

CHAPTER FIVE GOD GOVERNS ALL THINGS...

The Molinist Position: God governs all things based upon and limited by his innate knowledge of counterfactuals and free human choices.

Theological Truth #2 That Favors Calvinism: The Bible reveals that God governs all things, and this in no way dependent upon or limited by human choices.

Whenever I write a book I usually work on it very early in the morning. With this particular book I have prayed something like the following just about every morning before I begin: “Lord, please guide me as I write. May this book deepen and strengthen the faith of your people. May your bride be beautified as she understands more and more about how your sovereignty and her responsibility relate, and may her awe of you increase!” It is the focus of this last request that I especially do not want us to miss as we read through all the exegesis, as well as the theological and philosophical discussions on these pages.

While explaining that awe of God is needed, Paul Tripp wrote the following:

[We] need to spend more time gazing upon the beauty of the Lord. [We] need to put [our] heart in a place where it can once again be in awe of the grandeur of God that reaches far beyond the bounds of the most expressive words in the human vocabulary. [We] need awe of him to recapture, refocus, and redirect [our] heart again and again. And [we] need to remember that the war for the awe of [our] heart still wages inside [us].¹

Very few things can help us win the war for awe of our heart any more than looking at the sovereignty and meticulous providence of God. As we will see in the last five chapters of this book, we make real choices and our decisions, as well as our actions in this world, really matter. Yet, while this is true, our God is governing all things in the world. That is truly stunning! As we make our way through this discussion, I pray we will not only understand with greater clarity God’s exhaustive governance, may we stand in awe of him!

¹ Paul David Tripp, *Awe: Why It Matters For Everything We Think, Say, And Do* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015, Kindle Edition), Preface.

God's Absolute Sovereignty And His Meticulous Providence

In the rest of this chapter we will look in more detail at what the Bible says about God's absolute sovereignty—i.e. his kingship by which he is able to carry out his eternal purpose, i.e. his decrees. By decrees we are referring to, "...the eternal, volitional, all-wise, sovereign, and immutable purpose of God concerning all and every matter, comprehending both the time and the manner in which the matters will occur."²

The Westminster divines wisely and accurately explained that God carries out his sovereign eternal purpose (his decrees) through the works of creation and providence (e.g. Neh. 9:6; Ps. 74:12-17).³ Since God's works of providence are "his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing his creatures and all their actions,"⁴ what is implied is that God exercises his absolute sovereignty in his creation of the world, as well as in his meticulous providence (his keeping all things going and governing all creatures and creation through history).

One concept that ties together God's sovereignty in his works of creation and providence is his governance. Psalm 22:28 reads: "For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the

² Wilhelmus a Brakel, "God's Decree Defined," *Free Grace Broadcaster*, 237 (September 2016): 7 (Taken from *The Christian's Responsible Service*, vol. 1, 193-98).

³ In the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question and answer #7, the decrees of God are defined as: "...his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he has foreordained all that comes to pass." In question and answer #8, it is affirmed that God executes "his decrees in the works of creation and providence."

John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine Of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 643, explains: "Broadly speaking, Christian models of providence divide into two categories: Models that postulate God's general sovereign control and models that espouse his specific sovereign control over the world." We will see in this chapter how the Bible teaches the latter approach. Feinberg goes on to explain (645) that the specific sovereignty approach "sometimes...is called meticulous providence."

⁴ *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question and answer #11. Feinberg, *No One*, 642, writes: "The English word 'providence' comes from the Latin *providentia*, and that term corresponds to the Greek *pronoia*. Literally, it means foresight or prescience, but it is used to convey other theological truths. Foresight refers to God's plans for the future, but also the realization of those plans. Hence, in theological discussions providence 'has come to signify the provision which God makes for the ends of his government, and the preservation and government of all His creatures.'" (Feinberg is quoting Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968], 165).

nations.” Here David affirms that ultimate kingship or ability to reign (what we have called absolute sovereignty) belongs to *Yahweh*. He then adds in the parallel statement, literally, that *Yahweh* “continually rules over all nations” (author’s own translation). The Hebrew participle translated “rules” by the ESV (from *mashal*) conveys the ideas that our English word “governs” does, namely to direct, regulate, keep within the boundaries prescribed by God’s sovereign will.⁵ In fact, the King James Version translates this second clause in this way: “he is the governor among the nations.”

It is this line-of-thought that has led me so far in this book to speak of God’s absolute sovereignty exercised through his works of creation and meticulous providence, which points us in the direction we are about to go—namely that God governs all things that have ever happened and ever will happen in the world (in the manner set forth in 1 Chronicles 29:10-19)—from creation to the present and into eternity future in the new heaven and new earth. Let’s turn to the biblical evidence for this.

God Governs All Things

In Ephesians 1:11-12, a passage that speaks of rich abounding grace toward the first believing Jews as one of the riches with which God has blessed his saints (“in whom we were also made a heritage...those who have first hoped in the Christ” [author’s own translation]), Paul goes on to explain the manner in which this happened: “being predestined according to the plan of the one who works all things according to the counsel of his will” (author’s own translation). In other words, Paul is saying that God “decided beforehand,”⁶ i.e. “before the foundation of the

⁵ Cf. BDB, 606; *Gesenius’ Lexicon* (on-line).

⁶ This is how BAGD, 709, translates *proorizō* (lit. “mark out the boundaries, limits or horizons ahead of time”), a term “found six times in the New Testament...once with reference to Christ’s sufferings (Acts 4:28), once of the predestination of God’s redemptive plan (1 Cor. 2:7...), and four times of the predestination of people to salvation

world” (Eph. 1:4), to bring some people to salvation. This eternal decision was made in a way that is in line with or flows out of his plan that he set forth before anything else existed. And this plan comes from the God who works out all things consistent with or flowing out of his will. Though “all” can have different nuances in the New Testament, it seems most likely to mean here “all without exception.” If we have understood accurately Paul’s statements, it is an affirmation of two key truths in this book: (1) God’s will or eternal purpose (what he has decided and thus determined to do in eternity past) emerges from his own character, from within himself, and so is not arbitrary, even though it is absolutely free from outside constraint or limitation. (2) God directs, he governs, all things that take place in line with his eternal purpose (or plan).⁷

Elsewhere in Scripture we also see that God governs all things and also how this takes place. In the throne room vision of Revelation 4-5, in which both Father and Son are praised for their sovereignty over all things—especially in the accomplishment and application of redemption in history—the following praise is given to the Father (4:11): “Worthy are you, O Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power, because you created all things, and through your will they were and were created” (author’s own translation). In context, the “all things” does not seem to be limited to the initial creation of the world, but includes the determination of the events of history, especially as God’s redemptive plan is being fulfilled. As such, not only are we reminded that all things without exception come into existence through God’s will (his decrees, which comprise his eternal purpose), but the wording is such that all things that exist are so

(Rom. 8:28, 30; Eph. 1:5, 11),” according to Sam Storms, *Chosen For Life: The Case For Divine Election* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007, revised), 23.

⁷ J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View Of Man* (Carlisle, Pa: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999, repr.), 35, accurately comments: “Everything that happens is embraced in the eternal purpose of God; nothing at all happens outside of His eternal plan.” Then, he adds (39): “The Bible makes no exceptions when it speaks of God’s government of the world.”

certain that even before they come into being, it is as if they already existed. So, God governs all things according to his eternal purpose that is certain.⁸

In Isaiah 46:8-11 we not only read of God's all-encompassing governance, but also the encouragement that should arise from this reality:

Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, ⁹remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' ¹¹ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

The situation standing behind this section of Isaiah, and part of the reason the prophet addresses readers as “transgressors,” is the prophecy that Judah will be taken captive to Babylon (Is. 39:5) because they had failed to trust God and to fulfill their mission of honoring him in the world and drawing the nations to him (cf. Isaiah chapters 1-39, in light of 42:6; 49:6). In chapters 40-55 God makes it clear that the captivity is not the end of the story. Rather, he has a future for his people. He will come among them to rule (40:10) and to shepherd them (40:11), but this will be accomplished in such a way that it takes place through a king, one who will lead and serve his people in the future such that though they have been stubborn and blind, he will enable them to see (Is. 42:16).⁹ For this to happen, however, God will need to deliver them from the captivity so he can bring this servant-king from their midst and accomplish their salvation (cf. Is. 52:13-53:12). The way that God will end their captivity is by working through a future merely human king by the name of Cyrus (cf. Is. 44:28-45:7, 11-13).

⁸ It should also be noted that in Revelation 4-5 God's absolute sovereignty—displayed in his works of creation and meticulous providence—is intended to give great comfort to suffering and persecuted saints. It means that God can and will carry out all his promises and his redemptive plan for their benefit, even though current events might suggest otherwise.

⁹ We know this to be Jesus Christ, as does the New Testament (cf. 1 Peter 2:24, in light of Isaiah 53:4, 11).

Much of what is being addressed in these chapters is not only the superiority of the true God over false gods, idols in whom Judah and the nations had been wrongly trusting (41:21-29; 43:8-15; 44:9-20; 45:20), but also God, through Isaiah, is demonstrating that he is able to bring about the future saving blessings, the transformation in his people, and the ordering of events so that what he is prophesying can be fulfilled. These are the themes that stand behind and give shape to Isaiah 46:8-11.

More specifically, in regard to the immediate context, Isaiah 46:1-48:22 is calling readers to trust God who will humble Babylon and he calls them to salvation. In 46:1-47:15 we see that Babylon and her gods cannot save themselves. And in 46:1-13 the focus is upon God's superiority over idols, especially as seen in his almighty power to carry out his purposes.¹⁰

In verse 8 parallel to “transgressors” is “stand firm” or literally, “act like men.”¹¹ Though this is the only time the verb is used in the Old Testament, its noun form is used in a 1 Kings 2:2 command of David to Solomon, “show yourself a man” (which is used in conjunction with “be strong”). Most likely readers are not only being called to be strong or brave, but part of the implication is that the reason Israel had turned from God and is now facing exile is that they had not been strong and brave enough through what they are being called to in these verses: faith-fueled obedience.

This call begins with “remember” (8a, 9a). What is to be remembered is both “this” (v. 8: it refers both to what precedes¹² and is also further explained in verses 9-11) and also “the former

¹⁰ For this paragraph I am dependent upon Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, vol. 15B in E. Ray Clendenen, Gen. Ed., *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical And Theological Exposition Of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009), 282-296.

