

I know of no living person I would rather hear unfold the majesty of God in providence than Bruce Ware. One reason is that I have come to trust his heart as well as his head. He is utterly unlike those whom Jesus chastised in Luke 11:46 with the words, “Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.” Bruce Ware has heavy things to say (that is the meaning of “glory”!); but his heart moves him to lift these weighty things with biblical and pastoral wisdom—not so that they become weightless (the curse of our breezy age), but so that they become wings. We find ourselves carried not burdened by the majesty of God in providence.

— JOHN PIPER

Pastor for Preaching, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis

One thing that the recent discussion about “open theism” has exposed is the need for evangelicals to have a better understanding of the Bible’s teaching about God’s providence. So Bruce Ware’s presentation of God’s holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing of all his creatures and all their actions is just what the doctor ordered. In *God’s Lesser Glory*, Dr. Ware exposed the deficiencies and dismantled the foundations of so-called “open theism” (a better name for which is “diminished theism”). Now, in *God’s Greater Glory*, he sets forth a positive biblical proposal for a robust doctrine of God’s sovereignty and providence in relation to human freedom and responsibility. Pastors, seminarians, and intelligent church members will all benefit from Ware’s clear and accessible articulation of a mind-bending but pastorally important subject. Rather than attempting to tame and limit the doctrine of God, as so many have done in our time, Ware is determined to let the Scriptures set the table for our understanding of God.

— J. LIGON DUNCAN III

Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi

This is a marvelous, spiritually refreshing, soul-enriching, peace-giving, joy-awakening book. It is a thoughtful analysis of a complex problem by a first-rate thinker who has understood the complex debates over God’s sovereignty and responsibility and has reached wise and reverent conclusions richly supported by Scripture. The author is aware of many other books but he is clearly subject to only one Book. I strongly recommend this volume.

— WAYNE GRUEDEM

*Research Professor of Bible and Theology
Phoenix Seminary*

Bruce Ware has done it again. In *God’s Lesser Glory*, Professor Ware set the record straight, confronting the claims of limited theism with the reality of the biblical doctrine of God. Now, in *God’s Greater Glory*, he points to the grandeur, majesty, and perfection of the God who revealed himself in the Bible. This brilliant defense of the doctrine of God, rich in historical and biblical documentation, belongs on the bookshelf of every pastor and Christian believer. This book is not only an exercise in faithful theology, reading it is also a devotional experience, as the reader encounters the glory of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Dr. Bruce Ware is one of the finest and most faithful theologians serving the church in this generation. With this book, he places us once again in his gracious debt.

—R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

GOD'S GREATER GLORY

The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith

BRUCE A. WARE

CROSSWAY BOOKS

A DIVISION OF
GOOD NEWS PUBLISHERS
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith

Copyright © 2004 by Bruce A. Ware

Published by Crossway Books
A division of Good News Publishers
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided by USA copyright law.

First printing 2004

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture references marked NASB are from the *New American Standard Bible*® Copyright © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ware, Bruce A., 1953-

God's greater glory : the exalted God of Scripture and the Christian faith / Bruce A. Ware.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-58134-443-0 (alk. paper)

1. Providence and government of God—Christianity. 2. Providence and government of God—Biblical teaching. 3. Open theism. I. Title.

BT135.W37 2004

231'.5—dc22

2004018926

VP 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface

Readers of my earlier book, *God's Lesser Glory* (Crossway, 2000), cannot help but notice the striking similarity and difference between the titles of this earlier work and the present volume. And of course, the similarity in the two titles—God's glory—only accentuates the fundamental difference between them; in open theism, the theological understanding critiqued by that earlier work, God's glory is cheapened and diminished, while in the view I present in this work, I believe that his glory is honored and exalted. This is my deep conviction, and I can only hope and pray that readers of both books will be compelled to the same conclusion.

Why does it matter? Certainly, the answer is not because I want people to agree with me and not with “them.” This isn't a popularity contest. This has nothing to do with personal ego or theological one-upmanship. What is at stake is neither political nor personal nor partisan, strictly speaking. Rather, my deep and abiding conviction is that what is at stake, most centrally, is what is announced in the titles of these two books themselves. Whether we behold, and believe, and adore, and trust, and honor, and love the true and living God, or whether we belittle, and distort, and minimize, and diminish God as we conceive him in order to magnify and enlarge and overextend the significance of “us”—this, at bottom, is what is at stake. In a culture saturated with the esteem of the “self” and marred by the decline of Deity, we stand in need of beholding God for who he is. We need desperately to be humbled and amazed at the infinite splendor of his unrivaled Greatness and the unspeakable wealth of his lavish Goodness. We must marvel at his blinding Glory and fall astonished at his benevolent Grace. If we are to escape the cult of self and find, instead, the true meaning of life and the path of true satisfaction, if we are to give God the glory rightly and exclusively owed to him—that is, if we are to know what truly promotes both our good and his glory—we must behold God for who he is. To this end both of these books are aimed. I present both, then, in full recognition that the only opinion of my work that matters ultimately is the one that will be given before a heavenly throne, and in light of that day, I offer both

my previous critique and now, my constructive proposal. To understand and portray God more fully as he is—this is my heart's longing and deepest desire.

