

DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN THE REFORMED TRADITION (PART II)

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III. Reformed Understanding of Divine Providence

A. Nature of God's Relation to the World

God 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**.

While "libertarian freedom" is incompatible with exhaustive, meticulous sovereignty, "freedom of inclination" is compatible with this strong, Reformed understanding of divine sovereignty.

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

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