¹¹ The command includes the Hebrew verb *'iysh*, which could literally be translated “man up” or as the NKJV does: “show yourselves men.” The essence of what is being commanded is something like this: “be brave” (HCSB).

¹² Edward J. Young, *The Book Of Isaiah*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 225, argues that the “this” also has reference to God's uniqueness and the impotence of idols discussed in the previous passage.

things of old” (v. 9: This also is further defined in 9-11). The remembering is further detailed as “recall it to mind,” which literally is to “turn it (or return it) upon the heart.” The remembering is not to be merely intellectual. Instead, it is to penetrate to the core of their affections and will, and be owned by the readers in such a way it leads to strength and boldness. God, through the prophet, wants hearers to bring back to mind and heart not only his uniqueness and the impotence of idols (45:14-46:7), but also what is said about God in 9b-11.

After restating the uniqueness of God (9b-c), we find subordinate clauses in vv. 10-11a that give further explanation to Isaiah’s focus on God and that demonstrate God’s uniqueness.

In the first subordinate clause (10a-b) we read literally: “Declaring¹³ from the beginning the end and from ancient times¹⁴ that which was not done.”¹⁵ The point of this clause is that God, long before things happen, can make known what will happen. In context, the sense most likely is that even though some might be able to predict events and get some right, only God can do this without fail. In the present situation of Isaiah’s day God truly can both bring about their future freedom from captivity through Cyrus and even more importantly can also bring about their future promised and ultimate salvation.¹⁶

In the second subordinate clause (10c-d) we read: “saying my counsel¹⁷ will stand¹⁸ and all my pleasure¹⁹ I will accomplish.”²⁰ “Saying” is parallel to “declaring,” so most likely the sense is

¹³ Hiphil (causative active) participle from *nagad*. Note the use of *nagad* highlights that God not only knows, but he sometimes does make known what will happen.

¹⁴ *min + qedem*. Young, *Isaiah*, 3, 227: “long ago” or “from of old.”

¹⁵ Niphal (simple passive) perfect, 3rd person, masculine, singular, from *ʿasah*.

¹⁶ Certainly, to this point a Molinistic understanding of this text would work. However, as it moves on, the language becomes specific enough to demonstrate that God does initiate these events in a manner that he is not dependent upon or limited by human choice.

¹⁷ *ʿetsah* + 1st person common singular pronominal suffix (“my”).

still on making known what God will do, what will take place. “Counsel” in this context is synonymous with “plan.” That it will stand is a way of emphasizing it will come about rather than falling down or failing. Finally, 100% of what God takes pleasure in he will do; i.e. he will bring about.

The way this parallel clause furthers the first one is we see here that God declares not just what he knows (simple foreknowledge), nor does he declare what would take place, if Cyrus were placed in this set of circumstances (middle knowledge). Instead, God brings about all that in which he takes pleasure, i.e. all he has planned. What we see introduced here is that God’s pleasure (what he wants to happen and, at least to some degree, takes delight in) stands behind his eternal purpose, his plan. This is significant, for it moves us in a direction once again of seeing that God is moved internally (not externally) to decree what he does.

So, what we are discovering about God’s sovereignty exercised through his meticulous providence is very close to what Molinists believe. As Craig said about Molina, he affirmed that God “is quite literally the cause of everything that happens.”²¹ Additionally, Molinist, Kenneth Keathley, affirms that “God has meticulous control over all things...”²² However, because what God ordains, as set forth in the Molinist Model, is based upon his middle knowledge of indeterministically free human choices, there are significant differences between what Isaiah is affirming here and Molinist views of God’s governance, as we will see below.

¹⁸ Qal (simple active) imperfect, 3rd person, singular, feminine (agreeing with the fem. “counsel”), from *quwm*.

¹⁹ *chephets* + 1st person, common, singular pronominal suffix (“my”).

²⁰ This is the first person singular, Qal (simple active action), from *ʿasah* (also in 10b).

²¹ William L. Craig, “Middle Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?” in Clark H. Pinnock, Gen. Ed., *The Grace Of God And The Will Of Man* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1995, repr.), 153.

²² Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2010), 21.

In the third subordinate clause (11a-b) we read: “Calling from the east a ravenous bird, from a far away land a man of my counsel.” Most likely this is Cyrus (cf. 44:28; 45:1, 11-13). The man of God’s plan, the man whom he will use to bring about their future freedom that will be the door to ultimate deliverance is Cyrus.²³ This parallel clause furthers the first two by revealing more specific content of what God wants to reveal now before it happens.

Isaiah is revealing that 150 years before it takes place, God is able to orchestrate the immeasurable choices and events that will bring about the following: Judah is taken into captivity by Babylon; Babylon falls to the Medo-Persians; a couple give birth to a boy whom they name Cyrus and who grows up to be king over the Medo-Persian empire; and this Cyrus will become disposed to allow Judah to return to their land, to rebuild their temple, and to resume their right worship of God—all necessary preparation for the coming of God’s ultimate Savior and salvation.

Lest we think all that was taking place here was God, through Isaiah, predicting what would take place as a result merely of God bringing about certain circumstances in which Cyrus would freely choose to do what he would without God’s influence (and based upon God’s middle knowledge),²⁴ we read in Ezra 1:1 of the fulfillment of this prophecy: “...the LORD stirred up

²³ This understanding is not only supported by the mention of Cyrus in the preceding context (44:28; 45:1), but also by the next two verses (Isaiah 46:12-13), which speak of God’s righteousness displayed in future salvation, and also which address Judah as “stubborn of heart,” a contrast to what the prophet is calling readers to do with the currently mentioned knowledge of God in v. 8: “return it upon heart.” Isaiah 46:12-13 reads: “Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.”

²⁴ Isaiah 10:13 speaks of God as the ultimate Sovereign who carries out his decrees “by the strength of my hand...and by my wisdom, for I have understanding.” So, we are not advocating that God’s innate wisdom or knowledge has no part to play in his decrees. It does (so also Ware, “Prayer And The Sovereignty,” 129). What we are affirming is that innate knowledge of what man would do in certain circumstances does not limit God’s options. Also, we are affirming his decrees are not dependent upon human choices known to him.

the spirit of Cyrus,²⁵ king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom....” This proclamation goes on to state he is allowing Judah to return to their land and rebuild their temple. The point is that whatever immeasurable combination of circumstances, as well as causative and passive influences the LORD brought upon Cyrus, he worked in and around Cyrus in such a manner that the king was engaging in a free decision, something emerging from his own nature and heart, something influenced by his own previous decisions, a decision moving from his strongest motive at the time, and yet it was exactly what God had decreed—flowing out of God’s free and sovereign pleasure (cf. Pss. 115:3; 135:6).

So, we learn God governs all things absolutely and freely without exception. The 16th c. Reformer, Ulrich Zwingli, rightly concluded:

We cannot but admit that not even the least thing takes place unless it is ordered by God. For who has ever been so concerned and curious as to find out how much hair he has on his head? There is no one. God, however, knows the number. Indeed, nothing is too small in us or in any other creature, not to be ordered by the all-knowing and all-powerful providence of God.²⁶

Isaiah 46:8-11 not only supports the contention that God governs all things in accordance with his absolute sovereignty working through his meticulous providence, but it also suggests true followers of God and readers of the Scriptures can know these facts fully enough and find in them strength and courage to obey God as they trust in him. In other words, it is implied that there are enough specifics in the biblical text to conclude that God does govern all things after the manner we are setting forth throughout the book and thus we do not have to guess at how God might go about this—and this itself should impact the decisions of readers. As such, I reject the view that Scripture does not provide enough data to conclude how divine sovereignty and

²⁵ The Hiphil (causative active action) of *ʾuwr* carries with it the connotation of stirring or arousing. (Gesenius’ on-line lexicon)

²⁶ Cited in Samuel A. Owen, “The Providence Of God,” *Reformation and Revival*, 4, 2 (1995): 72–76.

human freedom interrelate and therefore that question must be answered by philosophy. This passage appears to imply the subject is both covered well enough and perspicuous enough in the Bible that readers can gain strength and courage from it.

God's Freedom In His Governance

As we have already demonstrated, Calvinists can lock arms with their Molinist brothers and sisters in regard to a commitment to specific sovereignty and a strong sense of God's meticulous providence. After all, in one sense, Molinists can affirm: "In his infinite intelligence, God is able to plan a world in which his designs are achieved by creatures acting freely."²⁷ Yet, the approaches are not exactly the same, for there is another sense in which Molinists must admit: "God's absolute intentions are thus often frustrated by sinful creatures...",²⁸ and this because "...God is not in control of which subjunctive conditionals are true. He does not determine the truth-value of these subjunctive conditionals. That is outside His control...."²⁹

How are these Molinist statements reconciled? It is in this way. Though God's absolute intentions (e.g. his moral will that all trust in and worship him, as well as no human murder another human) are frustrated by human creatures, nevertheless, "his conditional intention, which takes into account the creature's free action, is always fulfilled."³⁰ So, in other words, once God has taken into consideration his innate knowledge of what any given human would do in

²⁷ William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility Of Divine Foreknowledge And Human Freedom* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 135.

²⁸ Craig, "Rapprochement?" 152.

²⁹ Craig, "Calvinism Vs. Molinism," 76.

³⁰ Craig, "Rapprochement?" 152.

Keathley, *Salvation*, 154, adds: "The distinctive difference between Calvinism and Molinism is that Calvinism sees God accomplishing His will through His omnipotent power while Molinism understands [this to take place through] God's...omniscient knowledge." I am arguing in this chapter that Calvinism affirms the former without denying the latter.

different sets of circumstances (and this in light of and in response to the free human decisions that originate in their own hearts), he then can carry out his designs—but designs to some degree dependent upon and limited by those human choices.

It is this dependence and limitation by human choices that not only the Calvinist rejects, but so also does Scripture. Scripture teaches that God’s governance of all things is done in an absolutely free manner, flowing out of his own nature and according to his greatest desires, but not dependent upon or limited by the choices of humans. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones captured the biblical teaching well when he wrote:

[The decrees of God] are not dependent in any sense on human actions. They are not determined by anything that people may or may not do. God’s decrees are not even determined in the light of what He knows people are going to do. They are absolutely unconditional. They do not depend upon anything except God’s own will and God’s own holiness. ...But – and I want to make this quite clear – that does not mean that there is no such thing as cause and effect in life. That does not mean that there are no such things as conditional actions.... But what this doctrine says is that every cause and effect, and free actions, are part of the decree of God Himself.³¹

Let’s see how Scripture teaches this all-important aspect of God’s governance.