Dear family members and friends have once again encouraged me greatly in the writing of this book. Nearly every phone call to my parents, Bill and Ruth Ware, included a question about how the book was coming and their never-failing pledge and promise, "We're praying for you every day in your writing." And in similar fashion, my wife's mother, Esther McClain, and my sister and her husband, Bonnie and Wayne Pickens, also told me of their regular prayers that God would accomplish his will in this writing. In that coming day before the heavenly throne of which I just spoke, no doubt much of any of the value that resides in this book will be shown to trace to these and other prayers. While our parents' physical strength declines with age, their strength of soul and fervency of prayer grow ever larger. How blessed I am, and how gracious God is.

My wife and my daughters also constantly supported me in my writing. No wife has ever been a greater encouragement for her husband than is my precious wife, Jodi. And no children have ever loved their heavenly and earthly fathers with such longing as do my precious daughters, Bethany and Rachel. I yearn for these three women in my life to know ever more fully the God whose character they display to me daily. I can only pray that to the extent that this book assists in knowing him better, they, above all others, will be enabled more fully to see him, and know him, and love him, and worship him.

Todd Miles and Rob Lister assisted both in research and critical evaluation of this work. Both are excellent doctoral students in theology who give me great hope that the vision of God presented here will live on to another generation. Members of my small group also prayed and supported me throughout the writing. My gratitude and love, then, are extended to Ken and Beth Aebersold, Bill and Mae Croft, Mark and Brenda Janke, John and Marilyn McAloon, and Chip and Doris Stam. Marvin Padgett and Bill Deckard of Crossway Books have worked hard to see this project to completion. The keen editorial eye that Mr. Deckard brings to his work has made this book better in a thousand places. And I owe a special debt of thanks to President R. Albert Mohler, Jr., and to the Board of Trustees of The Southern Baptist Theological

Seminary, where it is my great privilege to teach, for the generous sabbatical leave that granted time needed to complete this work.

Finally, I have sensed both the presence and the pleasure of God as I have written this book. For God's sustaining and strengthening grace, I am eternally grateful. I've been regularly humbled by the task of writing about God, but I've also been stirred at the joyous prospect of commending to others the One I love and adore. From the bottom of my heart and from the depths of my soul I express this, my prayer: May the God whose name is holy, who lives in a high and holy place, make himself known as the God he is. May his majesty and mercy, his greatness and goodness, his supremacy and sufficiency, be to those who see him aright their source of unending joy—for his eternal glory and our everlasting good. Amen.

Considering the Enduring Questions and Necessary Features of Divine Providence

THE CONTROL OF GOD AND THE COMFORT OF THE BELIEVER

What comfort, joy, and strength believers receive from the truths of divine providence. Nowhere else are we given such assurance that the One who perfectly knows the past, present, and future, the One whose wisdom can never be challenged or excelled, the One whose power reigns and accomplishes all that he wills, governs all the affairs of creation, fulfilling in all respects what he alone knows is good, wise, and best. What may seem to us as “accidents” are no such things in the universe governed by the providence of the true and living God. Prayers may be directed to this mighty and reigning King knowing that while he tenderly and compassionately hears the cries of his people, he “sits” in the unique position of knowing perfectly what is best and possessing unthwarted power to bring to pass what he wills. The world is not spinning out of control; in fact, not one atom or despot or demon acts in any respect to hinder the fulfillment of what God has eternally ordained. To know this God, and better to be known by him (Gal. 4:9a), is to enter into the security and confidence of a lifetime of trust in his never-failing arms.

I am writing at 35,000 feet, on a flight that I wondered seriously whether I would make. Oh, how I longed to get aboard this plane, since it would take me home after a week away. But when my previous flight left nearly an hour late, and since the airline’s representative told me that this, my connecting flight for home, was on time and wouldn’t wait for

our plane's late arrival, I began dreading a Saturday night in some unknown hotel instead of returning to the arms of my wife. And not only did I long to be home, but I also was scheduled to teach the first lesson in our church's high school and middle school combined classes the next morning. Now, I thought, I'll have to find a last-minute substitute and miss the opportunity to lay out the vision of the brief series on "relating to God" that I so wanted to share with our youth.

But knowing that God reigns over all, I prayed! "No matter what any airline's agent says, Lord, the fact is: you and you alone have ultimate control over what happens. If you choose, you can do something to ensure that I get on that flight home. I know you can! But if you choose for me to spend this night waiting, I'll accept this also from your good and wise hand. Bless Jodi tonight, if this happens, and please prepare the best person to teach in the morning," I prayed.

Jodi and Rachel (my wife and daughter at home) were also praying, and my how God did graciously answer. When my delayed flight arrived, I learned that my connecting flight—which, as I was told just one hour earlier, had been scheduled to leave on time—now also had been *delayed just long enough* for me to board. What had happened? In that hour, between when I was told it would leave on time and now when I boarded this delayed flight home, a "computer malfunction" occurred in Atlanta delaying several Delta flights nationwide by about a half hour, the gate attendant informed me. I smiled, looked heavenward, and gave praise to the God who reigns. Imagine that. Bringing about a computer glitch in order to answer the prayer of one of his tired and earnest children. What a God! And what providence is this!

