**Systematic Biblical Truth
Providence and the Decree of God**

I. Explanation and Scriptural Basis.

 A. Definition: *God’s decree is His eternal plan, whereby, according to His decretive will
 and for His glory, He foreordained everything that comes to pass.*

 B. God is not only the creator, but He preserves and governs everything in the universe
 as well.

 1. God’s “providence”—summarizes God’s ongoing relationship with His
 creation (how He preserves and governs).

 a. God is actively related to and involved in creation at each moment.

 b. God keeps all things in existence and maintains the properties with which
 He created them.

 c. Cooperates in every created thing in every action, directing their distinct
 properties to cause them to act as they do.

 d. Directs them to fulfill His purpose.

II. Four errors in thinking about God’s relationship with creation.

 A. *Deism*—God created the world then abandoned it.

 B. *Pantheism*—Creation does not have a real, distinct existence in itself, but is only part
 of God.

 C. *Chance—*randomness: all of creation exists and evolved through random chance
 (evolution).

III. Details:

 A. Preservation: *God keeps all things in existence and maintains the properties with
 which He created them.*

 1. Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:17.

Hebrews 1:3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Colossians 1:17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

 2. If Christ ceased to exist, all things would cease to exist.

 a. God gives us each breath every moment: Job 34:14-15; Psalm 104:29

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

Psalm 104:29 You hide Your face they are dismayed, You take away Your spirit, they expire and return to dust.

 b. God’s providence provides the basis for science: God has made and
 continues to sustain a universe that acts in observable and predictive ways.

 B. Concurrence: *Cooperates in every created thing in every action, directing their
 distinct properties to cause them to act as they do.*

 1. God accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians
 1:11).

Ephesians 1:11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things to the council of His will.

 a. *Inanimate Creation*—We think of “natural occurrences” yet God causes
 them to happen: Psalm 148:8; Psalm 135:6-7; Psalm 104:14.

Psalm 148:8 Fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy winds, fulfilling His word…

Psalm 135:6-7 Whatever the Lord pleases He does in Heaven and in earth, in the seas and all the deeps, He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. Who makes lightenings for the rain. Who brings forth the wind from His treasuries.

Psalm 104:14 He causes the grass to grow for the cattle and the vegetaion for the labor of man, so that they may bring forth food from the earth.

 b. *Animals*—God takes care of the animals: Psalm 104:27-29; Mathew 6:26.

Psalm 104:27-29 They all wait for You to give them food in due season, you give to them they gather up. You open Your hand they are satisfied with good. You hide Your face they are dismayed; You take away Your spirit they expire and return to the dust.

Matthew 6:26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and YET, your heavenly Father feeds them….

 c. *Random and chance events*—The flipping of a coin seems random, but
 even the outcome is an event from God (casting lots: Proverbs 16:33).

Proverbs 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

 d. Events caused by God and by the creature as well (us)—God causes rain.
 God causes the grass to grow. Events are 100% caused by God and 100%
 caused by the creature as well.

 e. The affairs of nations—Job 12:23; Psalm 22:28; Acts 17:26; Daniel 4:34-
 35.

Job 12:23 He makes the nations great, then destroys them, He enlarges the nations then leads them away.

Psalm 22:28 For the kingdom is the Lords and He rules over the nations.

Acts 17:26 and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.

Daniel 4:34-35 But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzer, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me and 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. 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?”

 f. All aspects of our lives—Matthew 6:11; Psalm 139:16; Job 14:5.

Matthew 6:11 Give us this day our daily bread…

Psalm 139:16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.

Job 14:5 (speaking of man in geral, but also of himself) Since his days are determined, the number of his months is with You; and his limits You have set so that he cannot pass.

 -- Success and failure come from God: Psalm 75:6-7; Luke 1:52; 1
 Corinthians 4:7.

Psalm 75:6-7 For not from the east , nor from the west, nor from the desert comes exaltation, But God is the judge, He puts down one and exalts the other.

Luke 1:52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and exalted those who are humble.