To begin, the Bible teaches that God is the ultimate Sovereign (the ultimate King or authority) and so God’s will is not limited by or dependent upon any other will. Since God can turn the human king’s heart “wherever he will” (Prov. 21:1) and human kings are viewed as sovereign over other humans, this implies that God’s eternal purpose supersedes and is not limited by any man’s will.

Similarly, in Psalm 22:28 we discover the reason God can bring the nations to worship him (Psalm 22:27) is that he is absolutely sovereign over the hearts and wills of men:³² “For kingship

³¹ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “God’s Eternal Decrees,” *Free Grace Broadcaster*, 237 (September 2016): 13-14. (Taken from “The Eternal Decrees of God,” in *God The Father, God The Son* [Wheaton: Crossway, 1996], 93-102, used by permission)

³² Other Old Testament passages that affirm God can and does change the will of man to be in conformity with his own include: Ps. 51:10; Is. 25:3; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:40; Ezek. 36:25-27; Daniel 2:20-21; 4:34d-35.

belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.” It is not surprising, then, that we read in Proverbs 21:30: “No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the LORD.”³³ In other words, he is the absolutely free and ultimate Sovereign, the one who can without fail carry out that which he has decreed—and this in no way dependent upon or limited by the human will.³⁴

God’s absolute sovereign freedom is not only implied by his ultimate authority over all other beings, but also by the reality he is an infinitely and perfectly happy God, a God who is not frustrated at all, since he can and does carry out all of his eternal purpose (his decrees)—and in a manner that is not limited by or dependent upon the human will. 1 Timothy 6:15 makes this point: “...which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords....” The word “blessed” (*makarios*) is better translated as “happy” (the same is true of Paul’s use of this term with God in 1 Tim. 1:11).³⁵ Part of what is implied in God being the only sovereign,³⁶ the ultimate King and Lord, is that he is not

³³ Part of the implication of this proverb would appear to be that if God so decrees that a heart will be turned to him (cf. Prov. 21:1) and so will repent, love him intensely, and fear him (Dt. 30:6; Is. 25:3; Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40; Ezek. 36:25-27, et al.), he can do that and none can keep that from happening—i.e. to prevent him from working in their will such that they truly want to come to him and love him.

³⁴ Psalm 103:19 also affirms God’s ultimate, absolute, and free sovereignty: “The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.” Here God’s ability to provide his benefits to his people is grounded in his absolute sovereignty. See also Daniel 4:35, where we read: “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’” Also significant are Job 42:2 (“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted”); Psalm 33:11 (“The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations”); and Isaiah 14:26-27 (“This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. ²⁷ For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?”).

³⁵ For the history behind why this word is translated as “blessed” in English, why that no longer captures what the Greek term conveys, for a defense of the English translation “happy,” and also for a defense of the reality God is happy (and so this term is best translated as “happy” here), see Randy Alcorn, *Happiness* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 125-130, 185-208, 217-224.

³⁶ In Luke 1:52 the word translated “sovereign” here (*dynastēs*) refers to earthly or human kings. Paul seems to use the term in an absolute and superlative fashion—as is seen from what follows and from the use of the adjective *monos* (“only”) with it. In Luke 8:27 it speaks of great authority. The word means one has a place of authority or

constrained from outside himself against his will, he is not at all frustrated, he is happy, and so he can carry out all his will—at the core of which in this context is the certain hope of the Christian, “the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 6:14).

What Paul is communicating in 1 Timothy 6:15 is rooted in a strong Old Testament tradition. For example, Psalm 115:3 describes God’s pleasure as the bedrock and source of what he does. Here we read: “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”³⁷ In this psalm the psalmist affirms that he desires glory to go to *Yahweh’s* name alone (1) and then expresses incredulity that the nations should ask where *Yahweh*, the God of his people, is—as if he were inactive or didn’t exist (2). After all, unlike their idols who can do nothing—idols located here on earth and subject to the power of the hands who made them (4-8), the true God, the God of Israel, is in the heavens (i.e. not confined to earth) and all that he pleases, this he does—i.e. he is sovereign and not subject to anyone else. That God is not subject to us enables him to provide and to work in behalf of man and so man can trust in him (9-18).

In Psalm 135:6 this truth is stated in an even stronger fashion: “Whatever the LORD pleases,³⁸ he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.” What goes farther here is that it is said *Yahweh* does this “in heaven, and on earth, in the seas, and all deeps.” In other words, using similar terminology as found elsewhere (cf. Ex. 20:4), all the universe is emphasized. The point seems to be that in all parts of the world and in relation to all beings *Yahweh* does as he pleases.

power and can exercise it. 1 Tim. 6:15 is the only other place it is used in the NT. Paul is saying here that God is the only one who has authority and power as he does—over all kings and lords—the only one who can act in perfect happiness and never be frustrated.

³⁷ The last clause is literally, “all that he pleases he does.” The Hebrew word translated “pleases” is *chaphets*. BDB, 342, offers the following meanings for the verb: “Delight in, have pleasure in.”

³⁸ Also used here is the Hebrew verb *chaphets*.

What is more, in the immediate context of Psalm 135:6, it is emphasized that “the LORD is great,³⁹ and that our Lord is above all gods” (v. 5). Similar, then, to Ps. 115:3 part of the reason God’s independence is emphasized is that he is compared to false gods (see also vv. 15-18). The implication is that false gods must do what the makers please, whereas the true God is not dependent upon what man does. When we broaden the view to take in the context of the entire psalm, servants of *Yahweh* are being called to praise him (vv. 1-3, 19-21) not only because he is independent and unique—above all gods, but also for his sovereign grace in choosing Israel (4),⁴⁰ for his providence in creation (7), and for his deliverance of Israel from Egypt and defeat of the nations in the exodus (8-12 [which includes judgment on sinners and compassion toward his people!]).

In Psalms 115 and 135 we discover, contrary to idols that are subject to man, God is not subject to or dependent upon man. However, then, we formulate God’s eternal purpose, his decrees, we must refrain from making God dependent upon man—even though God does respond to man’s reactions to him (repentance, etc.).⁴¹ God’s sovereign freedom, however, does

³⁹ This term *gadol* denotes “more magnitude or extension than something else, or beyond what is usual” (Webster’s, 1828, on “Great”). God’s greatness is seen in the characteristics present in this psalm.

⁴⁰ In verse 4 we read: “for the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel for his own possession.” The term *šegullah* is used often not only to speak of a treasured possession (cf. 1 Chronicles 29:3 [David’s treasury]; Eccl. 2:8 [Qoheleth’s treasury]), but more specifically God’s treasured possession, i.e. Israel (Dt. 14:2; 26:18), whom he has chosen by his sovereign grace and not based upon anything in themselves (Dt. 7:6-8) and to be the ones to glorify him in the world as they carry out their mission for him (cf. Ex. 19:5). In the progression of the canon we discover that it is those who truly fear *Yahweh* and esteem his name who are his treasured possession, his *šegullah* (Mal. 3:17). Finally, it should be noted that the term *bachar* is what is often used to speak of God’s choosing, his sovereign election’ of Israel (e.g. Dt. 7:6-7).

⁴¹ An example of this would be found in the book of Jonah in which it is recorded that God had pronounced judgment upon Nineveh and the Assyrians, if they did not repent. Yet, they repented in response to Jonah’s preaching, and so God responded to that repentance and treated them differently than he would have, if they had not repented.

Contrary to what I have presented here, Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 46, argues, based upon passages that speak of God’s repenting (e.g. Gen. 6:6; 1 Sam. 15:11, 35), that “God’s sovereignty...is contingent in certain cases upon human decisions.” This is the key issue between Calvinism and Molinism when it comes to their view of God’s sovereign meticulous providence.

not make him capricious. After all, he always acts in accordance with his nature. In other words, he is righteous and always acts in accordance with the reality he is set apart to his own glory (he is holy) and always at one and the same time acts in love, mercy, grace, justice, wrath against sin, etc.

John Piper agrees and adds:

If God is not under constraint by forces outside himself to act contrary to his good pleasure, but rather only acts out of the overflow of the joy of his boundless self-sufficiency, then all his acts are the expression of joy and he has pleasure in all that he does....

What these two verses (Psalm[s] 135:6; 115:3) teach is that everything God takes pleasure in doing, he does, and cannot be hindered from doing. Or to put it somewhat differently, all that he does he takes pleasure in. He cannot be kept back from doing what he delights most to do. And he cannot be forced to do what he does not delight in. And this is true everywhere in the universe. That's the meaning of 'in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps' (Ps. 135:6)....

*The point is that God acts in sovereign freedom. His acts do not spring from the need to make up deficiencies but from the passion to express the abundance of his delight. This is the meaning of his freedom. I have called it **sovereign** freedom because this is the note struck in all [the] texts we have looked at – God does in fact do all his pleasure. He is free in that he has no deficiencies that make him dependent, and he is sovereign in that he can act on his delights without being stopped by powers outside himself....*

Thus the declaration that God does all that he pleases is a declaration of his power. This is what we mean by sovereignty – God's power always makes way for his perfections to be expressed according to his good pleasure.⁴²

C. S. Lewis adds regarding the freedom of God: “The freedom of God consists in the fact that no cause other than Himself produces His acts and no external obstacle impedes them—that His own goodness is the root from which they all grow and His own omnipotence the air in

Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., “The Sovereignty Of God: Cases Studies In The Old Testament,” in Thomas R. Schreiner, Bruce A. Ware, Ed’s., *The Grace Of God, The Bondage Of The Will*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 25, argues for the same view throughout the Old Testament as we have advocated in this chapter, namely one in which he is not limited by “creaturely factors.” He continues (25-26): “[Scripture affirms] the ultimacy of God over and in all things, including authentic human responsibility.... Human agency in no way whatever limits the freedom and efficacious power of God or renders uncertain the fulfillment of his eternal decrees.” Ortlund (27-46) then goes on to demonstrate this view of sovereignty from Psalm 139; Jeremiah 1; and the book of Jonah.

⁴² John Piper, *The Pleasures Of God: Meditations On God's Delight In Being God* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1991), 50-52.

which they all flower.”⁴³

The Meticulous Nature of God's Governance

Having seen the reality of God's governance of all things and that this governance is absolutely free, we want now to zero in with greater focus upon the meticulous nature of that governance. In other words, we want to discover that this governance is not a general work of God that somehow pertains to the world and events without impacting specifics. Rather, "...the providence of God is fine-grained; it extends to the occurrence of individual actions and to each aspect of each action.”⁴⁴

Creation And Its Ongoing Operation

We begin by looking at God's meticulous governance in relation to the origin of the world, as well as its ongoing function.

