A CALVINIST MODEL OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

The English word "providence" comes from the Latin roots *pro* and *videre,* meaning "to see or look before." However, the English term carries a meaning that extends well beyond mere "foresight." It means "provision" and "oversight." Broadly speaking, the biblical doctrine of providence explains God's actions in relationship to what He has created. Providence is the perfect outworking of God's eternal plan to oversee and provide for creation. The following discussion will begin to sketch a biblical model of divine providence by examining a whole range of biblical teaching on the subject. The thesis of this paper is that a Calvinist model of divine providence so orders the relevant biblical data into a conceptual whole that the inherent relationships among those data are exposed without distorting what they say.

One Bible verse that especially encapsulates the essence of the Calvinist model of providence is Ephesians 1:11, which says that God "*works* all things after the counsel of His *will.*" This verse teaches that God "works," indicating His providence, according to His "will," which is His sovereign decree. This text asserts that "all things," and not merely "some things," are regulated by divine providence, but what exactly does it mean by "all things?" Ephesians 1:10 demonstrates that the "all things" of verse eleven include "things in heaven and things on earth;"[1] so, the Calvinist reasons from Scripture that God does not merely exercise some "general" providence, but that His oversight is detailed and specific, encompassing every created thing. The biblical doctrine of providence means that God sovereignly and omnipotently exercises meticulous determinate control over all creation (Psa 103:19; 115:3; Dan 4:35; Eph 1:11; Heb 1:8). Louis

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[1] The words "heaven and earth" are a merism, which is a literary device employed to include "everything." The idea is "heaven and earth and everything in between."

Berkhof, a Reformed theologian, writes, "Providence may be defined as that continued exercise of the divine energy whereby the Creator preserves all His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end."[2]

## Biblical Evidence

The evidence from Scripture can be divided into two major categories: ordinary and extraordinary providence.[3] Ordinary providence refers to God's control over the normal operation of the world. Extraordinary providence signifies special events, such as the covenants, divine speech, miracles, the coming of Christ, and human salvation.[4] The designation "ordinary" providence should not be misunderstood to imply that some portion of God's providence is "boring" or otherwise unremarkable. Rather, the category embraces normal, usual, or "every day" divine activity in the midst of creation. Though the two categories I have chosen to organize the biblical material are "ordinary" and "extraordinary," they might well have been "normative" and "unique."

### Ordinary Providence

"Ordinary providence" encompasses the bulk of what providence entails. Every moment of every day, God upholds, directs, and governs all of creation by ordinary providence.[5]

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[2] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1958; reprint, 2000), 166.

[3] Some may quibble with the logical distinction between "ordinary" and "extraordinary" providence because Scripture itself does not divide the doctrine as such. However, I find the categories helpful conceptually, and the distinction has a long and traditional history of usage. Note too that it has a record of acceptance in the Baptist tradition. James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (reprint, Escondido: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1887), 228, (page citations are to the reprint edition).

[4] Other logical distinctions made by various theologians include: immediate and mediate, general and particular, and common and special. John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, The Baptist Faith Series, vol 1 (London: Matthews and Leigh, 1809; reprint, Paris: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1984), (page citations are to the reprint edition), 283-285.

[5] "Uphold, direct, and govern" correspond roughly to "cause, action, and effect," and to "motive, action, and goal."

The meaning of each of these three verbs needs to be examined.

The idea that God "upholds" creation means He keeps it in existence (Heb 1:3). God not only created everything out of nothing (Heb 11:3), but He also sustains and preserves what He created. To put it negatively, creation does not go back into nothingness precisely because God wills its continued existence. Scripture teaches that Creation "holds together" because of divine providence (Col 1:17). This Christian doctrine of preservation draws a sharp line of distinction between the Creator and the creature by affirming both that God is intimately related to the world and that He is distinct from the world. These twin truths put great distance between biblical Christian theism and Deism on the one hand, and between Christianity and Pantheism on the other. In opposition to Pantheism and Deism, God is both transcendent and immanent. The biblical account portrays creation as distinct from God, yet dependent upon a constant supply of His power for its existence.[6]

What does it mean to say that God "directs" creation? "Concurrence" is a theological term describing God's "direction" of the world. Louis Berkhof defines "concurrence" as "the cooperation of the divine power with all subordinate powers . . . causing them to act and to act precisely as they do."[7] According to the doctrine of concurrence, every act performed by creation is simultaneously an act of the creation and an act of God, but the creation's action is dependent on divine action.[8] God is the "mover" and creation is the "moved." Creation acts because God causes it to act. The Bible says that God's creatures move in Him (Acts 17:28), and that He works in His creatures to move (1 Cor 12:6; Phil 2:13). The acts of creation perfectly "concur" with the acts of God. Concurrence can be subdivided into two smaller categories: the impersonal world

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[6] The doctrine of preservation construed as "continuous creation" and held by theologians, such as Jonathan Edwards and Richard Sibbs, is not warranted by the text of Scripture, and is speculative at best.

[7] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 171.

[8] A wrong view of "concurrence" understands God and creation as "cooperating" to perform the actions done by creation. The analogy used by this unbiblical concept is that of two horses "cooperating" as a team to pull a wagon.

and the personal world.

The impersonal world includes elements of creation that are neither angelic nor human. Things such as random events, vegetative growth, weather, and animal life fall into this category. Often, secular thought attributes the operations of this realm to "natural law," but the Bible acknowledges no such thing. Rather, Scripture teaches that if there is any pattern of regularity, that regularity is the result of God's providence (Lev 26:3-4; Deut 11:13-14; 28:12; Job 28:26; 37:5-10; Psa 107:25; Isa 28:2; Matt 5:45; etc.).

God's oversight of the impersonal world encompasses apparent accidents and random events. The Bible's teaching about seemingly random events demonstrates that chance, fortune, and luck do not exist. Every hair on our heads is numbered (Matt 10:30), and none can fall to the ground apart from God's purpose. The decision of lots is from the Lord (Prov 16:33; Jon 1:7; Acts 1:26), and God is behind "chance" happenings (Exod 21:13).

