



RESURGENCE

Coordinated Hands of God and Men: Providence in the Reformed Tradition

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I. Reformed Definition of Divine Providence

God continually oversees and directs all things pertaining to the created order in such a way that

- 1) He preserves in existence and provides for the creation He has brought into being (see Neh 9:6; Matt 6:25-34; Acts 2:25; Col 1:16-17; and Heb 1:2-3; Jas 1:17), and
- 2) He governs and reigns supremely over the entirety of the created order in order to fulfill all of His intended purposes in it and through it (see Deut 32:39; Psa 135:5-7; Prov 21:1; Isa 45:5-7; Dan 2:21; 4:34-37; Eph 1:11)

II. Biblical Support

A. Spectrum Texts

1. Deuteronomy 32:39

"See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, and there is no one who can deliver from My hand."

2. Isaiah 45:5-7

5 "I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; 6 that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, 7 the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD Who does all these."

Notice two observations:

- a. The term *bara* ("create") is used in the OT exclusively with God as its subject. Here it is used in v. 7 for the two negative aspects of God's control – darkness and calamity

- b. The terms in the second couplet are the strongest Hebrew words, respectively, for all that is good (*shalom*, or "peace") and all that is bad (*ra*, or "calamity," "destruction," "evil").

God controls fully both light and darkness (Isa 45:7), but consider 1 John 1:5 also – "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."

God controls fully both all that is good and all that is evil (Isa 45:7), but consider along with this also Psalm 5:4 – "For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with you." (Note: "Evil" in Psalm 5:4 is the same term (*ra*) used in Isaiah 45:7)

Conclusion: God fully controls both good and evil, yet God is wholly good and is not evil in any respect whatsoever.

B. "Compatibilist" Texts

1. Genesis 45:4-8

4 "Then Joseph said to his brothers, . . . 'I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life . . . 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. 8 Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.'"

2. Isaiah 10:5-7, 12, 15

5 "Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger, and the staff in whose hands is My indignation. 6 I send it against a godless nation, and commission it against the people of My fury, to capture booty and to seize plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets. 7 Yet it does not so intend, nor does it plan so in its heart, but rather it is its purpose to destroy, and to cut off many nations . . . 12 So it will be when the Lord has completed all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, He will say, 'I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness . . . 15 Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it? Is the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it?'"

3. Acts 2:23; 4:27-28

2:23 "this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death . . . 4:27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles

and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.”

C. Other Texts

1. Daniel 4:34-35

34 “. . . I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. 35 All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’”

2. Ephesians 1:11

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

III. Reformed Understanding of Providence

A. Nature of God’s Relation to the World

Created a world over which **God exercises complete regulative control** of all things, including all events of nature as well as all choices and actions of His moral creatures

B. Providence in relation to Human Free Choices and Actions

Created with moral creatures possessing a “**Freedom of Inclination**” which is compatible with God’s sovereign control, hence “**Compatibilist Freedom**”

Definition of Freedom of Inclination: We are free in choosing one thing if, all things being just what they are when we make our choice, we are unconstrained and uncoerced so that we choose according to our **strongest inclination**, our **highest desire**, or simply **what we most want**.

C. Providence in relation to Good and Evil

Dealing with the Problem of (Moral) Evil: Three-Stage Argument

1. Stage One: Argument from Compatibilist Freedom – While God has complete control over the circumstances in which we make our choices, when we choose **we always do what we most want to do** (“freedom of inclination”) and hence

while God controls the outcome we bear full responsibility for the choices we make.

2. Stage Two: Greater Good Defense – God has wise and perfect **purposes** for the whole of the universe he has made and relating to the magnification of His own glory such that God, in His infinite wisdom, goodness, and righteousness, decided that a universe with evil as well as good was necessary for these purposes to be accomplished
3. Stage Three: Specific Permission – Divine permission in nature and human choosing of **just those things** which he could, if he so chose, also **prevent**

D. Providence in relation to Salvation

1. The Doctrine of Unconditional Election as the Basis of the Certainty of our Salvation in Christ

E.g., Ephesians 1:3-6 – ³ “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ he predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved”
2. Two different questions with two different answers: Why are the lost condemned to hell? And, Why do the saved get to go instead to heaven?
 - a. Why are the lost condemned to hell? **Sin**. They receive exactly what they deserve.
 - b. Why do the saved get to go instead to heaven? **Grace**. They receive exactly what they don't deserve. I.e., Romans 6:23 – “wages of sin” and “free gift” of salvation
3. If God could save all, why wouldn't He, and why doesn't He? E.g., Churchill story

IV. Application and Conclusion: **Coordinated Hands of God and Men**

- A. Facing the Unknown with the God who Both Knows and Controls the Future
- B. Facing Suffering with the God who Both Knows and Controls the Future
- C. Prayer and Hope with the God who Both Knows and Controls the Future