Psalm 33:6-9 reads:⁴⁵ “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses.... For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.” Additionally, in verse 11 we read: “The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.”⁴⁶ The point seems to be that “in the creation [of the world] God's purposes always

⁴³ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem Of Pain*, cited in Piper, *The Pleasures*, 53.

⁴⁴ Helm, *Providence*, 104.

⁴⁵ Psalm 33 is a hymn which focuses upon praise of *Yahweh* for His “creative activities in the realms of nature and human history” (Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in vol. 5, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, Gen. Ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991], 276).

⁴⁶ Literally, the text reads: “The counsel of *Yahweh* shall stand forever; the plans of his heart to generation after generation.” The focus seems to be the same as what we saw above in Ephesians 1:11, namely on the determinations in the LORD in eternity past. All (without exception) God has thought about and decided he wants to bring about as part of his eternal purpose will stand—i.e. it will not fall or fail. The movement in the psalm seems to be this vary thing: If all God purposed in the initial creation, as well as in the events of the world as they unfold will take place,

prevail; so it is after the creation....”⁴⁷ God’s meticulous governance of both the origin and the ongoing operation of the world not only leaves no room for anything to be outside his sovereign rule and direction, but also serves as a source of great comfort and hope for his people, for it means he can save from war (16), death (19a), and famine (19b).⁴⁸

In this psalm we should also not miss that God’s works of creation and providence flow out of his decrees—here viewed as his word: “by the word (*dabar*) of the LORD the heavens were made...for he spoke (*’amar*) and it came to be; he commanded (*tsavah*), and it stood firm” (6, 9). The idea appears to be that whatever God has purposed (v. 11) he can bring it about by commanding—not only something from nothing—but also telling his creation down to the most minute detail what to do.⁴⁹

What we have just introduced is that the normal operations of the world around us (what some might call the operations of nature) are also governed by God. This is all true, even though mankind can now describe in great detail much about the secondary causes of natural phenomena (rain, storms, changes in seasons, hurricanes, tsunamis, tornadoes, etc.). We know that modern science was birthed from those who had a biblical worldview that saw the world operating in an orderly fashion that could be studied and even predicted (e.g. Psalm 19:1-6), which includes

then certainly those who fear and hope in him can trust in him to accomplish salvation for them as he has promised he would (verses 13-22).

⁴⁷ C. John Collins, “Psalm 33:10-12,” in ESVSB, 977.

⁴⁸ The context does mention the sovereign LORD (13) is not only aware of all that happens (vv. 13-15)—which by itself could leave room for middle knowledge to play a role in how God is carrying out his sovereign, meticulous providence—the clause in 15a, “he who fashions the hearts of them all,” moves us away from a contra-causal understanding of the text and toward the idea that God can not only choose from the options he innately knows that men would choose in given circumstances, but he can direct the hearts in certain ways.

⁴⁹ See also Pss. 147:15-18; 148:5-8 for the reality that God’s works of creation and providence take place by his word of command—emphasizing that in his sovereign authority he can bring about all he desires, down to the most minute detail.

natural laws that are descriptions of secondary causes.⁵⁰ Yet, the Bible is consistent in ascribing to God always the ultimate causation in the most minute details of the world.

In Psalm 104 we find a celebration of God’s providence throughout creation. Here it is affirmed that he makes springs gush forth in the valleys to hydrate animals (10-11), he sends rain and snow upon the mountains (13), he causes the grass to grow for livestock (14), and brings forth plants for man to cultivate, resulting in food (14), along with wine, oil, and bread (15), he planted trees (16), he makes darkness (20), he even provides food for lions in their hunt (21-22), and food for the creatures of the sea (25-28). Sandwiched in all this discussion is the statement in v. 23: “Man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening.” Clearly there are means present in all these processes, means or secondary causes upon which the psalmist does not focus. His aim is to praise God for his provision in all areas of life. His aim is not to suggest a form of monocausality—namely that God is the only cause in these processes. To know the processes or the means (the science) is not to make God unnecessary. Rather it should be to attribute the processes ultimately to God.

Matthew 5:45 states that “he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and unjust.” Here we have an example of God as the far cause of these phenomena in creation. Through scientific inquiry we have discovered the near causes. Yet, it is still true that God is the ultimate cause behind daily occurrences—down to the most minute detail. That reality does not take away from the reality of the near causes—namely that they truly bring about these phenomena as well.⁵¹

⁵⁰ See David N. Livingstone, “Where Would Civilization Be Without Christianity: The Gift Of Science,” *Christianity Today*, 43, 14 (December 6, 1999): 52ff.; Charles Colson, Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1999), ch. 40.

⁵¹ We can also factor into the biblical teaching on the normal operations of creation that creation is under a curse due to sin, which means it is broken and often functions in a way that destroys and makes life hard (cf. Gen. 3:17-18; Rom. 8:20-22). What this results in is that Scripture can use language that shows: (1) God is the ultimate cause of

In Matthew 6:25-34 Jesus teaches his followers not to be anxious about food, drink, and clothing (the necessities of life), for God will provide. He uses birds (26) and wild flowers (28-30) as illustrations of how God provides for parts of his creation that do not engage in works of near causation (“they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns...they neither toil nor spin”). Jesus asks, “Are you not of more value than they?” and will he not much more clothe you?” (26, 31). For those who are more valuable (those made in God’s image and more to the point, those who are his children, true believers) God will provide. The ways God’s people are provided for are either the near causation of their work (Prov. 31:13-22; 2 Thes. 3:10) or others supporting them as they engage in ministry (1 Cor. 9:3-18; 1 Tim. 5:18). What we have in this text, then, is the teaching that whether God is more of a near cause or far cause, he still is seen as a cause, the one who provides. In the case of people who are to work, this does not negate their responsibility to work. But we also must not miss that God is seen as governing the most minute details of his creation.

In Matthew 10:29-31 Jesus encourages disciples on mission not to fear those who would oppose and hurt them. After all, not one sparrow (so cheap a commodity that two are sold for 1/16 of a denarius—less than one hour’s wage) will fall to the ground apart from the knowledge and consent of the Father. The disciples are of more value to him than a sparrow, so he will take care of them (even the hairs on their head are numbered). God’s meticulous providence is held out here as a comfort to the disciples. God’s sovereignty and providence do not merely extend to

provisional phenomena in creation; (2) God is the ultimate cause of destructive phenomena (Gen. 3:17-18; Amos 3:6; Rom. 8:20); (3) Man’s sin is the moral cause of brokenness in the phenomena of creation (Gen. 3; Rom. 8:20-23); (4) Satan can be a near cause of such phenomena that destroy (Job 1:6-12, 16, 18-19); (5) Man can be a near cause of destruction (Judges 15:1-5); (6) Man can be a near cause of good outcomes in creation (Prov. 6:6-11; 12:11; 13:4; 14:23); (7) And yet, God is not seen as morally responsible for the sin and evil of the world (cf. Hab. 1:13; James 1:13).

common natural phenomena, but even the smallest and seemingly most insignificant of those phenomena!

The Bible teaches that God's governance even reaches to the details of the place where humans find themselves (their place of birth) and what time in history they live. In Acts 17:26 we read: "And [God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place." Though Luke does not tell us how God did this, according to other statements in Luke-Acts about God's specific and absolute sovereignty (e.g. Acts 4:28; 13:48), then most likely what is intended here is that God's plan initiates the processes under consideration prior to and independent of man's choices.⁵²

God's governance even determines the length of a man's life. In Psalm 139:16 we read: "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." Here we discover God is like an author-potter who has written the days of a man in the book of his decrees and he has taken those days and formed them into something even while the person is early in the womb and none of those days have taken place yet.

Unless we can discover that Scripture delineates a difference between how God is sovereign over man and his decisions and how God is sovereign over the rest of creation (its operations and

⁵² In Acts 17:27a we discover God, as the Governor of all, has so ordered mankind in the different times and places so that they could seek or worship him. There is something in his providential governance of the peoples of the world that demonstrates that God has given every natural opportunity for man to see, know, and seek God. At the same time, we must also not miss that where people are born and live in the world (and whether or not they have access there to the gospel) can have a determinative effect upon whether or not they trust Jesus Christ (see Romans 10:13-17). This is part of God's meticulous governance of man in relation to salvation (a topic we will look at below). It must be admitted that apart from the body of teaching we are currently looking at, the Molinist does have a reasonable explanation for the unevangelized—both why they have no access and how God can be just in pronouncing judgment upon them: It is highly possible that God knew they would not respond positively to the gospel in any given world and so he distanced them from his Special Revelation (Cf. Craig, "Calvinism Vs. Molinism," 70). This explanation is reasonable. However, we are discovering that the Scriptural evidence is leading us in the direction of a different explanation.

events), it would appear that the views of simple foreknowledge and middle knowledge have a strong problem: For example, are we to conclude that in God's sovereignty exercised through his providence over creation that all we are saying is that he decreed merely what he knows birds would do in certain circumstances, but he is not in any way causing it? This does not appear to be what Scripture asserts.

At the same time, we must affirm a monocausal view of the world is a fatalistic and distorted view. It is one that is currently found in one strand of Islam, for example:

The reason ISIS behaves so irrationally can be traced to a ninth-century theological dispute in Sunni Islam.... The Mu'tazilite school...believed God is a god of reason and justice. It attempted to balance revelation and reason. If revelation – the Quran – appeared to conflict with reason, revelation must be reinterpreted or discarded.

The Ash'arite school, on the other hand, taught that God is pure power and therefore revelation dominates all, including reason. Man must submit to the Quran without questioning.

"The mind, once it testifies to the truth of the Prophet, must cease to act," as one Islamic scholar put it.

In Ash'arite theology, man has no free will, is incapable of determining right from wrong, and the only cause of anything is the will of Allah.... An arrow flies because Allah sustains its path, not because of momentum. If you cut off a man's head and he dies, he died because it was Allah's will, not because of any other cause.