The Bible attributes normal cycles of vegetative growth and global weather patterns to divine activity. God causes and withholds dew and rain (Lev 26:3-4; Deut 11:13-14; 28:12; Job 28:26; Matt 5:45). Hail, snow, and thunderstorms are from God (Job 37:5-10; Psa 107:25; Isa 28:2). He directs the winds (Num 11:31; Jon 1:4), and causes grass and crops to grow (Psa 104:14-15). Calvin says, "It is certain that not one drop of rain falls without God's sure command."[9]

Not only does God rule the weather, but He also exercises detailed control over the animal creation. He oversees the lives of sparrows (Matt 6:26; 10:29), and nourishes and feeds all the animals (Job 38:39-41; Psa 104:10-30). Not even the smallest animal lives outside the purview of God's providence.

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[9] John Calvin, *Institutio Christianae Religionis* 1.16.5, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, under the title *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 204.

Clearly, Scripture teaches that God regulates the impersonal world, but God controls the personal world too. The aspect of creation includes God's activity among and through angelic beings and human beings. Angels are designed to do the bidding of God. They are tasked with delivering divine messages (Luke 1:11-19; Acts 8:26; 10:3-8, 22; 27:23-24), executing punishment on His behalf (2 Sam 24:16-17; Acts 12:23), and fighting His battles (Dan 10:13). The righteous angels are subject to God's government, but He exerts total control over evil spirits as well (1 Sam 16:14-15; 1 Kgs 22:20-23; Job 1:6, 12; Isa 19:14).

God's direction of personal human agents is of particular concern because we are His image bearers. The Bible declares in no uncertain terms that the history of human nations is the perfect outworking of His intention. God determines the lifespan of nations and delineates their borders (Acts 17:26). He rules over them (Psa 22:28), makes them great, and destroys them according to His wise intention (Job 12:23). The Scripture teaches that when disaster befalls a city, God is the One who did it (Amos 3:6).

God not only directs national events, but He also regulates and controls the conditions of every single human life. Both wealth and poverty come from the Lord (Deut 8:11-20; 1 Sam 2:6-8; Psa 113:7-8). He assigns position and status, making men humble, and lifting them up (1 Sam 2:6-8; Psa 75:6-7; 113:8). He causes barrenness among women, and He makes them able to have children (Gen 30:2; Psa 113:9). The Lord both grants and denies food to human beings (Isa 3:1; Psa 136:25). He watches over us as we travel (Psa 146:9), and causes us to fall asleep (1 Sam 26:12).

God's providential control of human beings is even more specific than His control over their circumstances. He directs their minds and hearts (Psa 33:14-15). According to Scripture, the king's heart is in God's hand, and He turns it wherever He wishes (Prov 21:1). God removes

understanding (Job 12:24) and causes faintheartedness (Lev 26:36).  The Bible explicitly says that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh (Exod 9:12; cf. Lam 6:35), and He put it in Absalom's heart to devise an evil scheme against his father David (2 Sam 12:11; 16:22).  God thwarts the good counsel of His enemies (2 Sam 17:14), and causes their wisdom to perish (Isa 29:14).  He stiffened men's hearts in order to destroy them (Josh 11:20), and turned the hearts of men to hate others (Psa 105:25).  The Bible says that if a prophet is deceived, then God deceived him (Ezek 14:9).  As punishment for sin, God gives men over to corrupt minds (Rom 1:28), and sends delusions to make them believe what is false (2 Thess 2:11).

God's rule over the minds and hearts of men results in His complete control over their specific choices as well.  According to the inspired text, a man's way is not in himself; rather, the ways of men are from God (Jer 10:23).  The Lord determines every step a man takes (Psa 37:23; Prov 20:24), and all his movements are the result of the divine will (Jas 4:13-16). God caused Cyrus to invade and conquer Babylon (Isa 45) even though Cyrus had no knowledge of the part he played in God's sovereign design (Isa 45:4).  The speech of a man's tongue is from the Lord (Prov 16:1), and his every decision is according to the comprehensive providence of God (Prov 16:9; 19:21).

So, we see from the pages of Scripture that the Lord upholds creation, and that He directs creation.  That is, God keeps creation in existence, and He is the cause of all the activity of creation such that every act of creation is concurrent with His will.  But, God's Word says more about divine providence.

God governs creation.  All of creation is moving toward a specific and ultimate goal. Berkhof defines "government" as, "that continued activity of God whereby He rules all things teleologically so as to secure the accomplishment of the divine purpose."[10]  Scripture teaches that

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[10] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 175.

God is directing things to His own end (Rom 11:36). His goal is to work all things for the good of His people (Rom 8:28) and for His own glory (1 Sam 12:22; Psa 19:1-2; Isa 43:6-7; 60:21; 61:3; Ezek 36:21-22; 39:7; Luke 2:14; Rom 9:17; 11:36; 1 Cor 15:28).

**Extraordinary Providence**

While the world ordinarily operates regularly and predictably, sometimes God is pleased to exert His influence upon the world in an extraordinary way. Ultimately special revelation is necessary in order for us to know what falls into the category of "extraordinary providence." These extraordinary "doings" may include direct divine action apart from intervening causes or they may simply be extravagant displays of divine activity and power. The designation "extraordinary providence" is not at all meant to imply that "ordinary providence" excludes direct or remarkable divine activity. Indeed, God may regularly act directly and remarkably in ordinary providence, but that activity is often unknown and goes unnoticed because God has not revealed that it is extraordinary. The term "extraordinary providence" is reserved for times at which God's remarkable and more direct workings are carrying out His saving design and moving redemptive history forward. Admittedly, there is overlap between these two categories, and no logical/conceptual distinction is perfect; however, this one is helpful. Extraordinary providence may be seen to include things such as divine speech, the covenants, the coming of Christ, miracles, and human salvation.