Obviously, God does not always choose to answer such prayers in such a remarkable manner. But he does always reign over all that occurs, with just as much specific and meticulous detailed attention as is obvious in this case.¹ The providence of God assures us that the universe is not spinning out of control, that human history is not unfolding contrary to

¹ Concerning this account, someone might well ask, "What if someone else experienced harm due to the delay of the connecting flight?" Clearly, the omnipotent God who is able to bring about computer glitches to delay a flight also is omniscient (all-knowing) and omniscient (all-wise). We should not think of prayer as our talking God into doing something that he, in his infinite knowledge and wisdom, believes would be foolish yet he does it anyway because we pray fervently for it. Rather, we acknowledge that the God who knows best will grant what the prayer seeks only if he believes, all things considered, that answering the prayer would be best. As we will consider more in chapter 7, below, prayer is designed by God as a gracious instrument by which

God's purposes, and that God, ultimately, sustains and regulates all that he has made, to the glory of his great name, and in fulfillment of his perfect will. Yes, our God—the true and living God—reigns over all!

DEFINING DIVINE PROVIDENCE

While this book deals generally with the nature of God and the relationship between God and his creation, broadly understood, the focus clearly is on the nature of God's providential dealings with his human creation. Divine providence is at once a gloriously wondrous doctrine, and one full of puzzles and questions. Christians have struggled long and hard over the nature of God's providential dealings with his creation. So as we begin this investigation, it is important that the reader know just what I mean by the term "providence" as it applies to God's relational dealings with the created order. I suggest, then, the following 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, and 2) he governs and reigns supremely over the entirety of the whole of creation in order to fulfill all of his intended purposes in it and through it.

Stating the definition of divine providence in this way shows its two fundamental parts, as conceived by most in the Reformed and Lutheran heritage: providence as preservation and providence as governance.² Given

he draws us into relationship with him, yet we never instruct God or force his hand. Therefore, we can be sure that when he answers a prayer like the one I prayed—"If you will, Lord, please do something to get me on that flight home"—in granting what the prayer seeks rather than denying it, God is doing what he knows is best, all things considered.

² See Heinrich Heppe, ed., *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1950), 251-254, where he offers several standard definitions of providence from various Reformed scholastic theologians. Representative is this definition from John Heidegger: "God's providence (*pronoia*) is His outward work, by which He preserves all things created by His word, rules their movements, acts and passions, so wisely directs them all to their ends that He promotes all good things effectually and mercifully, the bad either severely restrains or holily permits, wisely orders, righteously punishes; in a word, controls everything for the glory of His own name and the salvation of believers" (cited in *ibid.*, 253). For those in the Lutheran tradition, Heinrich Schmid, ed., *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (3rd ed., revised; Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs, trans. [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1875, 1899], 170-172), offers this summary definition meant to represent broad Lutheran post-Reformation theology: "I. Preservation is the act of Divine Providence whereby God sustains all things created by Him, so that they continue in being with the properties implanted in their nature and the powers received in creation. II. Concurrence, or the co-operation of God, is the act of Divine Providence whereby God, by a general and immediate influence, proportioned to the need and capacity of every creature,

these two complementary elements of divine providence, it may be helpful to see more clearly the understandings I will be utilizing of these aspects of this doctrine. *Providence as preservation*, first, may be defined as follows:

God preserves in existence and provides for the needs of each aspect of the created order for as long as he purposes it to exist, and he protects all of his creation from any harm or destruction that stands outside his purposes for it (see Neh. 9:6; Matt. 6:25-34; Acts 2:25; Col. 1:16-17; and Heb. 1:2-3; James 1:17).

Providence as governance, second, may be defined as follows:

God governs and reigns supremely over 1) all of the activities and forces of nature and natural law, and 2) all of the affairs of his moral creatures, in all cases accomplishing in them and through them (at times by divine concurrence) his eternal purposes—yet in neither realm does he govern in such a manner that it violates the integrity of creaturely moral responsibility and volitional freedom to choose and act according to the moral agent's strongest inclinations, nor does God's exhaustive governance justly implicate the impeccable and infinitely holy moral character of God by making him either the author or the approver of evil (see Deut. 32:39; Ps. 5:4; 135:5-7; Prov. 21:1; Isa. 45:5-7; Dan. 2:21; 4:34-37; Eph. 1:11; James 1:13; 1 John 1:5).

Much in these definitions will be explicated more fully in subsequent chapters of this book as we unfold God's providential dealings with his moral creatures. Throughout this discussion, I will often speak merely of "providence" or "divine providence" as shorthand for God's providence as governance; and whenever the meaning is otherwise, this will be specified. The reason for this is simple: most of the enduring questions and deepest concerns that relate to God's relationship with humanity have to do, in particular, with his governance of human beings and their affairs from his position as Creator and Sovereign Ruler of the uni-

graciously takes part with second causes in their actions and effects. III. Government is the act of Divine Providence by which God most excellently orders, regulates, and directs the affairs and actions of creatures according to His own wisdom, justice, and goodness, for the glory of His name and the welfare of men." Schmid's definition separates out "concurrence" as a distinguishable aspect of divine providence, whereas many Reformed and Lutheran theologians have seen concurrence as part of the mechanism of providence as governance. This latter approach is the one I have chosen to follow, as is evident from the definitions offered here.

verse. Our concern with providence, then, is largely focused on his providence as governance, and how we, his human creatures, live out our lives in the light of this divine governance.

