

# Week Eleven

God's Providence

# God's Providence – Outline

- Calvinism
  - Preservation
  - Concurrence
  - Government
  - The Decrees of God
  - The Importance of Human Actions
  - Application
- Arminianism
  - Arguments for
  - Arguments against
- Comparison of the two perspectives

# Calvinism

- 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
  - 3.directs them to fulfill His purpose

# Preservation

- God keeps all created things existing and maintaining the properties with which He created them
- Christ is “upholding the universe by His word of power” (Heb 1:3)
  - Could be translated “continually carrying”
  - Christ is actively involved in the work of providence
  - 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
- “In Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28)
- “...and You preserve all of them” (Neh 9:6)
- “the heavens and earth that now exist...(are) being kept until the day of judgment” (2 Pet 3:7)
- “If He should take back His Spirit to Himself, and gather to Himself His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust” (Job 34:14-15)
- Christians & non-Christians see this (and hence we practice science), but attribute the cause to different sources

# Concurrence (1)

- God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do
  - God “accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:1)
  - No event in creation falls outside of His providence
- He is intimate with creation
  - “fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling His command!” (Ps 148:8)
  - “You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate, that He may bring forth food from the earth: (Ps 104:14)
  - God “makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt 5:45)
  - He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from His storehouses” (Ps 135:7)
  - Job 37:6-13 (pg 318)

# Concurrence (2)

- Animals
  - “These all look to You, to give them their food in due season. When You give to them, they gather it up; when You open your hand, they are filled with good things. When You hide your face, they are dismayed” (Ps 104:27-29)
  - “Look at the birds of the air...your heavenly Father feeds them” (Matt 6:26)
  - Not one sparrow “will fall to the ground without your Father’s will” (Matt 10:29)
- Seemingly “random” or “chance” events
  - “The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from the Lord” (Prov 16:33)
  - Casting lots to find that Achan had stolen gold (see Joshua 7)
  - Urim and Thummim from the Old Testament

# Concurrence (3)

- Events fully caused by God and fully caused by the creature as well
  - A botanist can detail the factors that cause grass to grow...yet Scripture says that God causes the grass to grow
  - It is incorrect for us to reason that if we know the “natural” cause of something in this world, then God did not cause it (pg 319)
  - Concurrence affirms that God *directs*, and *works through* the distinctive properties of each created thing, so that these things themselves bring about the results that we see (ibid)
- The affairs of nations
  - God “makes nations great, and he destroys them; He enlarges nations, and leads them away” (Job 12:23)
  - “Dominion belongs to the Lord, and He rules over the nations” (Ps 22:28)
  - “He made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation” (Acts 17:26)
  - Read Daniel 4:34-35 (pg 320)

# Concurrence – All Aspects of Our Lives (1)

- Our needs
  - “Give us this day, our daily bread” (Matt 6:11)
  - “my God will supply every need” to His children (Phil 4:19)
- He plans our days
  - “In Your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them” (Ps 139:16)
  - Paul says that God “set me apart before I was born” (Gal 1:15)
- Our actions
  - “In Him we live and move” (Acts 17:28)
  - “a man’s steps are ordered by the Lord” (Prov 20:24)
- Our success & failure
  - “He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree” (Luke 1:52)
  - For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up; but it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another” (Ps 75:6-7)

# Concurrence – All Aspects of Our Lives (2)

- Our talents and abilities
  - “What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” (1 Cor 4:7)
  - “He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze” (Ps 18:34)
- Rulers in their decisions
  - “the king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever it will” (Prov 21:1)
- “Just as a rock is really hard because God has made it with the property of hardness...so our choices are real choices and do have significant effects, because God has made us in such a wonderful way that He has endowed us with the property of willing choice” (pg 321)

# Concurrence – All Aspects of Our Lives (3)

- Exactly how God combines His providential control with our willing and significant choices Scripture does not explain to us. But...we should accept both in an attempt to be faithful to the teaching of all Scripture (pg 322)
- Analogy of a play (*Macbeth*) → Who killed the king?
  - Macbeth?
  - Shakespeare?