Special revelation is fundamental to extraordinary providence because it is the only way to know for certain that an event in providence is extraordinary. So special revelation is foundational to extraordinary providence, and it is an example of extraordinary providence. Sometimes God communicated through personal encounter (Exod 3-4). Other times He spoke through dreams and visions (Gen 40-41), and through direct speech (Exod 20). In Scripture, new

special revelation accompanies new instances of God's redemptive activity to explain what He has done in the past, what He is doing in the present, what He expects His people to believe and do, and what He will do in the future. Hence, God's provision of special revelation is "extraordinary" because it is unusual, reserved for times during which divine action requires explanation. Generally speaking, it is limited to periods during which God's redemptive plan moves from one stage to the next.[11]

The biblical covenants are instances of "extraordinary providence." Though God was in no way obligated to establish a covenant with Adam, He condescended and entered into a special relationship with him, promising eternal life for perfect faithful obedience and death for faithless disobedience (Gen 2:7-17). After the fall of Adam, God inaugurated a series of covenants for the redemption of mankind (Gen 3:15; 9:1-17; 12; 15; 17; Exod 20:1-17; Deut; 2 Sam 7; Heb 8). These covenants are fundamentally gracious; since, by their administration of Christ's work, God gives salvation to human beings who possess only demerit and no merit. Classical Reformed theology has understood that after the fall, a single covenant of grace runs through the story line of Scripture, which itself remains essentially unchanged throughout all periods of redemptive history.[12] The provision of this redemptive covenant along with the historical biblical covenants falls into the category of extraordinary providence.

Another occasion of extraordinary providence is miracles. Wayne Grudem defines a miracle as "a less common kind of God's activity in which He arouses people's awe and wonder and bears witness to Himself."[13] John Frame says, "miracles are unusual events caused by God's

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[11] O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word: A Biblical Response to the Case for Tongues and Prophecy Today* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1993), 60-78.

[12] Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, vol. 1 (London, 1822; reprint, New Jersey: P&R, 1990), 291-306, (page citations are to the reprint edition).

[13] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 355.

power, so extraordinary that we would usually consider them impossible."[14]  In Scripture, miracles often accompany and confirm special divine activity and divine speech.  The Bible is replete with examples of these remarkable phenomena.  God caused the sun to stand still (Josh 10:13) and to move backwards (2 Kgs 20:11; Isa 38:8).  Moses' hand turned leprous and then became healthy again (Exod 4:2-8).  Fire from heaven consumed the offering at Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:17-40). In the New Testament, Jesus performed healings and cast out demons (Matt 1:4-5; Luke 4:36-41; John 2:23; 4:54; 6:2; 20:30-31).  Numerous additional examples abound.  Miracles fall under the category of extraordinary divine providence.

The preeminent case of extraordinary providence is the work of Jesus Christ in the world.  Truly the incarnation and the resurrection of Christ are the greatest of all miracles. Because of His great love, God sent His Son into the world so that whoever trusts Him will not endure the covenant curse, but will enjoy the covenant blessing (John 3:36).  Jesus Christ suffered a bloody substitutionary death in order to redeem all who believe in Him (Rom 5:6-8).  The just died for the unjust (Rom 3:26).  The event of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ is the centerpiece of all history, and hence, it is the true center of the doctrine of providence.  All of providence works to glorify His meekness and majesty, and the glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ is God's ultimate design for the world.

A final instance of extraordinary providence is regeneration.  Regeneration is the means by which God applies the saving work of Christ to His people.  When God saves a human soul, He moves directly upon it to bring it to life (John 3:3, 8).  Regeneration is not the effect of "natural" causes; rather, it is the result of the direct and effectual operation of the Holy Spirit to apply the work of Christ (John 3:6-8; Titus 3:5-7).  According to Charles Hodge, this insistence upon regeneration as the product of the Spirit's direct influence makes the difference between

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[14] John Frame, *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Philipsburg: P&R, 2002), 245-246.

Pelagianism and Augustinianism.[15]  The Bible says salvation is of the Lord (Jon 2:9), and those whom God appoints to salvation will be saved (Acts 13:48).  Though it has been neglected, the doctrine of unconditional individual election to salvation by means of immediate divine activity is a common theme of the New Testament (Rom 9; Eph 1:4-6; 2:8-9; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Thess 1:4; 5:9; 2 Thess 2:13-14).

## Theological Formulation

At this point the biblical data need to be organized in a comprehensive conceptual framework in order to account for the whole teaching of Scripture.  But what framework is able sufficiently to account for all of Scripture's teaching about providence?  A number of options are available for consideration.

### Divine Determinism

Indeterminism cannot account for the data of Scripture because by definition an indeterminate event would be uncontrollable.  No set of causal factors would be sufficient to move an indeterminate event to produce any specific effect precisely because by definition an indeterminate event is free from causal determination.  So, it is clear that neither God nor anything else could have any control over an indeterminate event because of its very nature.  However, as we have already seen in Scripture, God is in control of every detail of creation.  Therefore, the biblical data already presented demands the conclusion that the universe does not operate according to contra-causal indeterminacy.

Of course, a number of Christians dispute this conclusion.  Among evangelicals, Arminians affirm that "free" human decisions are indeterminate.  They dismiss biblical examples

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[15] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1997), 615.

of determinism as "unique" and not normative.[16]  According to Arminianism, portions of Scripture that attribute decisions of human beings to divine determinism are unusual because they break from God's regular way of governing the world.  However, I have already shown that Scripture teaches that God determines the decisions of human beings.  So, in light of the overwhelming biblical evidence to the contrary, it is very difficult for the Arminian to prove that these instances are "unusual."  Furthermore, as following paragraphs will show, the Bible quite clearly teaches the Calvinist notion of deterministic and compatibilistic freedom, but it never teaches the Arminian notion of indeterminate freedom.  The biblical evidence for determinism cannot be dismissed as easily as Arminians would have us believe.

Just as classical Arminians do, Molinists also dispute the Calvinist conclusion that divine control requires divine determinism.[17]  Molinists are modified Arminians who argue that God can foreknow what any person would indeterminately choose in any given circumstance, and He can adjust the circumstances in order to bring about the indeterminate choice He desires the person to make.[18]  There is not enough space to respond fully here, but briefly there are two significant problems with this framework.  First, God could not foreknow what an indeterminate event would be because there would be no sufficient cause of it.  Scripture grounds divine foreknowledge in divine causation (Isa 46:11).  Second, this framework only gives God "significant control," rather than the total control ascribed to Him by the texts of Scripture already mentioned.[19]

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[16] Jack, Cottrell, *What the Bible Says About God The Ruler*, The Doctrine of God, vol. 2 (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1984), 139-143.

[17] Molinists are basically Arminians who subscribe to middle knowledge.  The subject of middle knowledge will be discussed in greater detail in the section that deals with God's relationship to moral evil.