ENDURING QUESTIONS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Given these definitions relating to the doctrine of divine providence, we should consider next some of the deepest questions and puzzles that thoughtful Christians have endeavored to explore when considering the nature of God and his exalted rulership over the world in relation, in particular, to the outworking of human life. I do not intend to answer these questions at this point; much of the remainder of this book endeavors to address most of the issues here raised. But it may prove helpful to have in mind some of the enduring issues raised by this doctrine, to begin thinking even now of how Scripture may lead us to treat them. Consider, then, the following broad questions and the issues they raise:

1. *What is the relation of divine providence to human freedom?* Without doubt, this is the most frequently raised and one of the most persistently difficult questions to come up when one considers divine providence. Of course, behind this question are several others. Is God truly sovereign over the world he has made? And what is the nature of the sovereignty Scripture affirms and asserts that God has? Along with this, what is the nature of the volitional freedom granted by God to his moral creatures (angels and human beings)? What mechanism best explains just how God may reign sovereign over the affairs of human beings and yet those humans remain free in their choices and decisions? One might consider this question, then, as a sort of *mechanical question*. It asks how two things (i.e., divine providential governance and human freedom) can fit together, how the two work together so that one does not cancel out or negate the other. What does Scripture instruct us on both realities, and how do these two truths work together, in the outworking of God's relationship with his human creation?

2. *What is the relation of divine providence to moral responsibility?* While the previous question, more mechanical in nature, is vexing, this

question is even more deeply troubling. This *moral question* arises when one considers God's sovereign control over the created order, and it asks two related questions: How are moral creatures rightly held morally responsible for their actions when God is sovereign over the world? And how is God preserved from being blameworthy for moral wrongdoing that takes place, while also being fully praiseworthy for all the good that occurs under his sovereign governance? In short, why is it that God's moral creatures bear all the blame for all the evil that occurs in the world, while God receives all the praise for all the good done—even good done through the hands of his moral creatures? And how can this be, when God is sovereign over the world? Clearly, "the problem of evil" is an outgrowth of the basic question of the relation of divine providence to moral responsibility, but less often noted, what might be called "the problem of goodness" is also raised by this question. How can moral creatures do good, and receive reward for good done, when God is the source of all good done and God alone is to receive the glory for all good that occurs? Here we have, then, a web of issues, all of which pertain to the basic question of how divine providence and moral responsibility relate.

3. *What is the relation of divine providence to good and evil respectively?* Is there any meaningful sense in which we might understand the action of God in the world as asymmetrical? That is, must we see divine providence as requiring a singular manner of divine action, such that God's relation to good and evil must be understood as identical (i.e., God's sovereign control of good is executed in exactly the same way as his control over evil)? Or, can we, with most throughout the history of theology (including most in the history of Reformed theology), distinguish some meaningful sense in which God's relation to good is different in kind and manner from God's relation to evil? Can we speak meaningfully and rightly of God *permitting* certain actions to occur while at the same time understanding God as fully sovereign? If not, and if we must entertain a fully symmetrical notion of God's relation to both good and evil, how can God escape culpability for evil while he retains praiseworthiness for good? But if some sense of the divine permission of evil is accepted, what does this require of our understanding of divine providence? And just how should we understand the nature of the divine

permission? Are there different senses of “permission,” and how do these correlate with different senses of “sovereignty”?

4. *What is the relation of divine providence to natural law?* Here, the issues are more remote, since they do not involve persons and their moral choices and actions—except for God and his choices and actions as they relate to forces of nature and his sovereign regulation of natural law; and except for us in the sense that we are deeply affected by what laws of nature are established and what forces of nature do in our world. At one level, one can ask whether natural law is even a meaningful concept, if God is sovereign in a meticulous sense over all that occurs in the universe. Is natural law real? Or, does God regulate all things in a direct manner, giving merely the appearance of laws of nature functioning within the structure of the created order? Or, does God build into the universe what we have come to call “laws of nature,” which (laws) he permits to operate essentially according to the properties of these very laws themselves? If so, what regulation does he exert over these laws of nature? What control does he have over the effects these laws of nature have as they bring about both great good and horrible devastation to human life and well-being? Is God “sovereign” over tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, droughts, famines, birth defects, and so forth, which bring untold pain and suffering to sentient life in this world? And yet, is God not also sovereign over the sun and rain that cause crops to grow, the changing seasons of the years, “normal” and healthy childbirths, and bodies that heal themselves from cuts and scrapes and bumps and bruises? What, then, is God’s relation to natural law and forces of nature, both beneficial and harmful to human life?