The Ash'arite school of thought became the dominant teaching among Sunnis, who became the majority sect in Islam. There is still a strong strain of irrationality in Sunni Islam...and it [plays a] central role in jihadist ideology.⁵³

Random Events And Accidents

God's governance is so exhaustive that it even extends to those events that, on face value, have the strongest appearance of having no apparent cause—things that many might ascribe to good or bad luck—a good day at the casino or a totaled car on the highway. In fact, historically Calvinists have asserted that even though God does either causatively or permissively brings about all things, this does not “take away...the power of second causes; on the contrary, they are

⁵³ Les Sillars, “Isis and Islam's Irrationality,” *A Q & A With Robert Reilly*, in *World*, posted November 6, 2015, accessed on November 6, 2015, at worldmag.com.

created and have their roles by His appointment.”⁵⁴ This is seen, for example, in Proverbs 16:33: “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.” Lots were usually pebbles with different colors or shapes on them that, for example, could be placed into the fold of a garment and thrown out randomly (i.e. without intentional placement on the part of the person casting). This practice was often used to discern God’s will in a decision (Ex. 28:30; Nu. 26:53; Ne. 11:1; Ps. 22:18; Jonah 1:7; Acts 1:26).⁵⁵

Like with the rolling of dice today, the casting of lots was to be done in such a manner the outcome is not prejudiced by the one casting. Though the goal is for the cast to be random,⁵⁶ nevertheless, how the lots are picked up, how the muscles in the hand and fingers and arm function together—all controlled by the near cause of the person’s brain—also where the lots land, what kind of surface they land on, and if outside, whether or not wind would have an effect, will determine the outcome. So, typically with lots or dice, we have an event that has near causes located within a person and circumstances surrounding him, but not causes located in the person’s will (other than the decision to pick up and throw).

In such a seemingly mundane and random act, this proverb asserts that every time lots are cast and so a decision is made, the decision is ultimately from *Yahweh*. Since the decision is determined by how the lots fall, this necessitates that the LORD works concurrently through the decision to cast lots, the brain, the movement of the arm’s, hand’s, and finger’s muscles, along

⁵⁴ RSB (2005), 900. The *Westminster Confession Of Faith*, Chapter 3, paragraph 1, likewise reads: “God from all eternity, did...ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet...nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.”

⁵⁵ For this information on the casting of lots, I am dependent upon the ASB, 986.

⁵⁶ A random act (i.e. the word used as an adjective) is the following (Webster’s 1828)—when something is, “Done at hazard or without settled aim or purpose; left to chance; as a *random* blow.” Or, it is, “Uttered or done without previous calculation; as a *random* guess.”

with other factors (such as surface, the weight and state of the lots, and wind) to determine the outcome of the lots.

Because God works concurrently through secondary causes in the world, including natural laws for how the universe typically functions, things such as the rolling of dice and most subjects of scientific inquiry can be subjected to study to “predict the average outcome or the probability of a particular outcome,” in other words subjected to the study of “chance and probability.”⁵⁷ Mathematician and theologian, Vern Poythress, reminds us this is how much science works: “a scientist can predict the average outcome or the probability of a particular outcome.”⁵⁸ When the Bible affirms that God is the ultimate and decisive cause of even the random toss of lots (or today dice), it is not suggesting that God bypasses secondary causes in the universe. These secondary and normal causes are no less a cause than God and, what is more, they have been ordained by God for the normal operation of the world. This is why we can study the world and what typically happens—even in seemingly random events—and can engage in the calculations of probability and statistics. But, nonetheless, even in such mundane and random events, the outcome is due to the sovereign and meticulous governance of God.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Vern S. Poythress, *Chance And The Sovereignty Of God: A God-Centered Approach To Probability And Random Events* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014, Kindle Edition), Introduction. He adds: “The analysis uses mathematical methods that take into account the variations in experimental outcomes. These methods reckon with what might be called chance variations that occur in the midst of an experiment designed primarily to explore regularities rather than chance variation itself.” Poythress goes on in Chapter 9 of that same book to define the kind of “chance” that truly happens as “something that happens unpredictably without discernible human intention or observable cause.” He rightly denies that the kind of “chance” many have in mind takes place: “the assumed impersonal purposeless determiner of unaccountable happenings, i.e. luck.”

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Poythress, *Chance*, chapter 3, argues that God governs “random events.” Here he mentions some more examples in the Bible: The flight of an arrow that took the life of Israel’s King Ahab (1 Kings 22:20-35); that Rebekah just happened to come out to the well at the right time for Abraham’s servant to meet her so eventually she could become Isaac’s wife (Gen. 24:15); and a similar situation years later with Rachel coming to a well (Gen. 29:6); the reality that after Joseph was thrown into a pit, a caravan of Ishmaelites “happened to go by,” took him out (Gen. 37:25), and then “happened” to sell him to Potiphar in Egypt (Gen. 37:36); the fact that Pharaoh’s daughter “happened” to come to the river at just the right time to hear baby Moses crying in the basket so she could take him out (Exo. 2:3-10), et.al.

We also see in the Bible that God governs accidents or chance events. So, on the one hand, we can say that if a vehicle crashes, it can be due to explainable near causes such as a blown tire, an unforeseen icy patch on the road, a boulder suddenly crashing down upon the interstate from the mountain above the road, a driver whose attention was taken away by a screaming baby or by looking down at a just-received-text. Yet, on the other hand, the Bible teaches that through an immeasurable combination of causative and permissive governing movements by God, even these events come about by his meticulous providence. Vern Poythress helpfully explains:

Christian transcendence says that God fully controls chance events. They are unpredictable and inexplicable for human beings, but not for God. When they look at chance events, human beings cannot see a definite, simple, meaningful pattern of secondary causes, that is, causes within the world. God, however, knows his purposes even if we do not. He brings about the events even if we as creatures cannot see a cause.

Christian immanence says that God is present with so-called chance events. He has his purposes. He is involved for the sake of his people...Rom. 8:28....

One place we discover this is in comparing parallel texts out of the Pentateuch on the provision of refuge cities for those who have accidentally taken the life of another person, and so they want to escape the vengeance of the family. In Dt. 19:4-5 an example is given of such an unintentional act. A person takes the life of another “unintentionally without having hated him in the past—as when someone goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down a tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies....” Another example is given in Numbers 35:33. A death occurs while someone is using “a stone that could cause death, and without seeing [the other person] dropped it on him, so that he died, though he was not his enemy and did not seek his harm....” Yet, in Exodus 21:13, we read of such incidents, “God let him fall into his hand.”⁶⁰ So, it was an accident, something

⁶⁰ According to BDB, 58, this verb, *'anah*, used in the piel stem as it is here, can connote, “cause (or allow) to meet.” Because it occurs only three other times (2 Ki. 5:7; Ps. 91:10; Prov. 12:21) and none of those times in the piel, its exact meaning is hard to establish. Is it suggesting God actively caused or passively allowed the meeting? To some

by chance, something not planned by the person using the axe or stone; nevertheless, it took place as a result of God's sovereign and meticulous governance of all events.⁶¹

It must also be noted that in some cases of accidents, though the outcome was not intended by the subject, nevertheless, the subject can bare moral responsibility. For example, in Exodus 21:28-29 the case law is provided that affirms a man shall not be held liable for murder of another individual by his ox who gored the victim to death, unless the animal had a habit of doing this previously. Then, in that case, the subject is guilty of murder since he was aware of the animal's tendencies and should have addressed them. This shows us that various degrees of human responsibility can be assigned in accidents (and such things should be examined for those different degrees), nevertheless, if we have understood accurately texts such as Exodus 21:13 and Proverbs 16:33, these accidents take place not only as a result of these real secondary causes, but ultimately they take place as a result of God's meticulous governance.

As a result, practically-speaking, we live with both the reality all happens as a result of God's meticulous providence and also that in the vast majority of situations we can also speak of secondary causes and the responsibility they bear. So, at one and the same time, a Christian can be assured that a neighbor's accidental discharge of his firearm that results in their life-threatening injury and long hospital stay is part of God's governance of all, yet, the neighbor's irresponsibility and carelessness can also be a legitimate focus of conversation. What is more,

degree, it doesn't matter, if our assessment in the rest of this book is accurate. Such events would happen as a result of an immeasurable combination of causative and permissive governing movements on the part of God such that what he decreed all along the way could take place, yet we could also say that the event happened since fallen humans live in a sin-cursed world in which such things take place and death occurs, and in some such situations we could even say that though the axe-wielder did not mean for the event to take place, he was also careless and irresponsible leading up to it.

⁶¹ Poythress, *Chance And The Sovereignty*, ch. 4, also mentions the disasters that take place with Job's children, his servants, and his herds (wind, lightning, marauders)—leading to the loss of all for Job. From the human perspective, these were accidents or chance events—albeit happening in a cluster. Yet, we are told in the book of Job God ordained these events by permitting Satan to engineer them as part of a challenge Satan made against God in reference to Job. The point is that God has his purposes and he did decree to permit them through secondary causes (Satan, and the cursed, broken creation).

merely because God permits something to happen as part of his eternal purpose does not mean he puts his moral stamp-of-approval on it. It does mean he can and does use it along with an immeasurable combination of other events and experiences to bring about good in the life of his people (Romans 8:28) and to bring about the magnification of his glory (Rom. 11:34-36).⁶²

Sin And Suffering

In Chapters 2-3 we gained some insight into why God ordained sin. Those chapters, coupled with what we have seen in this chapter about God's exhaustive governance (e.g. Eph. 1:11), lead us to the unmistakable conclusion that God ordained that humans sin and also ordained the suffering that emerges from that sin.

We also come to this conclusion from a different direction. Since God the Father, in eternity past, determined to set his affection upon the Son in such a way that he would be the lamb who saves sinners (1 Peter 1:19-20),⁶³ and also determined that sinners would put to death Jesus (Acts 4:27-28),⁶⁴ we also know that God ordained that humans would be sinners who are in need of that very salvation.

Yet, there is also a third way we know God has ordained sin and the suffering that is sin's result, and this comes from texts which explicitly say God is their ultimate cause. In Jer. 23:12; 25:9; and Lam. 3:33 we see that God decreed that Judah would experience great evil as judgment for their sins at the hands of Babylon and king Nebuchadnezzar, which includes God's ordaining

⁶² To look into a more detailed treatment of chance and probability, as well as how it would be treated by a soft deterministic Calvinist, see Part II and Part III of Poythress (a mathematician and theologian), *Chance And The Sovereignty God*.

⁶³ 1 Peter 1:19-20: "...but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in the last times for your sake." The meaning of "foreknow" and "foreknowledge" will be dealt with in the next chapter, as well as in Appendix Two.