[18] William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 127-151.

[19] For a more detailed refutation of Molinism, see: William Hasker, "A New Anti-Molinist Argument," *Religious Studies* 35 (Summer 1999): 291-297.

The classical Arminian and Molinist solutions are inadequate, but what about fatalism? If Arminianism misses the mark to one side of the truth, fatalism misses the mark on the other side. Fatalism is the belief that impersonal forces (or pagan gods) ensure that unalterable purposes will be finally achieved. According to fatalism a person might "struggle against fate" only to discover that the struggle is useless. Whatever will be must be, and what a person actually does is irrelevant because the fated outcome will inevitably come to pass. However, the texts examined above show that God not only appoints the "ends" by His government, but He also ordains the "means" to those ends by concurrence. So, with biblical providence, the "means" are necessary to the "ends." This is not fatalism, but biblical Christianity. According to the Bible, God, not blind forces or pagan deities, controls the universe.

Unlike indeterminism and fatalism, divine determinism seems best to fit the biblical information, but there are some serious difficulties with a deterministic framework. These difficulties are especially apparent in the relationship of God and human beings to moral evil. That issue will be addressed later, but for now, a definition of divine determinism is in order. Divine determinism declares, "Every created event has a cause."[20] Note that this definition implies that God does not have a cause because He is not a created "event." But, everything other than God is sustained in its existence and moves because of causes, and behind every causal chain is a first cause that originates with God. In this way, God retains total control over everything that takes place in creation and nothing that comes to pass in creation is outside of His purpose. Admittedly, the Bible does not explicitly teach determinism exactly as stated above, but the Bible

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[20] This is my definition, and I am unaware of any source that defines divine determinism exactly this way. Francis Turretin, however, says, "The first cause [God] is the prime mover in every action so that the second cause [creation] cannot move unless it is moved, nor act unless acted upon by the first. Otherwise it would be the principle of its own motion and so would not longer but the second cause, but the first." Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol 1, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, (1696; reprint, Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992), 507, (page citations are to the reprint edition).

does not explicitly teach other important doctrines either. Neither the Trinity nor the Protestant

canon is explicitly revealed in Scripture, yet conservative evangelicals universally accept them

because they believe that the sum total of the Bible's teaching is most adequately explained and

preserved by the doctrines of the Trinity and the canon. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with

affirming a theological construction not explicitly taught in the Bible as long as the textual

evidence as a whole warrants it. Divine determinism has proven to be a powerful unifying

explanation of the Scriptural data about God's control of creation.[21] One other thing ought to be

mentioned before moving forward. Divine determinism should not be confused with naturalistic

determinism, which sees natural causes behind every event. Unlike naturalistic determinism,

divine determinism says that while "natural" causes are behind created events, "spiritual" causes

(such as angelic beings, the human soul, and ultimately God) are behind them as well.

**Compatibilistic Freedom of Human Agents**

If divine determinism is true, then some serious questions arise about the nature of

human freedom. How are human beings free if every human choice is causally determined? Most

people would agree that freedom is a necessary precondition of responsibility; so, the answer to

the above question has much to say about whether or not people can be held responsible for the

things they do.[22] Therefore, this is no idle philosophical speculation.

Those who affirm that divine determinism and human freedom are compatible are

called "compatibilists," while those who deny that divine determinism and human freedom are

compatible are called "incompatibilists." Incompatibilists argue that human beings possess

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[21] Because of its controversial nature, however, whoever holds divine determinism should do so tentatively with a willingness to be corrected by Scripture or sound reason. This seems to be the right attitude about any proposed retroductive (or abductive) theological conclusion.

[22] Helpful discussions of this category of questions are found in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 327-331.

"libertarian freedom" rather than "compatibilistic freedom." However, libertarian freedom should be rejected because of its profound incoherence.[23] Libertarianism's central point of confusion is found in its insistence that a person's choice is only free when he can choose between mutually exclusive choices "A" and "B" without being causally determined to choose "A" or "B."[24] It says that when a person chooses "A" over "B" he has reasons to choose "A" over "B," but it also says that the reasons a person might choose "A" over "B" are the exact same set of reasons he might choose "B" over "A." How can exactly the same set of reasons explain both choices? This is the absurdity. Libertarianism is fundamentally nonsensical because if a set of reasons explains choice "A," then the same set of reasons cannot also be a viable explanation for choice "B."[25] But, libertarianism is forced to say this because the alternative would be to affirm that choices are made apart from reason, and that would be unacceptable to libertarians because it would imply libertarian choices are unreasonable.

If libertarian freedom is an unacceptable notion of freedom, then is there a better one? To answer that question, we need to look carefully at Scripture. Luke 6:45 says, "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure

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[23] John Frame submits eighteen points of incoherence. 1) Sovereignty is incompatible with libertarianism, 2) the Bible does not teach that human beings have libertarian freedom, 3) Scripture never grounds responsibility in human freedom, 4) God places no value on libertarian freedom, 5) in heaven, we will not have libertarian freedom, 6) Scripture never judges anyone's conduct on the basis of libertarian freedom, 7) Scripture condemns some acts that are not libertarianly free, 8) in civil courts, libertarian freedom is never a condition of moral responsibility, 9) civil courts assume that criminal conduct arises from motives, 10) Scripture denies that only uncaused choices are responsible, 11) Scripture denies we have the independence of libertarian freedom, 12) libertarianism violate the biblical teaching about human personality, 13) God does not have libertarian freedom, 14) libertarianism is an abstraction of the principle that inability limits responsibility, 15) libertarianism is inconsistent with divine foreordination and foreknowledge, 16) libertarians often make libertarianism a non-negotiable, central truth, 17) libertarians often appeal to philosophy to establish their doctrine, 18) if libertarianism is true, then God has limited sovereignty. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 139-145.

[24] For contemporary accounts of libertarian freedom, see the writings of William Lane Craig, Thomas Flint, and Alvin Plantinga.

