieces of the ship they all came safe to shore. Trust God when providences seem to run quite contrary to promises.*"

Abraham – Faithful to God trusting in God's promise to bless

Job – Job worshipped God in the midst of terrible suffering and pain at the hand of Providence.... "Even though He slay me yet will I praise Him."

Job 1:20-21 - 20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. **The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.**" NASB

Joseph – Faithful to God in the midst of terrible hardships and suffering.

Daniel – Faithful to God in the midst of great suffering and pagan culture and temptation.

Paul – Endured tremendous suffering and persecution yet persevered to the end

Never Complaining against Providence

Would you be content to rule the world on your own? Do you suppose you have a wiser plan than God? Would not God and His world be better off you were at the helm? This is utter folly, and we all know it. Why then would we complain disrespectfully against God's wise providence? Shall the clay say to the potter, why did you make me like this? Shall the dog bite the hand that feeds it? If we raise complaint to God about the circumstances of our life, let us be sure to do it *seeking consolation and comfort*, and never speaking a cross word or in anger against God's Holy counsel, lest we find ourselves deeper into the pit of suffering. Consider the words of Thomas Watson.... "*Let us be content that God should rule the world; learn to acquiesce in his will, and submit to his providence. Does any affliction befall you? Remember God sees it is that which is fit for you, or it would not come.*"

Philippians 2:12-16 - 12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. 14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing;** 15 that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, NASB

We must come to that place of humble submission to God where we realize He knows far better what we need than we do ourselves. The circumstances which God has ordered for our life are indeed that which works for our highest good and God's greatest glory!

Matthew 6:31-34 - 31 "Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' 32 "For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; **for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.** 34 "Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. NASB

Being Thankful for Providence

Dear friends, consider in the goodness of God to us, how we ought to be thankful! God has promised that every single thing in our lives will ultimately work for our good. Consider that if God would not spare His own Son, but gave Him for us, won't He then also give us everything we need?

Romans 8:31-32 - 31 What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who is against us?** 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, **how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?** NASB

If God will give His people a Kingdom when they die, will He not also give them daily bread while they live? If Jesus would suffer and die to bring me to Himself, will He not also hear my prayer when I cry to Him for help? Indeed He will, more than that, he will crown me with eternal life and grant me to see His glory forever more in His glorious Heaven, what more could I have from the good hand of Providence! Learn then, that it is fitting for the upright to praise God! Thanksgiving to God is pure praise! It is direct honor to God who gives us life and breathe!

Psalm 50:23 - **He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me;** And to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God." NASB

For those who know the goodness of God, we have no other response but the high praises of our King! Thanksgiving is the blood that runs through the veins of a saint! Praise is the garment that fits handsomely on our backs!

Psalm 145:9-10 - 9 The LORD is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works. 10 **All Thy works shall give thanks to Thee, O LORD, And Thy godly ones shall bless Thee.** NASB

Consider that the mouth of the wicked is filled with grumblings and murmuring and complaining! But this is not fitting for a saint! The wicked cannot praise God, neither are they thankful. The poison of asps is on their lips, and with the tongue they profane the name of God!

Psalm 33:1-5 - **Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones; Praise is becoming to the upright.** 2 Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings. 3 Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy. 4 For the word of the LORD is upright; And all His work is done in faithfulness. 5 He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD.

Let us therefore give God the thanksgiving and praise which is due to Him! That no matter what cup He gives us to drink, no matter what bitterness of soul should afflict us, no matter what great trial may befall us or try us, that we shall stand in the company of the saints, with the glorious praise of God in our mouth, knowing that He shall give us nothing but that which works for our good! It is God's will that we should give Him thanks in every circumstance!

1 Thessalonians 5:18 - 18 **in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you** in Christ Jesus. NASB

Ephesians 5:20 - 20 **always giving thanks for all things** in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; NASB

Trusting in God's Providence

When we consider the promises which God has made, we should be encouraged in our faith to rest in God's providence. God is in control, and we can rest knowing that He will bring about our good and His glory! Thomas Watson gives this encouragement.... *"Therefore, Christians, believe that God loves you, and that he will make the most cross providences to promote his glory and your good."* As the scripture says, God will care for us and meet our needs.

Psalm 37:3-7 - **Trust in the LORD, and do good;** Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. 4 Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart. 5 **Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him,** and He will do it. 6 And He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your judgment as the noonday. 7 **Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him;** NASB

Jesus often says when confronting our fears, "Do not be afraid," and this is often followed by assurances of His presence with us. Indeed we have nothing to fear if we love God, everything will work for our *ultimate good*.

Luke 12:32 - 32 **"Do not be afraid** , little flock, **for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.** NASB

Consider God's Providence in you being saved? Consider how He brought you to Himself?