⁶⁴ Acts 4:27-28: "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, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." See Appendix One for the explanation of this text.

that this king and his citizens would act sinfully. In Romans 8:20 we discover that God subjected creation to a curse and the suffering that comes with that, and this was because of man's sin. In Proverbs 22:2 and Ecclesiastes 7:14 we are reminded that both prosperity and the suffering that can come with poverty come ultimately because of God's decrees.⁶⁵ In Job 1-2 we see God permitting Satan to carry out evil upon Job that comes at the hands of sinful men, as well as a result of the curse and brokenness that creation is under—the suffering of natural disasters and that of bodily disease. And, as a final example, we discover that even the suffering that the New Testament Church undergoes in this age at the hands of sinners is the result of God's decretive will (1 Peter 4:16, 19)—so much so that we are told God already has fixed the number of Christians who will die at the hands of others for their faith (Revelation 6:11).

We need to remember, however, that God's ordaining sin and suffering does not consist of his "will of approval or action."⁶⁶ In other words, as suggested in Job 1-2, God permitted Satan and man to sin and continues to permit sentient beings to sin, but this does not mean he places his moral stamp-of-approval upon such affections, decisions, and actions, nor is he the moral author of such sin.⁶⁷ In the next chapter we will look at how this can be so.

Nevertheless, the movement behind God's ordaining sin for the Calvinist and the Molinist is different. For the Molinist, sin results from man's indeterministically free will. In one sense,

⁶⁵ Isaiah 45:7b (NLT) adds about God: "I send good times and bad times."

⁶⁶ This phrase is from the English Puritan, William Perkins, in his work, *Manner And Order Of Predestination*, in his *Works*, 2:613-14 (cited in Joel R. Beeke, Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine For Life* [Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012], 128).

⁶⁷ Poythress, *Chance And The Sovereignty*, ch. 4, writes of Job 1-2: "Yes, the Bible does teach that God is good and does good (Ps. 86:5; 100:5; 107:1; 119:68). But it flatly contradicts those who want to 'protect' him by removing his control over disasters. Job made it clear that he thought God was in control: 'The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away' (Job 1:21). Was Job wrong? From the surrounding narrative in Job 1 we learn that Satan engineered the disasters... (Job 1:12). But Satan did not act without God's permission (see Job 1:10-11). We see three distinct causes: God, Satan, and human raiders (vv. 15, 17), all acting within the same events. The plans of Satan [or sinful humans] do not negate the sovereignty of God."

then, God did not have the power to prevent it, since he created man. On the other hand, for the Calvinist, based on the biblical line-of-reasoning we have been following, there is a different approach. God willing permitted sin and suffering to accomplish a greater good, a purpose that flows out of the holy character of God.

To wrap up this discussion we can do no better than quote the helpful words of Arthur W.

Pink:

Once more, it needs to be carefully borne in mind that God did not decree that Adam should sin and then inject into Adam an inclination to evil, in order that His decree might be carried out. No; 'God cannot be tempted, neither tempt[s] He any man' (James 1:13). Instead, when the Serpent came to tempt Eve, God caused her to remember His command forbidding to each of the tree...and of the penalty attached to disobedience! Thus, though God had decreed the Fall, in no sense was He the Author of Adam's sin, and at no point was Adam's responsibility impaired....

To affirm that God decreed the entrance of sin into His universe, and that he foreordained all its fruits and activities, is to say that which, at first may shock the reader; but reflection should show that it is far more shocking to insist that sin has invaded His dominions against His [decretive] will, and that its exercise is outside his jurisdiction; for in such a case where would be His omnipotenc[e]? No, to recognize that God has foreordained all the activities of evil, is to see that He is the Governor of sin: His will determines its exercise, His power regulates its bounds (Ps. 76:10). He is neither the Inspirer nor the Infuser of sin in any of His creatures, but He is its Master, by which we mean God's management of the wicked is so entire that, they can do nothing save that which His hand and counsel, from everlasting, determined should be done.

Though nothing contrary to holiness and righteousness can ever emanate from God, yet He has, for His own wise ends, ordained His creatures to fall into sin.⁶⁸

The Life, Death, And Resurrection Of Jesus

Another way to see that God governs all things according to the Calvinist understanding is to look at the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. All related to these events and these events themselves took place as a result of God's absolutely sovereign and meticulous providence.

In Acts 2:23 we discover that Jesus was delivered up to his enemies to be crucified and killed "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." Yet, at the same time, this was carried out by morally responsible agents: "you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless

⁶⁸ Pink, *The Sovereignty*, 250-51.

See also Appendix Four, where I deal with the problem of evil.

men.”⁶⁹ The text goes on to say God raised him up and this was in accordance with Old Testament Scripture (Ac. 2:24-33).

This same affirmation is made in Acts 4:27-28, where the early church in its praying asserts the moral responsibility of Herod, Pontius Pilate, Gentiles, and people of Israel “gathered together against your holy servant Jesus” (27) and yet, in verse 28 we read: “to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.” If I have understood this text correctly, it affirms that God decreed these events in a way that was not dependent on or limited by human free decisions. See Appendix One for the explanation of this passage.

Another way in which we see God’s absolute governance in and over the death and resurrection of Jesus is in how the New Testament often says that his death and resurrection were necessary (through use of the Greek verb *dei*): Mt. 26:54; Mk. 8:31; Lk. 9:22; 17:25; 24:7; John 3:14; 12:34; 20:9; Acts 17:3. What these texts teach is that because God, in accordance with his nature, had determined to save sinners in a manner that preserves and displays both his justice

⁶⁹ Acts 2:23 begins with the accusative masculine singular near demonstrative pronoun, “this one” (*touton*), which has as its antecedent, “Jesus” in v. 22. Peter has introduced “Jesus” and given some important information about him, information that reminds listeners God the Father himself has demonstrated the reality of who Jesus is and what he has done. Now, at the beginning of v. 23 Luke records Peter as continuing the theme of divine purpose and work in the life of Jesus, when he writes literally: “according to the predetermined (*tē hōrismenē*) will (*boulē*) and foreknowledge (*kai prognōsei*) of God (*tou theou*) delivered up (*ekdoton*).” The accusative masculine singular adjective “delivered up” modifies “this one,” which itself refers to “Jesus”. So, Jesus was “delivered up,” i.e. given over to enemies or the power of someone else. The rest of the clause tells us the manner in which he was delivered up. What Peter emphasizes is that it was according to God’s divine plan. It must be understood that “foreknowledge” for God is not merely knowledge ahead of time. It is a predetermined and active knowledge. That is emphasized by the language used in this verse. This is also seen more clearly in Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:2 (seen in context of vv. 1, 3-4). See Chapter Six and also Appendix Two.

The last clause of the verse speaks of human responsibility and agency for the death of Jesus. Literally, it reads, “through hands (*dia cheiros* : preposition + singular [functions as plural] ablative of agency) of lawless men (*anomōn*) having crucified (*prospēzantes*: aorist active temporal participle, nominative, masculine, plural) you killed” (*aneilate*: Aorist, active, indicative, 2nd plural). This clause is very precise in its wording. Peter believes Jews (note “Men of Israel”) instigated the crucifixion of Jesus—a sinful act for which they are morally responsible, but which was carried out through the agency and compliance of the Romans, i.e. “lawless men”. As such, Peter is affirming the moral responsibility of Jews and Gentiles for the death of Jesus. Most likely this speaks both of the near moral cause of the events surrounding the death of Jesus, as well as an implication regarding the theological purpose behind his death also—i.e. Jesus was going to his death because of the sins of sinners, to pay sin’s penalty and purchase salvation.

and his justifying mercy (cf. Rom. 3:26; 9:22-23), and so he had ordained the death and resurrection of Jesus to that end, then these events must happen. Precision is in order here. The necessity does not suggest that despite what humans wanted to do in regard to Jesus, what was going to happen was going to happen—in other words, they had to act contrary to their own reasoning, desires, and wants. Rather, it means that through an immeasurable (from the human perspective) number of causative and permissive movements on the part of God he brought about exactly what he had ordained in a manner that the events were also caused by humans and so they bore responsibility for them. Yet, the language also implies God’s governance of the events.

Salvation⁷⁰

The next way in which we see God’s exhaustive governance in the world has to do with how he saves sinners. This brings us to the subject of divine election. What Sam Storms says about Paul’s description of election in Ephesians 1 is an accurate overview of what is taught in all of Scripture:

The Calvinist view of election highlights, as does Paul in Ephesians 1, the divine initiative in the work of salvation. Paul is deafening in his redundancy to make the point that the distinction in humanity between those who believe and those who don’t...is ultimately God’s doing. Note the repeated emphasis on the divine initiative in salvation as seen in the vocabulary related to God’s will or purpose or plan: ‘according to his purpose’ (vv. 9, 11), ‘the counsel of his will’ (v. 11). Indeed, no fewer than eleven times in these verses do we find vocabulary reflective of divine sovereignty: he chose us (v. 4), he predestined us (v. 5), his good pleasure (v. 5, KJV), God’s will (v. 5), God’s will (v. 9), his good pleasure (v. 9, KJV), his purpose (v. 9), he foreordained us (v. 11, author’s translation), his purpose (v. 11), his counsel (v. 11), his will (v. 11).⁷¹

Storms also sets forth the two main options we have for how to view election: “Does God elect people because they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, or does God elect people in order that

⁷⁰ We will only introduce the subject here. We will take it up again in more detail in Chapter Eight.

⁷¹ Sam Storms, *Chosen For Life: The Case For Divine Election* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 40.

they shall believe in Christ? ...Are faith and repentance produced by free will and thus the cause of election, or are they produced by the Holy Spirit and the effect of election?”⁷²

Before moving on with the biblical material, we need to see accurately how Molinists view the relation of God’s election of the saved to the faith of the saved. I affirm our Molinist brothers and sisters for a very strong attempt to remove themselves from adherence to conditional election. They do this based on two main tenets. William Lane Craig sets forth the first tenet when he affirms that God “provides sufficient grace for salvation for each and every person he creates.”⁷³ And, so, though sin leaves mankind morally unable to see their need for Christ and to trust in him, God has remedied this with this “sufficient grace,” often referred to as “prevenient grace,” so that man can initiate saving faith or he can reject Christ in a way that is consistent with indeterministic freedom. We will look at the subject of prevenient grace in more detail in Chapter Eight.