[25] Libertarian freedom also seems inconsistent with the Westminster Standards (WCF 5:1, 4) and the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (LBC 5:1, 4).

produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." This verse teaches that

our hearts determine what our mouths say. Character determines choice. John Frame says that the

biblical notion of freedom means that you have "the freedom to do what you want to do."[26] This

form of freedom is "compatible" with divine determinism and responsibility; therefore, it is called

"compatibilism." Compatibilism is the notion that says the will is determined to "choose

according to its highest inclination at any given moment" and that the agent is free and responsible

for his choice as long as he is not "compelled" against his character. Of divine determination and

human responsibility John Calvin said, "Thieves and murderers 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."[27] Thus, Calvin affirmed that God's determination of human evil and human responsibility

for evil are compatible.

Compatibilism adequately explains the mechanism of human choice; nevertheless, some

compatibilistic choices are neither free nor responsible. A compatibilistic choice is only free and

responsible if it is informed by knowledge, controlled by the agent's character, and therefore made

without compulsion.[28] Compatibilistic choices that are "compelled" are not free and responsible.

But, exactly what does "compulsion" mean? "Compulsion" needs to be defined carefully because

it does not mean, "cause." In a determinist system, all compatibilistic choices are "caused," but

not all are "compelled." To understand compulsion, it is necessary to see that a person may be

compelled either externally or internally. External compulsion occurs when one agent "physically

forces another" agent to act. If someone were bound, gagged, and dragged to another location,

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[26] Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 136.

[27] Calvin, *Inst*. 1.17.5 (trans. Battles, LCC 216-217).

[28] Paul Helm, *The Providence of God*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 185.

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then he was compelled to go there. People who are externally compelled are not responsible for the acts they perform while under compulsion. Internal compulsion has to do with the manipulation of an agent's desires. Hypnotism, drugs, and other sorts of internal manipulation are forms of "internal compulsion."[29] An agent who was internally compelled by manipulation would still be determined to "choose according to his strongest inclination at the moment," which is the definition of compatibilism. But, his actions would not come from his character and so his responsibility would be diminished. People retain limited responsibility, for things they do when internally compelled, but incur full responsibility for freely placing themselves in situations whereby they might be vulnerable to internal or external compulsion in the first place. A compatibilistic choice is only totally free and responsible if it is free from compulsion.

But, does the Bible teach that human beings are free and responsible even when God causally determines their choices apart from compulsion? Though philosophers have debated this issue for ages, Scripture must settle the question for the Christian. Thus, we turn to six examples from God's Word.

First, God caused Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery, yet the brothers were guilty of sin (Genesis 45:4-8 and 50:20). Genesis forty-five records Joseph's revelation of his true identity to his brothers. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom *you sold* into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves *because you sold me here, because God sent me* before you to preserve your life" (Gen 45:4-5, emphasis mine). Joseph's brothers sold him into Egypt, yet Joseph declares that God is the one who sent him to Egypt. "And *God sent me* before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So *it was not you who sent me here, but God*" (Gen 45:8, emphasis mine). Joseph plainly says that his brothers did not send him to Egypt. God did. Nevertheless, Joseph's brothers were morally

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[29] Ibid., 185-189.

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blameworthy for selling their brother.  Genesis 50:20 says, "As for you, *you meant evil* against me, but God meant it for good."  So Joseph went to Egypt both because his brothers sold him there and because God determined it.  Yet, his brothers appear to retain full responsibility for their immoral deed.  This is compatibilism.

Second, God hardened Pharaoh's heart and then punished him for it.  In Exodus 7:2-4, God told Moses of His plan to command Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery and of His plan to harden Pharaoh's heart, which would make it impossible for Pharaoh to obey the command.  After God hardened Pharaoh's heart, He punished him for refusing to obey.  "Tell Pharaoh to *let the people of Israel go* out of his land.  But *I will harden Pharaoh's heart. . .* Then I will lay My hand on Egypt . . . by great acts of *judgment*" (Exod 7:2-4, emphasis mine).  Now, it is true that the text later says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, but that only happened after God first announced His plan to harden Pharaoh's heart.  God caused Pharaoh to harden his heart, and Pharaoh was responsible for his actions.  God hardened Pharaoh purposely and explained His purpose for doing it.  "I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants *in order that I may show these signs of Mine among them*" (Exod 10:1, emphasis mine).  These "signs" were "signs" of judgment.  He caused Pharaoh's stubbornness in order to display His own power and yet Pharaoh was totally blameworthy.

Third, God caused the Assyrians to conquer Northern Israel, and He punished them for doing it.  The Assyrians are called the "rod" of God's anger (Isa 10:5) that he "sends," (Isa 10:6) and "commands" (Isa 10:6) to destroy Israel.  But, Assyria "does not so intend and his heart does not so think" (Isa 10:7).  That is, the Assyrians had no idea that God was working through them.  After the Assyrians finished destroying Israel, the text says, "the Lord has finished all his work" (Isa 10:12), and "he will punish" (Isa 10:12) Assyria.  Assyria's boasting angered God because

their success was due to God alone.  "Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it?" (Isa 10:15).  Assyria was an instrument of God in the destruction of Israel, yet God punished Assyria for her sin in destroying Israel.

Fourth, God sent the Babylonians against Judah to conquer her and to take her into captivity, but then God punished Babylon for what He caused them to do.  God told Judah, "I will send for all the tribes of the North, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, *my servant*, and I will bring them against this land." (Jer 25:9, emphasis mine).  "Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation" (Jer 25:12).  So, we find another clear example of the same.  God determined that Babylon would capture Judah, and then God punished Babylon for what He made her do.

Fifth, in the New Testament God determined that Judas would betray Jesus and yet Judas was responsible for what he did to Christ.  Jesus said, "But behold, the hand of him who betrays Me is with Me on the table. For the Son of Man *goes as it has been determined*, *but woe*, to that man by whom He is betrayed" (Luke 22:21-22, cf. Matt 26:24; Mark 14:21, emphasis mine).  The term "woe," is a prophetic oracle of judgment and doom.  Jesus' point was that His betrayal was divinely determined, but that His betrayer was nevertheless to be judged for it.

Sixth, the crucifixion of Christ was divinely determined, but those who crucified Him were guilty of murdering the Savior.  Acts 2:23 says, "this *Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge, of God*, you crucified and killed by the *hands of lawless men*" (emphasis mine).  Those who killed Christ were responsible for their lawlessness even though it was part of God's plan.  Similarly, Acts 4:27-28 says, "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, to do whatever y*our hand and your plan had*

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*predestined to take place*" (emphasis mine).  It is a sin to kill the Lord's anointed, yet those who sinned in that manner were doing exactly what God's own hand had predestined to take place.  So, here again, the Bible teaches that divine determinism and human responsibility are compatible.