5. *What is the relation of divine providence to salvation?* Clearly, at the center of biblical revelation is redemptive history, that is, the unfolding of the purpose of God to save a people from sin and condemnation, to the glory of his name (Eph. 1:3-14). And questions of divine providence’s interface with salvation are manifold. No one doubts the fact that God has sovereignly planned to save his people, but when one considers the implementation of the plan, and its application in the lives of all who make up the company of the redeemed, then many questions arise that relate God’s providence to human action and responsibility at

many different levels. For example, how shall we understand God's election of those whom he will save? Is election unconditional, so that God unilaterally chooses those whom he will save? Is the coming of just some and not others to Christ the outworking of God's prior unconditional electing purpose? Or is God's election conditioned upon the foreseen faith of those who, when hearing the gospel, choose to come? Does God choose those whom he knows, in advance, will choose him? And what about sanctification? What is the relation between God's sovereign dealings with his people and their growth in holiness? Can his people renounce him? Can they resist his working? Can God guarantee that those whom he has chosen to save will be saved in the end? If so, how should we understand our role in our sanctification and ultimate, final salvation? In short, is the outworking and not merely the plan of redemptive history regulated by the providence of God? And if so, to what extent and with what certainty are God's saving purposes accomplished? And how do our choices and actions accord with the outworking of those purposes?

6. *What is the relation of divine providence to practical expressions of the Christian faith, such as prayer, evangelism, and Christian service?* So many areas of the Christian life call us, God's people, to responsible action. We are commanded to pray, to witness to the gospel of Christ, to use our gifts to build up the body of Christ. The commandments contained in the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament epistles are numerous, and it is clear that God's people are to take them seriously. But how should we understand this commanded obedience in light of God's providence over all? Is prayer meaningful if God is sovereign? Is evangelism necessary if God is sovereign? Is Christian service to believers and unbelievers alike really a work for which we are responsible, if God sovereignly regulates all of his created order? How should we understand the outworking of the Christian faith in light of the providence of God?

7. *What is the relation of divine providence to the very nature and character of God?* Among some of the most important questions to arise out of recent discussions about process theology, open theism, and versions of classical theism have been questions about God himself. As God

relates to the world he has made, how should we think about his relation to space, time, and change? Attributes of God such as omnipresence, eternity, and immutability (and related attributes such as simplicity, impassability, omniscience) have brought about a renewed interest and attention to these complex and difficult areas of study. Should we think of God as eternally timeless and nonspatial and hence removed altogether from any literal temporal, spatial presence and interaction with created persons? If not, do we infringe on the perfection and transcendence of God? How can we best account for biblical teaching both on the transcendence and on the immanence of God? How can God eternally exist apart from all created reality while also dwelling fully and comprehensively among this created realm? What rethinking of God's very nature is required as we consider the reality of the God-world relationship required by the doctrine of divine providence?

NECESSARY FEATURES OF A RESPONSIBLE BIBLICAL MODEL OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

In light of this understanding of what divine providence is and some of the main questions it raises, how should we conceive of the divine-human relationship? My purpose in much of this book is to address just this question. But here, at the outset, I would like to lay out ten features of a doctrine of divine providence that I believe are essential in formulating the doctrine such that it is faithful to all that Scripture teaches while also showing itself to be glorious and richly relevant to us, God's moral creatures. What follows here, then, anticipates much of what will be presented throughout this book with greater development.³

1. *Exhaustive and Meticulous Divine Sovereignty.* First, I begin with an unqualified commitment to the exhaustive and meticulous sovereignty of God. Passages such as Deuteronomy 32:39; Psalm 135:5-6; Isaiah 45:5-7; Daniel 4:34-35; Romans 9:6-26; and Ephesians 1:11 lead me to conclude that the God of the Bible, the true and living God,

³ The following ten features of a model of divine providence were presented, in an altered form, in Bruce A. Ware, "Robots, Royalty and Relationships? Toward a Clarified Understanding of Real Human Relations with the God Who Knows and Decrees All That Is," *Criswell Theological Review* N.S. 1/2 (Spring 2004): 197-203.

has ultimate and specific (or exact, or precise, or detailed, or meticulous) control over all that occurs. The “spectrum texts”⁴ of Scripture indicating God’s control over death as well as life, sickness as well as healing, poverty as well as riches, disaster as well as peace, show the full spectrum of life over which God has complete control. While I realize that it is extremely important how we talk about the mechanics, as it were, of the exercise of this control, I believe that faithfulness to God’s Word requires our full and unqualified assent to God’s exhaustive and meticulous control over all. As Paul summarizes this truth, God “works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph. 1:11).