Two brief responses to Craig will be given here. To begin, I do not see the doctrine of prevenient grace taught in Scripture. I will address this in more detail in Chapter Eight. Second, even if one could see it in Scripture, it would still be hard to see how this solves anything because it admits a previous gracious work of God is necessary for man to believe, which begins to open the door away from the movement of faith arising in one’s own will. Some will respond, “Yes, Tom, that is true, but it still is a situation in which man can either accept or reject the offer—and this is the kind of alternativity that indeterministic freedom demands. Yes, that is true, but then we have a whole host of other texts which seem to argue for the effective nature of the call for the elect and so this approach runs into problems.

⁷² Storms, *Chosen*, 22. Storms does not intend to suggest that the Holy Spirit, in the minds of Arminians and Molinists, would not be operative in salvation. The point made is that the Holy Spirit initiates the process, and this not based upon simple foreknowledge or middle knowledge that the person would believe.

⁷³Craig, *Only Wise God*, 136.

William Lane Craig sets forth the second tenet when the very capable theologian and philosopher highlights that predestination is not based upon simple foreknowledge of faith or human merit, nor is it merely unconditional.⁷⁴ In God's middle knowledge he knows what would happen in given sets of circumstances and with this knowledge, God graciously and freely choose to actualize the world with all its circumstances as they have been, are, and will be, including all persons in their circumstances. Because God chose this world, this in part, decides man's situations and whether or not they would believe. So, on the one hand, God is not deciding who will be elected based on their faith.⁷⁵ Yet, on the other hand, whether or not one is saved depends upon them: "their eternal destiny thus lies in their own hands. Everything depends on whether they freely receive or reject Christ."⁷⁶

However individual Molinists work out the particulars, their commitment to indeterministic (or libertarian) freedom necessitates that the person possesses alternativity (to choose or reject) and that faith must move originally from their own heart. However much that faith is influenced by God's grace and previous movement (including antecedent circumstances God willed to actualize) seems to differ from Molinist to Molinist. What is clear and most problematic is that at least to some degree, for all Molinists, God's choice of those who are saved is dependent upon and/or limited by human freedom. This, as we are discovering, is biblically untenable.

Lest we doubt this dependence upon human freedom, we should consider Craig's comments: "In Molina's view, we might say that it is up to God whether we find ourselves in a world in which we are predestined, but that it is up to us whether we are predestined in the world in which

⁷⁴ Craig, "Rapprochement?" 155-56.

⁷⁵ Keathley, *Salvation*, 141, agrees.

⁷⁶ Craig, *Only Wise God*, 137.

we find ourselves.”⁷⁷ Again, he writes: “...those who God knew would respond to his grace are predestined to be saved.... Nevertheless, in the divided sense they are entirely free to reject God’s grace; but were they to do so, then God would have different middle knowledge than he does and so they would not be predestined.”⁷⁸

Returning to our biblical understanding of God’s governance in salvation, we see that God appears to have set a pattern with Israel that he keeps with his New Covenant people—namely of choosing them in his sovereign grace—not because of anything to commend them to him (it is unconditional), but he chooses to love them because he chooses freely to love them (Deut. 7:6-8). We should also note that in this passage both this past sovereign grace and God’s future grace are to motivate his people to faithfulness and purity before him (7:1-5 and how it connects to 7:6-11).⁷⁹

For those who come to see who Jesus Christ truly is, that they need him, that they must humble themselves, repent, and come to him in faith, it is necessary that the sovereign grace of

⁷⁷ Craig, “Rapprochement?” 157.

⁷⁸ Craig, “Rapprochement?” 158.

⁷⁹ Deuteronomy 7:1-11 reads: “When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you...seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, 2 and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. 3 You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, 4 for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. 5 But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire. 6 “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9 Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, 10 and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. 11 You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today.”

both the Father and the Son precede the movement of their will (Mt. 11:27):⁸⁰ “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”⁸¹

In Matthew 22:14 we read, “Many are called, but few are chosen.” In context this is explaining the rejection of Jesus and the gospel of the kingdom by many in Israel, especially leaders who have opposed him. Though it is true that man is lost and without excuse because he has rejected the General Revelation of God or the General and Special Revelation of God, it is

⁸⁰ In the larger context of Matthew Jesus has already affirmed that he came “to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners” (Mt. 9:13, NLT). Now, in Matthew 11:20-24 Jesus is denouncing people who have seen his miracles, yet remained unrepentant. What is clear from these denunciations is that Jesus views people as responsible for their rejection of him, i.e. for their refusal to come to him. These denunciations eventually give way to one of Jesus’ most compelling invitations in the Gospels that people come to him (11:28-30): “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Two things are clear about this invitation. First, it appears to be an invitation that is given to all kinds of people without distinction. Second, those who will come will be those who realize they “labor...[and] are heavy laden,” those who need rest, those who struggle with burdensome yokes placed on them by other teachers. Given the language of repentance in the preceding context (21), as well as the larger context that calls for people to understand they are sinners (9:13), those who come will be those who understand they labor and are heavy laden because of sin. So, people are responsible for their sin and Jesus calls them to turn from their sin and the brokenness of this world to him. Yet, in the middle of the denunciations and the invitation we find our current passage we are considering.

⁸¹ In the context (v. 25), it is affirmed that the truths of salvation and man’s need for it are divinely hidden from those who think themselves wise and understanding, i.e. who think they do not need it. The point is not that God has not shown himself to them at all. They have all the faculties to see and understand and they have general revelation. And, in the case of those Jesus most directly has in mind, they had seen his Messiah-affirming-works (vv. 20-24). Yet, emerging out of their own hearts and as a result of God’s immeasurable combinations of causative and permissive movements in and on their hearts, they had remained in their stubbornness. It seems best to view the hiding of v. 25, then, as a passing over some—leaving them in their rebellion and blindness (cf. also 2 Cor. 4:4). Yet, conversely, the Father has revealed these salvation truths to children, i.e. those who, as a result of God’s gracious work, have come humbly to see their need and turned to him in trust—like children (cf. Mt. 19:14; 2 Cor. 4:6).

In verse 26 the text reads: “Yes, Father, for such became well-pleasing before you” (author’s own translation). Here we have an affirmation that the Father was moved by his pleasure to save such “children.” As we discovered above, this implies God’s absolute sovereignty, his freedom, moving out of his own pleased nature, to move in this way. The “all things” of v. 27 appear to refer to the things of salvation (who Jesus is and his works). Jesus affirms that the Father has handed over or given him these all things. In other words, Jesus is carrying out his works because the Father has decreed that Jesus do them. Given this divine initiative, it should not be surprising that no one truly and intimately knows the Son except the Father and vice versa. The point here is that the Father and Son, as part of the godhead, have intimate natural knowledge of each other. Also, it is not surprising that if some are going to come to know the Father (and in context, by implication the Son), there must be a divine work in them to that end. Here it is very clearly stated that those who know the Father are those to whom the Son has chosen to reveal him.

also accurate to say that the man who remains unsaved is not saved because God has passed over him and allowed him to go his own way and so not to trust in Christ for salvation.

In John 6:22-65, the Bread of Life discourse, we discover that the will and work of God is to “believe in him whom he [the Father] has sent” (29) and yet this only happens with those whom the Father promised to give to the Son in eternity past (37) and yet all these will believe, have eternal life, and not be lost (38-40). All such persons will come to Christ in faith because the Father will first draw them (44) through the life-giving, regenerating work of the Spirit (63) and this because he has ordained they would come (65).⁸²

In Acts 13:48 we see that God’s choosing, i.e. his appointment of people to eternal life, decides the antecedents to faith and also that the faith itself will happen, and it is logically and chronologically prior to the faith (though the faith is truly the faith of the person): “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” This verse tells us that while Paul and Barnabas were preaching the gospel to Gentiles in Antioch, three things happened. First, many Gentiles began rejoicing,⁸³ as they heard of God’s plan to save them and as they heard the gospel.

⁸² John 6:37, 38-40, 44, 63, 65: “³⁷All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.... ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁶³It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.... ⁶⁵And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

In John 10:26-28 Jesus tells unbelieving Jews at Solomon’s Colonnade, located at the temple, “But you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” The initiative must be God’s for people to be saved. If God does not work in a saving manner, then people are left in their sin and blindness and remain unwilling to trust and repent.

⁸³ This is an inceptive imperfect, focusing upon the beginning of the action.

Second, they began glorifying the word of the Lord.⁸⁴ Most likely this speaks of the word from and about the Lord, and it was more specifically the core of that word—the gospel (as can be seen from the rest of the book of Acts and what preaching was like). That they glorified the word has the same sense it does in 2 Thes. 3:1,⁸⁵ where Paul asked for prayer that the word might be glorified or honored as it is preached—and as it was among the Thessalonians. How did the Thessalonians honor the word? They “accepted it not as the word of man but as what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thes. 2:13). In this acceptance as recorded in Acts 13, then, many Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch believed (see the last part of the verse) and so they honored the word for what is really is, and possibly glorified God because of that great good news as well.

Third, “they believed.”⁸⁶ The focus is not merely on the beginning of faith, but rather the text is saying they believed and is viewing it in the entirety of the action or occurrence. It should not be missed that the text is saying some people truly believed (i.e. it was their faith; it was action they took). But, the reader might ask, “Who believed?” Or, “How many believed?” We learn in the remainder of the verse.

Here is the group that believed: “as many as had been appointed unto eternal life.” The verb for “appoint” is part of a construction here that literally could be translated “were having been appointed.”⁸⁷ “It represents action as complete and the results of the action in existence at some

⁸⁴ Another inceptive imperfect. As with “they began rejoicing,” so here, this use of the imperfect may imply the beginning of an age in which there will be much glorifying of God’s Word among the Gentiles—especially in light of the presence of Isaiah 49:6 in the context.

⁸⁵ This is the only other place in the New Testament where “glorify” has “the word” or anything similar as its object.

⁸⁶ Based upon how Luke presents saving faith in Luke-Acts, most likely this is a constative aorist, i.e. focusing upon the entirety of the movement or action of faith, rather than merely its beginning.