Only compatibilism makes sense of what the Bible teaches about divine determination and human freedom and responsibility.  God determines human choices, but human beings are responsible for them.  Compatibilism explains how this is possible.  Other options are both incoherent and inconsistent with the biblical data about divine providence and human activity.[30]  Therefore, compatibilism should be adopted as the biblical model of human freedom and responsibility.

**Divine Knowledge**

Some advocates of libertarian freedom known as Openness theologians are saying what Calvinists have said all along.  They rightly admit that God cannot foreknow or control a libertarianly free choice.[31]  Nevertheless, Openness theologians continue to hold libertarian freedom.  They believe that since human beings have libertarian freedom, God does not know any of the specific future choices they will make.  This doctrine is at odds with the Bible,[32] and leads to biblically untenable conclusions.[33]  Contrary to Open Theism, the Bible teaches that God possesses exhaustive definite foreknowledge of the future choices of free human agents (Isa 40-48; Psa 139).  According to Scripture, God knows the future because He determines the future.  "I have spoken

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[30] Indeed, compatibilism not only makes sense of the Bible's teaching about providence, but also of human nature, salvation, and perseverance.  Compatibilism alone can account for the doctrine of inerrancy.  Unless God determines human choices in minute detail, an inerrant Bible would be impossible.

[31] Gregory A. Boyd, *God of The* Possible (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 5-169. Other major advocates of this position include Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, and William Hasker.  Recently, the Evangelical Theological Society voted not to expel Sanders and Pinnock even though the appointed committee determined that the views of Sanders are inconsistent with the doctrine of inerrancy.

[32] Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 1-230.

[33] Bruce A. Ware, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Theologically: Is Open Theism Evangelical?," *JETS* 45 (June 2002): 193-212.

(decreed the future) and I will bring it to pass (do the future); I have purposed, and I will do it."

(Isa 46:11). That is, God knows what will come to pass because He decreed the future and will

causally determine what the future will be. But, it has already been shown that God can only

determine the future choices of free agents if they have compatibilistic freedom, which alone is

consistent with divine determinism. Therefore, belief in the biblical doctrine of divine

foreknowledge and human freedom is only consistent if one holds compatibilistic freedom.

**Responses to Two Objections to the Calvinist Model**

The apostle Paul anticipated two objections to the doctrine of unconditional election,

which also relate more broadly to the doctrine of divine providence. The first is that God is unjust

to determine unconditionally who will be saved and who will not be saved (Rom 9:14). The

second is that God cannot hold men responsible for what He has determined them to do (Rom

9:19). So, the first objection is about God's responsibility. Is not God responsible (unjust) for

determining who will not be saved? The second objection is about the responsibility of human

beings. How can God hold men responsible when they are simply doing what God Himself wills?

The second question is easier; so, it will be answered first.

**Why are people responsible for the moral evil God determines them to do?** In the

preceding discussion, it has already been demonstrated that the Bible teaches both divine

determinism and human responsibility; so, we must ultimately rest there. In Romans nine, Paul

quickly responds to the question without giving a satisfying philosophical or theological answer.

Instead, he appeals to God's sovereignty and to the Creator/creature distinction. "But who are you

O man to answer back to God" (Rom 9:20)? God can do as He pleases with His creation. That is

a wholly sufficient answer. Another thing can be remembered in these discussions as well.

Human beings are held responsible when they do moral evil because they do it willingly. No one

forces a sinner to sin. People sin because they want to sin. They sin freely from their hearts and in a way that is consistent with their characters. God never "compels" anyone to sin against his will. By definition, sin is never committed under "compulsion" because sin is only sin if it is an expression of the heart. Therefore, God is just to hold people responsible for the sins they commit. If this does not satisfy, then consider the alternative – libertarian freedom. Does that really solve the problem? The question can be turned back on the libertarian. If people sin from libertarian, contra-causal, indeterminate freedom, then how can they be held responsible? A choice of that nature ultimately would be uncontrollable. A person with libertarian freedom could choose to sin against character, spontaneously, and apart from any sufficient, self-determining reason. A person with libertarian freedom might rightly object on Judgment Day, "But Lord, my libertarian free will sometimes chose to do things inconsistent with my character. I wish my character determined my will, but it is indeterminate! Even I cannot determine it. Please do not hold me responsible for what it made me do." No, God holds us responsible for sin because we sin self-determinately and with compatibilistic freedom, which always chooses according to our strongest inclination at the moment.

**Why is God not responsible for determining morally evil choices in human beings?** This question is a bit more difficult than the first. It is the Calvinist's "problem of evil," and in a sense, it is more difficult than the Arminian's "problem of evil" because Calvinism attributes moral evil to God's all determining decree. Berkhof says, "The decree includes whatsoever comes to pass in the world, whether it be in the physical or in the moral realm, whether it be good or evil."[34] Many believe that the Calvinist model makes God the "author of sin," but all classical and orthodox Calvinists utterly deny that.[35] In order to show that God is not morally blameworthy by

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[34] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 105.

[35] See *The Westminster Confession of Faith* 3:1 and *The Second London Baptist Confession* 3:1.

His decree of moral evil, three things must be demonstrated: God's motive must be good, His acts must be good; and His goals must be good.[36] Calvinists in general have offered a number of solutions to the problem of evil,[37] but in the author's opinion, the best one comes in three parts. First, God is not morally to blame for the morally evil acts of human beings because *God does not directly cause human beings to do moral evil.* This is why God's actions in relation to moral evil are not themselves evil. Second, the moral *evil that exists is necessary to God's greater glory*, which is God's upright motive and goal. Third, there is a discussion of the fact that even for God, the "ends" (the glory of God) do not "justify the means" (indirect determination of human moral evil).

To begin, God is not responsible for the existence of moral evil because God does not cause it directly. The distinction between primary and secondary causes is essential because Scripture plainly teaches it. This is what James is getting at when he says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one" (Jas 1:13). God never tempts anyone directly, but the Bible says He may purposefully allow an evil spirit to do it (1 Kgs 22:21-23). Also, Psalm 5:4 says, "For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you." God cannot "do" evil, and does not delight in evil. So, while the Bible shows that God is the remote (distant and primary) cause of evil, He is never its proximate (near) cause.[38] God is the first cause of all that comes to pass, but He never directly plants evil thoughts or intents into the minds and hearts of human beings.