2. *Compatibility of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom.* Second, the kind of freedom and moral responsibility we ascribe to human beings must be compatible with God’s meticulous sovereign control. I see two main reasons for this: 1) the nature of the divine sovereignty, as just discussed, requires that any and every aspect of the created reality, including human freedom and moral responsibility, adhere with it; 2) a compatibility of meticulous divine sovereignty and human freedom is required by Scripture’s teaching. Passages such as Genesis 45:4-8; 50:20; Isaiah 10:5-19; Habakkuk 1:6-17; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Romans 9:6-26 demonstrate that God’s sovereign control must be compatible with the choices and actions that human beings perform, and this must occur in such a way that humans fully carry out what they desire most to do and that they are fully responsible in so doing. To give just one example, the men who put Christ on the cross will not be able to plead “not guilty” at the Great White Throne judgment by pointing to Acts 2:23 and claiming, “See here, You say Christ’s crucifixion was by Your predetermined plan and foreknowledge, so we are off the hook!” No, Christ was put on the cross by the hands of godless men, says Peter; hence, they are guilty. To cite just one other support here for the compatibility of divine sovereignty and human freedom, the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration is virtually inexplicable without this understanding. John Feinberg argued in his essay years ago that the only way fully to account for every word of Scripture, every grammatical con-

⁴ I earlier labeled these sorts of passages with the term “spectrum texts” in Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2000), 150, 204.

struction, every syntactical arrangement as both fully God's Word and fully human is by appeal to compatibilism.⁵ I simply do not think that William Lane Craig's appeal to middle knowledge here works;⁶ I have often wondered, when considering his proposal, if God could succeed with a one hundred percent success rate on Scripture using middle knowledge, why don't we see that kind of record reflected more in other aspects of his governance of the world (e.g., how many people, throughout the world today, have responded to his offer of salvation)?

3. *Freedom of Inclination, not Freedom of Indifference.* Third, human freedom that is compatible with God's meticulous sovereignty, then, cannot be libertarian or contra-causal freedom⁷ but must instead truly be a freedom of one's strongest inclination, desire, and volition. That is, our freedom consists in our choosing and doing according to what we are inclined most, or what we desire most, to do. I remain fully unpersuaded by the case made for libertarian freedom. If an action is free *if*, when the action is performed and all things being just what they are, the agent could have done otherwise, then there is no choice-specific reason for the action. Granted, the agent no doubt has a reason or reasons when he acts. But, if all things being just what they are (i.e., all those reasons are in place exactly as they are), he could have done otherwise, then it follows that any reason or set of reasons for why the agent did what he did would be the identical reason or set of reasons for why, instead, he might have done otherwise. More simply, no choice-specific reason or reasons can be given for any so-called "free" choices or actions that we do. Of course, this reduces all "free" choices and actions to arbitrariness and removes from us the bases for why we choose and act. Compatibilist freedom, on the other hand, insists that regardless of what struggles we go through in making our choices or deciding what action

⁵ See John Feinberg, "God Ordains All Things," in David Basinger and Randall Basinger, eds., *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 34-35.

⁶ William Lane Craig, "'Men Moved by the Holy Spirit Spoke from God' (2 Peter 1:21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration," *Philosophia Christi* 1 (1999): 45-82.

⁷ The view of freedom held in the Arminian tradition and elsewhere is often called 'libertarian freedom' and sometimes called 'contra-causal freedom.' The latter term refers to the notion that when we cause one thing to happen by the choice we make, we could have chosen otherwise, and hence, we could have "caused contrary" to what in fact we caused to occur by the choice we made. Freedom, then, is contra-causal; it is constituted by our ability to cause either one thing or its contrary to take place whenever we make a choice.

to perform, in the end, when we choose and act, we do so from prevailing desires which explain exactly why *this* choice and not another is made. This obviously means, however, that when we choose, all things being just what they are, we *must* choose as we do! This constitutes our freedom exactly at this point: we do what we most want. So, compatibilist freedom commends itself to me both because it alone accords with divine sovereignty and fits Scripture's teaching about divine-human concurrence of action, and also because it explains and accounts for human choice and action where libertarianism simply cannot do so.

4. *Asymmetrical Divine Agency in Regard to Good and Evil Respectively.* Fourth, the mechanism by which we conceive of God's control over and supervision of human affairs must involve asymmetrical aspects, one of which works in a direct and immediate fashion, causing particular events and actions to occur (e.g., creation, regeneration), but the other of which works in an indirect and permissive manner, allowing human activities or natural conditions to proceed as they are, all the while able to change those if what he sees would come from them stands in conflict to his wise and good purposes (e.g., the regular functioning of the laws of nature, ongoing unbelief and rejection of Christ by the non-elect). Perhaps we could call the first manner of divine activity "direct-causative" divine action and the second, "indirect-permissive" divine action. Notice that the second kind of divine action is not, in fact, inaction; i.e., it properly is "action." Why? Simply because, as Paul Helm makes clear in his volume on the providence of God,⁸ this form of permissive divine will is one in which God permits *specifically* and *only* those aspects of the natural order or human actions which he could, were he to choose to, prevent. And, since he permits specifically and only what he could prevent, therefore he actively chooses to allow just these items when he is fully capable of having brought about others instead.

Having made clear this distinction, the main point, however, is that God's control requires both kinds of divine actions. It seems to me that the strain in Calvinism that has been reluctant to embrace the "permissive will of God" simply rejects one of the very conceptual tools neces-

⁸ Paul Helm, *The Providence of God*, in *Contours of Christian Theology*, series ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 101-102, 172.

sary to account for God's moral innocence in regard to evil. Surely, more is needed than just this manner of the divine activity, but I don't see how we can proceed if God's sovereign dealings in matters of good and evil are, in fact, symmetrical.