# Concurrence – What About Evil? (1)

- It is clear that Scripture nowhere shows God as directly doing anything evil
- Scripture never blames God for evil or shows God as taking pleasure for evil
- Scripture never excuses human beings for the wrong they do
- We must never come to the point that we think we are not responsible for the evil we do
- Yet, there are dozens of passages that say that God (indirectly) brought about some kind of evil

# Concurrence – What About Evil? (2)

- Joseph
  - His brothers:
    - Were jealous of him (Gen 37:11)
    - Hated him (Gen 37:4,5,8)
    - Wanted to kill him (Gen 37:20)
    - Wrongly cast him into a pit (Gen 37:24)
    - Sold him into slavery (Gen 27:28)
  - Yet, Joseph said to them
    - “God sent me before you to preserve life” (Gen 45:5)
    - “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good...” (Gen 50:20)

# Concurrence – What About Evil? (3)

- Hardening Pharaoh's heart in Egypt
  - “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)
  - “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, Ps 105:25)
- Absalom’s revenge on David’s harem (prophesied in 2 Sam 12:11-12, fulfilled in 16:22)
- The Lord “incited” David to take a census (2 Sam 24:1)
- God gave Satan permission to bring harm to Job’s family, possessions, and finally well-being
- The Lord “put a lying spirit in the mouth” of Ahab’s prophets (1 Kings 22:23)
- The crucifixion was “predestined” (Acts 2:23)

# Concurrence – Verses

## Relating God and Evil (1)

- In a way not understood by us and not revealed to us, God *caused* them to make a *willing choice* to do what they did (pg 326)
- God uses all things to fulfill His purposes and even uses evil for His glory and for our good
  - “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28)
- God is glorified even in the punishment of evil
  - “the Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble” (Prov 16:4)
  - “Surely the wrath of men shall praise you” (Ps 76:10)

# Concurrence – Verses Relating God and Evil (2)

- God never does evil and is never to be blamed for evil
  - “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted with evil and He Himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire” (James 1:13-14)
    - We should never think of God as the personal agent who is tempting us or who is to be held accountable for the temptation
  - “The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.” Isaiah 45:7
    - It does not say that God Himself *does* the evil, but should be understood to mean that God ordained that evil would come about through the willing choices of His creatures (pg 328)

# Concurrence – Verses Relating God and Evil (3)

- God is a “secondary cause”
  - He is removed from actually doing the evil
  - Thieves and murders and other evildoers are the instruments of divine providence, and the Lord Himself uses these to carry out the judgments that He has determined with Himself. Yet I deny that they can derive from this any excuse for their evil deeds. Why? Will they either involve God in the same iniquity with themselves, or will they cloak their own depravity with His justice? They can do neither. - John Calvin, pg 328
  - Analogy → gun manufacturers
    - Guns can be used for good or evil, but the manufacturers are not accountable for that evil
    - The rules God has put into the universe can result in evil, but He is not accountable for that evil

# Concurrence – Verses Relating God and Evil (4)

- God rightfully blames and judges moral creatures for the evil they do
  - “These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations; I also will choose affliction for them, and bring their fears upon them” (Is 66:3)
  - “God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices” (Ecl 7:29)
  - The blame for evil is always on the responsible creature ... and the creature who does evil is always worthy of punishment (pg 329)

# Concurrence – Verses Relating God and Evil (5)

- Evil is real, not an illusion, and we should never do evil, for it will always harm us and others
  - We are to pray “deliver us from evil” (Matt 6:13)
  - We should never even will that evil be done, for entertaining sinful desires in our minds is to allow them to “wage war” against our souls (1 Pet 2:11)
  - There are things that are right for God to do, but wrong for us to do...He also uses evil to bring about good purposes, but He does not allow us to do so (pg 329)
- “Scripture does *not* tell us exactly *how* God brings this situation about or how it can be that God holds us accountable for what He ordains comes to pass” (pg 330)
- “The problem of God’s relation to sin remains a mystery” (pg 330)

# Concurrence – Do We Have “Free Will”?

- Nowhere in Scripture does it say that
  - We make decisions outside of God’s control
  - We make decisions without any outside influences
- We still make willing choices, which have real effects
- A freedom to be outside of God’s sustaining and controlling activity would be impossible if Jesus Christ is indeed “continually carrying along things by His word of power” (Heb 1:3) (pg 331)
- An absolute “freedom”, totally free from God’s control, is simply not possible in a world providentially sustained and directed by God Himself (pg 331)

