Providence Paper

Assignment 5-1 for ST5534 Systematic Theology 1

Jarret Hutchison

The topic of providence has been one I have thought much about in my life, as I am sure many do. I grew up with a very Calvinistic view that God is in total control but I have heard convincing arguments for both sides. Many of my views align with a softer determinists viewpoint so I wouldn’t say that I am really on the far end of the spectrum. All of this leads me to say that I strongly agree with Erickson and his view when he says “the specific sovereignty model seems to be able to deal with a wider scope of biblical teaching with less distortion than the other. Since the view of compatibilistic freedom is a viable option, the specific sovereignty model is tenable and preferable.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Providence is mainly seen as “general or specific” meaning God is either in total control or is in partial control over events. Erickson describes both of these in his chapter on God’s continuing work and says “the general providence view holds that God has general goals that he intends and actually attains, but that with respect to the specific details, he permits considerable variance, allowing for human choices. The specific providence view is that God ultimately decides even the details of his plan and ensures that they eventuate as he intends.”[[2]](#footnote-2) As I stated previously I tend to lean more on the side of specific providence but there are issues and problems that arise with this viewpoint like the issue of prayer. If God has established everything and how it will unfold then why pray? This is a very interesting question and one that I was not prepared to handle off the top of my head while reading. Erickson does however present a very compelling answer to this question on page 379 when he says, “thus, prayer does not change what he has purposed to do. It is the means by which he accomplishes his end. It is vital, then, that a prayer be uttered, for without it the desired result will not come to pass.”[[3]](#footnote-3) God chooses to use prayer as a vehicle to get things done and we are called to pray in scripture as it says in James 5:16 “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

God is working consistently through us and all around us, which is why we need to be aware of the way God is trying to interact with us. One thing that a Calvinistic viewpoint will cause Christians to have is a healthy view on prayer knowing the fact that if God is orchestrating everything and prayer is the means by which He works then we need to be praying. I believe that understanding a softer deterministic view that I described previously is essential in other ways as well. One other way this view effects Christians is it helps us trust in God and rely on Him in all things. If we truly understand that God is in control of all things and is actively working then we will be more willing to trust His guidance. I believe God wants us to know that He is active in our lives and that He wants to use us/work through us in all aspects of life not just ones that pertain to Church.

1. Christian Theology 3rd Edition, Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Christian Theology 3rd Edition, Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Christian Theology 3rd Edition, Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The MacArthur Study Bible, English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)