5. *Compatibilist Middle Knowledge*. Fifth, this indirect-permissive divine action functions with human compatibilist freedom, avoiding coercion and allowing humans to do what they most want to do, by God's utilizing a Calvinist version of middle knowledge. I'll call it "compatibilist middle knowledge," knowledge of what compatibilistically free creatures *would* do, which is middle between God's knowledge of merely what *could* be and his knowledge of specifically what *will* be. Both Terrance Tiessen⁹ and John Frame¹⁰ have, in recent years, urged this concept, even if not with the same terminology. I agree fully with these men and others who argue that Molinist middle knowledge, predicated on libertarian human freedom, is not possible. How can God know what a free agent *would* do in some state of affairs if, all things being just what they are, the agent can do A or not-A? Knowing and controlling the circumstances in which free creatures act only exerts control over the range of possible choices, but in no way does it indicate just what choice would in fact be made. And, as seen earlier, since these libertarianly free choices have no choice-specific reasons for them, neither God nor the agent could know why he chooses specifically and exactly what he does. How, then, is God to know what an agent *would* choose?

But if we really do make our choices for prevailing reasons, if the conditions (both internal and external) surrounding a particular choice present to us the individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for making just the choices we do, if choices and actions are actually effects of sufficient causal factors—if this is so, then it follows that God can know what choices *would be made* by knowing just exactly the set of conditions (i.e., all factors which together form the set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions) that gives rise to particular choices and actions. So, he can envision an agent in one situation, and

⁹ Terrance L. Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 289-336.

¹⁰ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002), 150-152, 500-505.

knowing all the factors true in that situation can know from these factors what choice the agent *would make here*, and he can envision a slightly different situation, and again, in knowing all the factors true in that situation he can know what the agent *would do*, instead, *there*.

6. *Divine Omnipresence and Omnitemporality*. Sixth, relationship with God requires that God be involved with us in our time and space. Here, I will only say that I agree fully with the proposal John Frame has put forth in his *The Doctrine of God*.¹¹ Again, I might choose to use different terminology, but I affirm the concepts he advocates. It makes eminent sense to me to understand God, in himself and apart from creation, as both nonspatial and nontemporal, but then to see that when God creates the heavens and the earth, creating necessarily then both space and time, God “fills” the creation he has made. So we rightly speak of God as omnipresent, meaning that God really is here and everywhere present, while he is, in himself and apart from creation, nonspatial. So likewise, we should speak of God as omnitemporal, meaning that God is every-time present. God really is with us, in space and time, in all of life.

7. *Divine Immutability and Mutability*. Seventh, relationship with God requires vibrant conceptions of both God's immutability and his mutability. I have argued for this elsewhere,¹² and I'll only say here that it seems clear to me that God's ontological and ethical immutability requires that God be relationally mutable, so that when the moral situation with which God is in relation changes, so too does God “change” in relation to that changed situation in ways called forth by his immutable character and promise. For example, when a sinner repents, God's disposition toward that person changes, from wrath and impending condemnation to one of peace and acceptance. This is a change in God—not of his essential attributes and character, but of his disposition, relation, and attitude.

8. *Necessary and Contingent Divine Qualities*. Eighth, relational mutability requires that we understand God as having some kinds of

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 543-575.

¹² Bruce A. Ware, “An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29 (1986): 431-446.

contingent qualities. He should rightly be said to “respond” to situations that arise. His anger toward sin really does arise as the sin is committed, and his acceptance really is extended to those who repent. We should not understand all of God’s qualities as absolute, but understand his relationship with the world he has made to involve, by his relational mutability, some contingent qualities.

Here, then, I would also urge a distinction between categories of the divine attributes: essential and contingent (or accidental, to use Aristotle’s term) attributes. God, as triune and eternal, has infinite essential qualities of holiness, love, power, knowledge, and many more. But shall we say of all of God’s qualities that they are equally eternal and essential? Again, it seems that creation, and particularly the entrance of sin into the creation, calls forth qualities of God that are expressions of eternal and essential qualities but that are themselves also contingent and conditional qualities occasioned by the world to which God is now related. For example, shall we think of God as eternally merciful? In the Trinity, apart from creation, to whom is God merciful? If mercy is favor shown to one who is destitute, needy, helpless, and hopeless, how can mercy be expressed within the Trinity? The same can be said of grace and wrath. It seems that these are qualities that express God’s essential attributes of love and holiness, respectively, but they are conditioned by God’s relationship with a sinful world, and hence come to be in time and are, therefore, contingent.

9. *Uniqueness of “Real Relationality” with God.* Ninth, relationship with God, because it is with God, departs in some respects from the kind of relationships we have with others. For example, I don’t assume with any person I talk with that he or she is always right. But with God, I dare not assume anything else than that he is always right! Won’t this require that my relationship with God will be different than my relationship with anyone else? If, as Isaiah 40 tells us, no one can counsel the Lord, then I ought not relate to God by trying to correct him or straighten him out. Rather, I seek to know what his will is and do it. Or to take another example, I do not assume with any other person that I must do absolutely everything that he or she tells me to do. But with God, must we not relate to him by acknowledging before him that we should do only and always what is his will for us to do? We can try to

determine what a “real” relationship with God is by insisting that the only kinds of real relations are the ones we have with other human beings; but since God is unlike us in so many ways, it stands to reason that our relationship with him will likewise be different in many ways, and yet it is no less a *real* relationship.