1 Corinthians 4:7 For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

 -- All of our talents and abilities are from God: 1 Corinthians 4:7; Psalm
 18:34.

 2. Human involvement.

 a. We “cause” events to happen: We are significant and we are responsible.

 b. We have real choices that have real consequences: God has endowed us
 with the property of willing choice.
 c. The great mystery: *God causes all things that happen, but that He does so
 in such a way that He somehow upholds our ability to make willing,
 responsible choices, choices that have real and eternal results, and for
 which we are held accountable.*

Analogy: Macbeth—Macbeth the character kills King Duncan. The question could be asked, “who killed King Duncan?”, Macbeth or William Shakespeare? On one level, the correct answer is Macbeth. Within the context of the play he carried out the murder and is rightly blamed 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 the king. On the one level, Macbeth was 100% responsible for the killing of King Duncan, on the other level, Shakespeare was 100% responsible.

In one sense, we are saying that God causes us to make willful choices.

 C. What about evil? If God does cause, through His providential activity, everything that
 comes about in the world, what is the relationship between God and evil in the world?
 Does God cause the evil that humans do?

 1. God does cause evil events to come about and evil deeds done ( nowhere in
 Scripture does it show God as being directly doing anything evil, but rather as
 bringing about evil deeds through the willing actions of moral creatures).

 a. Classic illustration—Joseph and his brothers: Genesis 37; Genesis 45:5;
 Genesis 50:20.

 -- The exodus and Pharaoh: Exodus 4:21; 7:3:10 :20; 10:27. See the
 purpose for this as told by Paul Romans 9:17.

 -- David’s sin and the prophet Nathan: 2nd Samuel 12:11-18; 16:22.

 -- Isaiah 45:7; 63:17.

 2. Analysis of God and evil.

 a. God uses all things to fulfill His purposes and even uses evil for His glory
 and our good.

 -- Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20; Proverbs 16:4.

 b. God never does evil and is to never be blamed for evil.

 -- Mathew 18:7.

 c. God rightfully blames and judges moral creatures for the evil they do.

 -- Isaiah 66:3-4

 -- Ecclesiastes 7:29

 d. Evil is real, not an illusion, and we should never do evil, for it will always
 harm us and others.

 -- Matthew 6:13

 D. Are we free? Do we have free will?

 1. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that we can be free in the sense of being out of
 God’s control.

 2. Yet—we make free willing choices with real effects.

IV. The decrees of God.

 A. Definition—*The decrees of God are the eternal plans of God whereby, before the
 creation of the world, he determined to bring about everything that happens.*

 1. Similar to His providence, but here we are thinking about God’s decisions
 *before* the world was created, rather than His providential actions in time.
 God’s providential actions are the outworking of the eternal decrees that He
 made long ago.

 a. Psalm 139:16; Job 14:5; Acts 2:23.

V. The importance of our human actions.

 A. We are still responsible for our actions.

 1. We should never think that “God made me do evil and therefore I am not
 responsible for it.

 a. (Genesis 3:12) Adam began to make excuses for the very first sin—”*The
 woman whom You gave me…”*

 b. Romans 9:19-20.

 B. Our actions have real results and do change the course of events.

 1. God has *ordained* events will come about *by our causing them.*

 2. We do not know what God has planned for the rest of this day, or for next
 week/year/decade, but we *do* know that if we trust God and obey Him, we will
 discover that He has planned *good things* to come about.

 C. Prayer is one specific kind of action that has definite results and that does change the
 course of events.

 1. James 4:2; John 16:24.

 D. No one can understand this doctrine fully!

 E. There is no such thing as “luck” or “chance”.

 1. All things happen because of God’s decreed will and His providence. This
 should take superstition out of the equation in your life!

VI. Creation.

 A. Definition—*God’s work by His Word and for His glory in creating the universe out
 of nothing so that the original condition was without spiritual or physical
 corruption.*

 B. The universe and time had a beginning—Genesis 1:1.

 C. Creation was rapid and out of nothing—God is the only cause of the universe.