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[36] According to David Clyde Jones, who claims to stand in the ethical tradition of Augustine, Calvin, and Edwards, an act is morally praiseworthy on these three grounds. See David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 11.

[37] Helm, *Providence*, 168-183.

[38] Ibid., 178-179. Helm cites a passage written by John Calvin in which he uses the terminology of "proximate" and "remote."

Now we can apply this to the question about whether God is the "author of sin." There are two senses in which God is not the "author" of sin. First, God does not sin. That is, God is not a sinner and all of His actions are morally upright. Second, God is not the agent of sin; that is, He is only the remote cause of sin and not the proximate cause. Human beings are tempted by Satan and by their own sinful natures, but never proximately (or directly) by God. Wayne Grudem offers a helpful analogy to illustrate this point. God is like the author of a play and human beings are like the characters. Grudem says:

> In the Shakespearean play *Macbeth*, the character Macbeth murders King Duncan. . . . the question may be asked, 'who killed King Duncan?' On one level, the correct answer is 'Macbeth.' Within the context of the play he carried out the murder and is rightly to blame for it. But on another level, a correct answer to the question, 'Who killed King Duncan?' would be "William Shakespeare": he wrote the play, he created all the characters in it, and he wrote the part where Macbeth killed King Duncan.[39]

Though the cause of King Duncan's death may rightly be attributed either to Shakespeare or to Macbeth, the moral culpability belongs to Macbeth alone and not to Shakespeare. No analogy is perfect and this one is no exception, but it does illustrate that it might be possible for God to determine an agent's sinful action, maintain the agent's responsibility, and remain blameless Himself.

But, how could God determine sinful, morally evil events, such that they were certain in the decree, without being their direct cause? How could God be the "indirect cause" of moral evil? One possible answer to this "how" question is available in the doctrine of "middle knowledge." Molinists are usually soteriological Arminians who believe in libertarian freedom.[40] However, though middle knowledge is completely inconsistent with libertarian freedom,[41] it can

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[39] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 321.
[40] William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 127-151; Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 169-180.

[41] The Molinist version of middle knowledge contains an implicit (if not explicit) contradiction. It says that while circumstances do not determine what a libertarianly free choice would be, circumstances do determine God's

work with compatibilistic freedom.[42]  What is middle knowledge?  To answer that question, we

need to understand three categories of divine knowledge.  First, necessary knowledge (or natural

knowledge) includes God's knowledge of Himself, of all logically necessary truths, and of all

possible worlds.  Second, free knowledge is what God knows will come to pass in the future.

Third, middle knowledge falls logically between these two (in the middle) and is God's knowledge

of what a person *would* choose in each possible world (circumstance).  The Bible teaches that God

has middle knowledge (Matt 11:21; 1 Cor 2:8).  Its usefulness lies in the fact that God knew from

eternity what a person would choose in any circumstance.  Based on that knowledge, He chose

which circumstance to instantiate in order to determine what a person will choose in the future

without directly causing the choice.[43]

Hence, middle knowledge provides a conceptual framework by which a Calvinist could

seriously advocate a form of divine "permission."  When the Calvinist says that God "permits"

moral evil, he means that God lets a choice come to pass that He knew would come to pass, given

a set of specific circumstances over which He has total control.  "Permission" in the Calvinist

model means that God lets something happen that He could have prevented, but that He

intentionally permitted.  When we sin, we sin because God permits us to sin, not because He

directly causes us to sin.  Classical Calvinism has always affirmed that God knows all

possibilities, but Reformed theologians have not explicitly used the category of middle

knowledge.  However, it could be argued that the doctrine is implied in their theology of "second

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knowledge of what a libertarianly free choice would be.

[42] Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in The World?* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 289-336.

[43] I am not at all convinced that middle knowledge is a necessary category.  Classical Reformed theology readily admits that God knows what a free creature would do in any circumstance, but it includes this divine knowledge in the category of necessary knowledge.  Necessary knowledge is God's knowledge of "all possible worlds."  God's knowledge of what a human being "would" choose in any given circumstance is a subcategory of God's knowledge of each possible world, since what a human would choose is a part of each possible world.

causes." Middle knowledge, as it is defined here, merely explains "how" God might use His knowledge of what divinely determined creatures would do.

In middle knowledge, God's relationship to good and evil is asymmetrical because He does not stand behind evil in the same way He stands behind good. Goodness is expressive of God's character while evil is permissive. Evil itself does not express the character of God because God's character is only and always good. Psalm 5:4 says, "For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you." To say that evil expresses God's character is blasphemy.[44]

That God is only the remote cause of evil via middle knowledge does not entirely solve the dilemma, however. How could it be morally right for God to determine evil in any sense, whether directly or indirectly? It would never be right for one human being to determine another human being to do evil. If a king ordered a member of his secret service to murder one of his subjects, does the fact that the king is the "remote" cause of the murder alleviate him of all responsibility? This is exactly how David killed Uriah, and He was wrong to do it. Perhaps the king just sets up circumstances so that one of his secret service agents gets the idea to murder one of the king's subjects. Does this alleviate the king of responsibility? Surely it does not because the king still purposed and willed the murder of another person.

Another reason God is not guilty for permissively determining moral evil is that God's ultimate goal in permitting evil is to achieve the greatest possible good. But what is the greatest good? It is the glory of God, of course. The moral evil that exists in this world is necessary to God's greater glory, which is God's upright motive and goal. God's purpose in creation is to display His own glory (Isa 43:7), and that purpose is only achievable by means of evil. Now, we

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[44] Much of the information in the last three paragraphs comes from classroom lectures by Dr. Ware. Bruce A. Ware, "Middle Knowledge Calvinism," (classroom lecture, 27340—*Models of Divine Providence*, Fall 2003).

must be careful here because the fact that the evil in the world is "necessary" does not mean God

"needs" evil.  God forbid that conclusion.  Rather it means that evil is a necessary factor in order

to achieve the purpose for which God designed creation – the display of all His holy character.  If

that were not the purpose of creation (which could never be), then evil would not be necessary.