As an example of this, consider Jesus’ repeated statements that he spoke only as the Father taught him, that he did only what the Father wanted him to do, that he always did what pleased the Father (e.g., John 8:26-32). Now, someone might conclude from these types of expressions that there was no *real* relationship between Jesus and the Father; Jesus was a robot, a puppet! He didn’t have a mind of his own! But such a reaction would simply reveal a failure to realize that Jesus was relating here with *God*. And relationship with God will be different than relationship with any other person, but it can be just as real.

10. *The Glory of God Alone Is the Ultimate Purpose for the God-World Relationship.* Tenth, the glory of God is the end of human life, as it is the end or purpose for the universe as a whole. Indeed, pride of place goes exclusively to the glory of God, not to human satisfaction, and certainly not to charting one’s own course, or to human attainment. If it’s not all about me, but it is *all about God*, then we ask humbly how we fit into his wise and glorious plan rather than refashioning God to fit better into the kind of life we might wish to design for ourselves. Humbly accepting what God has designed, and being at peace with this as good, wise, and glorious, allows us to submit to God and, at the same time, be free to be exactly who God has made us to be.

STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

With this overview now in mind, we proceed to look more closely at various aspects of God’s nature, especially his relationship with the created order. The chapters that follow divide into two main sections, first theological, and second practical. Part One, “Foundational Theological Bases for Divine Providence,” includes four chapters. Chapter 2 begins with a broad consideration of the importance of understanding God as both transcendent and immanent, as fully self-sufficient and as mercifully self-relating (i.e., freely choosing to relate to others). But the order

here is crucial, and that balance is needed in our understanding of God will be made clear.

With this broad framework established, chapter 3 considers God's providential rulership *over* creation, focusing on the first three features of divine providence summarized above. Questions of divine sovereignty and human freedom and moral responsibility will be examined, and a case will be made for a compatibilist understanding of freedom, that is, a freedom, of inclination.

Chapter 4 considers God's rulership *through* creation, focusing on the fourth and fifth features of providence summarized above. This chapter examines the nature of divine concurrence by which God's will is sometimes carried out through the free and responsible agency of human beings. That God's relationship to good and to evil, respectively, must be asymmetrical will be demonstrated, and how the use of compatibilist middle knowledge assists in this discussion will also be examined carefully.

Chapter 5 discusses God's providential rulership *with* creation, completing our consideration of the sixth through tenth features of divine providence summarized earlier. Here, dynamics of the divine-human relationship will be examined. We will consider the importance of how God's relation to space and time figures into the real relatedness he has with his created beings. Special attention will also be given to the kinds of mutability and contingency that this divine relationship requires, along with what is both immutable and necessary in God. We'll explore how this relationship is in some ways like human relationships but also observe the sheer uniqueness of this relationship among all beings in the universe. The beauty and richness of the divine-human relationship shows how right it is that glory be given to God alone for making, sustaining, and empowering all that occurs, for the everlasting good of his people and for the honor of his name.

Part Two, "Practical Christian Relevance of Divine Providence," shifts attention to some of the ways in which this doctrine of divine providence affects the outworking of our Christian faith. Chapter 6 explores the experience of living *behind* God, as it were, in the veil of often unknown reasons for the suffering God calls his children to endure, for the evil that pervades life this side of the fall. There are, indeed, reasons for suffering, though they are often hidden from our view. Without this

assurance, we lose hope, but because of it, we gain strength and passion to live faithfully through whatever God designs our lives to experience.

Chapter 7 considers living *before* God as we seek to move forward in life in trust and hope in God, as expressed chiefly in fervent, Spirit-prompted prayer. Great intimacy of relationship occurs as we live before him, depending on him and seeking his mind and will for our own.

Chapter 8 celebrates living *under* God as we experience his lavish goodness providing all we need for the joy and privilege of service. The generosity of God, here, is really beyond all human comprehension, and so we learn how wise and good it is to live under the God who provides and empowers all, for our good, and to his glory alone.

Chapter 9 concludes our study of God and his providential relation to creation. Brief consideration is given to how far many who claim to know and follow God actually are from God as he truly is. Those granted the privilege of handling the things of God in pulpits and classrooms must resolve to stand faithful, upholding the true biblical vision of God, commending his glorious excellency and majesty, and caring only for God's approval and the growth in faith of God's people. Being "trustworthy stewards" is our calling, and it is a serious but joyful task.

Chapter 10 presents as an appendix a paper first delivered at the 53rd Annual Meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society, Colorado Springs, November 15, 2001, and published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* in June of the following year. This paper inquires whether open theism is a viable evangelical model of divine providence. I give here twenty-six implications of the open view which are intended to show clearly that the open view fails as a viable model and should be rejected by the orthodox, evangelical church.

May God grant continued humility before him and his Word so that we may understand more clearly and accurately his design for our relationship with him. May the truthfulness of his self-revelation guide us, and may we make it our goal to be faithful to him and to his Word, no matter the cost to our lives and well-being. May God alone be praised, and may be his people be richly blessed.