# Government

- God has a purpose in all that He does in the world and He providentially governs or directs all things in order that they accomplish His purpose
  - “His kingdom rules over all” (Ps 103:19)
  - God is the one who “accomplishes *all things* according to the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11)
- Though in God His will is undivided, and not divided or contradictory, we cannot begin to understand the depths of God’s will and only in a small part is it revealed to us (pg 332)
  - Moral (revealed) will vs. Secret will (providential government)
  - It is possible that He wills His creatures to do something in the short term that displeases Him in order that in the long term He would receive the greater glory (pg 332)

# The Decrees of God

- The eternal plans of God whereby, before the creation of the world, He determined to bring about everything that happens
  - “in Your book were written, every one of them, that days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them” (Ps 139:16)
  - Our salvation was determined long ago because God “chose us in Him (Christ) *before the foundations of the world*, that we should be holy and blameless before Him” (Eph 1:4)
- He does not make things up as He goes along
- All that God does He has planned before the creation of the world (and eternal plan) (pg 333)

# The Importance of Our Human Actions (1)

- God has made us responsible for our actions, which have real and eternally significant results (pg 333)
  - God has created us with the characteristic of being responsible for our actions, so we are!
  - Scripture never blames God for sin
    - Job
    - Adam and Eve
    - Jesus
- “You will say to me then, ‘Why does he still find fault? For who can resist His will?’ But who are you, a man, to answer back to God?” (Rom 9:19-20)

# The Importance of Our Human Actions (2)

- Our actions have real results and do change the course of events
- Prayer is one specific kind of action that has definite results and that does change the course of events
- We must act!!!
  - A hearty belief in God's providence is not a discouragement but a spur to action
  - Read Acts 27:22-26 on page 336
- What if we still can't understand?
  - That's okay: God is infinite and we are finite

# Application

- Do not be afraid, but trust in God
  - “In peace I will both lie down and sleep” (Ps 4:8)
  - “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father’s will...Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt 10:29-31)
- Be thankful for all good things that happen
  - “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits” (Ps 103:2)
  - “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thes 5:18)
- There is no such thing as “luck” or “chance”
  - The universe is not governed by an impersonal fate or luck, but by a personal God
  - This should not make you more superstitious, but instead to trust in god more and obey Him more fully

# Arminianism

- Supported by
  - Directly by Methodists & Nazarenes
  - Many other followers in various denominations
- Areas of disagreement
  - How do we know that the portions of scripture about God intervening can be applied to the rest of life?
  - We have “real” freedom (or “free will”)
    - If God knows what you are going to do, do you really have a choice?
    - Choices caused by God are not “real” choices
  - Calvinism attributes sin to God
  - Believes that Calvinism will lead one to believe in fatalism, resulting in a lazy, non-active perspective on life

# Calvinist Responses to Arminianism

- How do we know that the portions of scripture about God intervening can be applied to the rest of life?
  - God doesn't just cause some grass to grow
  - This one is weak
- We have “real” freedom (or “free will”)
  - Only God defines what is real
    - A thunderstorm caused by God is still a “real” thunderstorm
  - This tries to give an explanation using human intuition & logic for what we do not understand
- Calvinism attributes sin to God
  - This is the strongest argument initially
  - But, then the question of how sin came into the world in the first place becomes important
- Believes that Calvinism will lead one to believe in fatalism, resulting in a lazy, non-active perspective on life
  - This is based on a misunderstanding of a Calvinist perspective
  - Both agree that we are responsible for our actions and that we make voluntary, willing choices

# Both Perspectives Have Difficulties

- Calvinism

- Exactly how God can ordain that we do evil willingly, and yet God not be blamed for evil
- Exactly how God can cause us to choose something willingly

- Arminian

- How does God know the future?
  - How can God know that good ultimately triumph over evil?
- Why would God allow evil into the world against His will?

# Reading For Next Week

- Chapter 19
  - Angels
    - Homework – questions 1-5 (all)
- Chapter 20
  - Satan and Demons
    - Homework – questions 1-3 (all)