But the fact is, the divine attributes of mercy, grace, and retributive wrath[45] may only be displayed

in the face of moral evil.  So, it stands to reason that God permissively determined moral evil in

order to show forth the fullness of His character in righteous mercy, grace, and wrath on earth, and

in heaven and hell for all eternity.  The Bible says, "What if God, desiring to _show his wrath_ and

to _make known His power_, has endured with much patience, vessels of wrath _prepared for_

_destruction_, in order to _make known the riches of His glory_ for vessels of _mercy_, which He has

_prepared beforehand for glory_" (Rom 9:22-23, emphasis mine).

But still, this is not a fully adequate solution because it suggests that God's morally

upright "ends" justify Him in permissively determining moral evil.  Do the ends (the glory of God)

justify the means (divine determination of moral evil)?  They do not.  To return to our analogy,

even if the king had a good purpose in arranging circumstances so that one of his secret service

agents would murder one of his subjects, he still would not be justified because the king sought to

achieve a moral end by an immoral means – inducing one human being to murder another.  What

is the solution?  It is found in Scripture.  Not only is God's goal righteous (the glory of God), but

all of God's acts are righteous too (divine determination of moral evil), and none of His acts is

immoral in the slightest sense (Gen 18:25; Deut 32:4; Ps 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; etc.).  The Bible is

overflowing with statements to this effect.  But how can God permissively determine a human

being to do moral evil and still remain blameless Himself?  At this point, we must admit a great

mystery, but there is an answer, even though it may not satisfy everyone.  Paul responds to the

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[45] Sometimes called "conditional attributes" because they only function on the condition of sin's existence.

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question by appealing to the Creator/creature distinction (Rom 9:14-21).

For both God and human beings, morally upright actions are determined by what honors God the most. In that sense, ethics for God and ethics for human beings are the same. God's perfect and immutable character governs and declares the specific actions that are right both for God and human beings. All ethical norms, for God and human beings, are rooted in God's character. But, perhaps, the way the Creator is right to honor Himself is not identical to the way a creature is right to honor the Creator. While it would be immoral for a creature permissively to induce another creature to do moral evil, apparently, at times God may permissively induce a creature to do moral evil without Himself sinning, and at the times He does determine moral evil in that way, He is righteous to do so. That is the answer. This is not the *ex lex* argument, which says God is "outside the law."[46] Instead, this argument says that what is morally right for God is not always exactly the same thing that is morally right for human beings, even though both God and human beings must do what is right in order to be morally praiseworthy.[47] God is right to take life (Deut 32:39). We are not. God is right to take property (1 Sam 2:7). We are not. God is right permissively to determine certain moral evils (Isa 45:7). We are not. God is God and we are not (Rom 9:20). He is right to do things that we have no right to do.[48] Surely this understanding of God's action in relation to moral evil cannot be fundamentally objectionable because the basic

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[46] For a version of the *ex lex* argument, see Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* (Hobbs: Trinity, 1995), 240-242.

[47] It bears repeating that what is "right" for God and human beings is determined by God's character. The ethical norms for God and human beings are not arbitrary.

[48] Jonathan Edwards argued that "benevolence to being in general" is the ground of moral praiseworthiness. But, the way a creature loves "being in general" is not the same as the way the Creator loves "being in general." The creature delights in the delight of the Creator in the Creator and the Creator delights in His own delight along with the delight of His creatures in Him. So, from Jonathan Edwards starting point, it might be reasoned that "benevolence to being in general" demands one set of specific acts from created image bearers (moral law; Decalogue, Rom 2:15) and another set of specific acts from the Creator. See Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 1 (Great Britain, 1834; reprint, Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000), 122-140, (page citations are to the reprint edition).

idea seems axiomatic.

## Practical Applications

The only right immediate response to the doctrine of providence is worship. "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor? Or who has given a gift to Him that he might be repaid? For from Him and through Him, and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen." (Rom. 11:33-36). Our God is a God of immense power, knowledge, goodness, and glory; therefore, we owe Him all praise, adoration and obedience.

The biblical doctrine of providence is a motive to make progress in sanctification. Since every created event has a cause, Christians ought to fill their lives with influences that tend to produce godly character. We should saturate our minds with Scripture, pray fervently without ceasing, and listen attentively to the preached Word of God. We must not forsake the public worship, but actively participate in the Christian community, being diligent to honor our covenant with God and with the church of Christ. Most of all, the primary motive of love for God and joy in Him must always be in our minds; that is, the person of Jesus Christ in His work past, present and future. The Bible says, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling, *because* it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13, emphasis mine).

Providence is a motive to persevere in marriage, child rearing, and work relationships. While the doctrine of providence implies that we can influence other people, it teaches that we cannot control the hearts of others; therefore, it is not our responsibility to change them. Our responsibility is to live obediently, loving God, loving others, dying to our selfishness, and seeking our joy and the joy of others in Christ. Then, we simply trust the Lord to bring about the outcome

that will glorify Him the most and serve to make us more like Christ. How long should men and women love and bear with their spouses? They must continue until death, just as Christ died for the church, His bride. How long should parents faithfully love and train a rebellious child? They must continue until death, just as Christ laid down His life for His children. Employees are called to love and submit to unjust and unkind employers, looking for every opportunity to live and speak the gospel of Christ, and knowing that God sovereignly controls every circumstance.

Finally, the doctrine of providence is a powerful motive to preach, speak, relate, write, and live boldly without fear. God causes all things to work for the good of His people, and there is no possibility He will fail to reach His goal. "If God is for us, who can be against us" (Rom 8:31)? "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim 1:7). There is no reason to fear men because they are only able to kill the body, but God can punish the soul in hell. Therefore, Christians should be emboldened by God's gracious and loving providence to be more like Christ, even as the world stands against them.

## Conclusion

When all the data of Scripture is taken into account, a Calvinist model of divine providence seems best to order all the biblical information in such a way that none of it is distorted. To sum up, the Calvinist model says that God exercises meticulous control over all creation and that He directs all of it to display the full range of His own glorious character, which is most remarkably manifest in the Lord Jesus Christ. The only right response to this biblical teaching is worship, love, and obedience to the God who owns and controls creation.