⁸⁷ The verb for “appoint” (*tassō*) is a perfect passive participle, nominative, plural. The verb translated, “were,” is an imperfect, active, indicative, 3rd person plural. This construction is known as the “periphrastic pluperfect” (D & M, 232). The periphrastic construction (helping verb + participle) is a favorite of Luke’s.

point in past time, the point of time being indicated by the context.”⁸⁸ As a result, what is conveyed is that this action of appointing was completed in the past and it had existing results in the past that are complete. In other words, the appointing, along with its existing results (i.e. the antecedents to the believing on the part of these Gentiles) were all done prior to the believing. The action of the verb *tassō* conveys the idea of deciding something ahead of time.⁸⁹ The meaning here in Acts 13:48 is that there is a group of people—no more and no less (meaning of *hosos* [“as many as”])—of whom it had previously been decided by God would believe—these are the ones who believed.⁹⁰

At this point we should ask, “According to what we find elsewhere in Luke-Acts, how has God decided? His decision is determinative for the believing, but how does he decide? Does he decide in eternity past, based upon looking ahead to one’s belief (simple foreknowledge) or based upon middle knowledge? If we have read correctly other passages in Acts (cf. 2:23; 4:28), God made this decision unconditionally—not dependent upon or limited by human decisions.⁹¹ Such an understanding, for example, is seen in Acts 16:14 (“...the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul”), where we read that God’s previous and initiating action in Lydia was necessary and causative for her belief and so it was not a libertarian or contra-causal freedom she exercised. If this is indicative of how faith happens, an emphasis in Luke-Acts is on

⁸⁸ D & M, 205.

⁸⁹ This includes deciding ahead of time a day when something would happen (Ac. 28:23), a place where people are to go (Mt. 28:16), who will be in a particular position as a government authority (Rom. 13:1) or as an authority under someone else’s authority (Lk. 7:8; Ac. 15:2). As such, it can also be used of God’s action of deciding ahead of time what the Apostle Paul would do—decisions that were completed before his conversion and revealed to him afterward (Ac. 22:10).

⁹⁰ This action is without any other antecedent, and so, this is most likely a divine passive. God is doing the appointing, as in Ac. 22:10.

⁹¹ What is also significant is that the Lord Jesus encouraged Paul in a vision as he was beginning ministry in Corinth with the truth that “I have many in this city who are my people” (Acts 18:10). In context, he cannot mean that these people had already believed, but that since they were chosen, they would believe.

God causing it. If this is the case, then one of the key reasons for advocating simple foreknowledge or middle knowledge (preserving libertarian freedom) is removed. What is more, what we discover elsewhere in Scripture about God's providence, sovereignty, how man's will functions, and the need for God's previous and deciding work in the soul of the unregenerate all suggests to us that this deciding ahead of time for God is absolutely unconditional. And, it demonstrates his governance even in relation to salvation in accordance with the Calvinist model, not the Molinist.

Paul also displays in his writings God's governance in salvation.⁹² In 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:16 we discover that God has ordained salvation to be accomplished and applied to people in such a fashion that it exalts him and not them. This is true not only because it involves the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, but also the preaching of the man-humbling cross, and the reality that it is only by God's sovereign grace that man comes to trust in Jesus Christ as Savior. After all, what ultimately distinguishes the different reactions to Christ is whether or not one is effectively called (1:24) and thus in the process of being saved (1:18). What is more, it is only by the work of the Holy Spirit that one comes to see their need for Christ and thus believes in the gospel (cf. 2:10-16).⁹³ And, in 2 Timothy 1:9 Paul affirms that God effectively calls his saints based upon his own purpose and grace, a decision made in eternity past, and not dependent upon or limited

⁹² See two significant Pauline statements in Romans 8:29-30 and 9:11-12, texts we deal with elsewhere (See Chapter Three and Appendices Two and Three).

⁹³ Here are the key passages. 1 Cor. 1:18: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." 1 Corinthians 1:23-24: "...but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." 1 Corinthians 2:10-16: "...these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit... 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. 14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. 16 "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ."

by human decisions or actions: “[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.”⁹⁴

Moving beyond Pauline literature, in James 1:18 we find an example of the good gifts that come from God the Father (v. 17), namely that he has brought us forth (a birth metaphor) having first willed to do so,⁹⁵ and this by the means or agency of the word of truth with the result (2:1) that people believe in Jesus Christ as presented in that word.⁹⁶

In 1 Peter 1:3 we discover that it was “according to his great mercy he caused us to be born again....” Here, speaking of God, it is shown that it was not corresponding to works (or even foreseen faith),⁹⁷ but corresponding to God’s mercy that God caused saints to be born again.⁹⁸ In

⁹⁴ The preposition the ESV translates “because” in both cases is *kata*. It often conveys the idea of one thing corresponding to or measuring up to another. An analogy would be this: When a couple decides to purchase a house in their price range, they are purchasing a home corresponding to or in measure with their financial means. In other words, they can sign a contract for this house because they can afford the down payment and mortgage payments. In eternity past what is it that stood behind God’s decision to call effectively certain people to him? Was it the innate knowledge that they would believe and produce works in keeping with the gospel (e.g. Rom. 1:5: “the obedience that faith produces” [Author’s translation])—and so he knew he could call them effectively? Paul says, “No!” Rather, it was based upon his eternal purpose and his grace. His purpose and grace, located in himself, rather than man’s faith and/or works, was the motivating factor. It was the adequate reservoir and motivation out of which God decreed and has acted.

⁹⁵ What we discover at the beginning of verse 18 is an aorist passive temporal participle, literally “having willed” (*Boulētheis*). The intent on the part of James is that the willing was logically prior to the bringing forth. It also appears to communicate that God’s salvation moves out of his own will. Though James does not write that it is of God’s own will alone, certainly this statement is consistent with other passages that do communicate that truth.

⁹⁶ Here are the key texts of James 1:18; 2:1: “¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.... ^{2:1} My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.” The clause, “he brought us forth” appears to emphasize that God had a decisive and causative role—in the same manner that parents bring forth a child. The subject of this verb is “Father” (*patēr*) in verse 17.

⁹⁷ In the preceding context the apostle writes that the readers to whom he is writing are “elect exiles” (1:1) “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” In the next chapter (and in Appendix Two) I will argue that “foreknowledge” here is not merely knowledge ahead of time (either of the simple foreknowledge variety, nor that of the innate middle knowledge of God). Rather, it connotes that God in advance determined to love in a saving manner, i.e. he determined to set his covenantal affection upon the elect. Elsewhere the noun and verb have sentient beings as their object and not merely the act of faith. Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 50, writes that rather than this phrase modifying only “elect” in v. 1, “since verse 1 contains no verb, it is most natural to let ‘according to the foreknowledge of God the Father’ modify

other words, what moved God to cause persons to be born again was his mercy and not foreseen faith or works. This clearly fits with the view of God's governance we are unpacking from the rest of Scripture, namely, it is moved from within God himself (in this case, motivated by his mercy) and it is not dependent upon or limited by human free choices.

In Revelation 3:9, while speaking about unbelieving Jews who will come to believe in Jesus, the Lord says "behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you." Note the strong sense of divine causation in salvation. Nowhere else in Revelation is such worship or bowing down something that is forced against the will. It connotes worship that one truly wants to give. What we have here, then, is a prophecy that turns around such Old Testament prophecies that speak of Gentile nations in the future bowing before and worshiping God (e.g. Is. 60:1-14). Here we have Jews, those who had rejected Jesus as

the whole situation of the readers described in the first verse: they are 'chosen sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, etc., according to the foreknowledge of God the Father'. This implies that their status as sojourners, their privileges as God's chosen people, even their hostile environment in Pontus, Galatia, etc., were all known by God before the world began, all came about in accordance with his foreknowledge, and thus (we may conclude) all were in accordance with his fatherly love for his own people. Such foreknowledge is laden with comfort for Peter's readers."

⁹⁸ "Mercy is the goodness of God shown to people who are in a miserable plight." (John Piper, *Future Grace* [Sisters, Oregon, Multnomah, 1995], 75-76). Wanting to highlight the mercy, Peter modifies the term with the adjective *to polu* ("great"). This is denoting the degree--it is a great mercy that is not lacking in amount or type. (Cf. BAGD, 688) It is rich, deep, greatly valuable, and broad.

It is noteworthy that in Titus 3:5 "according to his own mercy" (note the similar prepositional phrase in a salvation text and it is also the only other place in the NT a similar prepositional phrase, "according to mercy," is used at all) not only modifies "he saved us," but it also is set in opposition to "not because of works done by us in righteousness." If Peter is using the prepositional phrase in a similar manner to Paul, he is highlighting God's free and sovereign grace and mercy which moved him to reach down to sinners in their plight to save them.

The causative nature of the verb translated, "caused...to be born again" (*anagennaō*), must not be missed. Its presence prohibits us from understanding this text in a manner that supports libertarian human freedom. Grudem, *1 Peter*, 55, adds: "The root word (*gennaō*) often refers to a father's role in the birth of a child..., either literally (Mt. 1:2-20), or figuratively, of spiritual birth (1 Cor. 4:15)." J. Guhrt, "*gennaō*," DNTT, 1, 176 concurs, when he writes: "*gennaō* is a causal form of *ginomai*.... The compound *anagennaō* has the meaning cause to be born again."

As such, the translation should reflect the active role God takes in this process. The only other time this verb is used in the NT (1 Peter 1:23) it is the perfect passive participle, emphasizing that the reality of the new birth is something that takes place by someone else working through God's Word (i.e. God, as we see in this verse): "since you have been born again...through the living and abiding word of God...." See also 1 Pt. 2:8-10 for God's decisive actions in relation to salvation or rejecting salvation (a text that also suggests the active nature here). Also in support of this causative role on the part of God is the use in John 3 of the related verb, *gennaō*, along with the adverb *anōthen*, to give the idea of being born again from above—i.e. by the work of the Spirit of God (cf. John 3:3, 6, 7, 8).

Messiah and who opposed the New Testament Church, coming to true worship of the triune God through acknowledging Jesus as the Christ. This will also include their acknowledging believing Gentiles as full-fledged members in God’s covenant people—i.e. as those whom Christ has loved. Yet, these Jews will come to believe as a result of God’s strong causation: “I will make (*poiēsō*) them come and bow down.” If we put together this future active verb with the reality that such worship in Revelation is voluntary (motivated by one’s desire), we come to see that Jesus Christ is promising that he will so move in the hearts of these Jews to bring about their willing faith and worship.⁹⁹ This not only matches the view of sovereignty and providence we have set forth, it also fits with the view of how God works on the human will in order to save—a subject we will look at in more detail in Chapter Eight.

What we have discovered, then, both in the Old and New Testaments, as well as from every part of the New Testament, is that God’s exhaustive governance extends to human salvation. Yet, it does not stop here. God also governs the growth, the sanctification process of believers.

Sanctification¹⁰⁰

What we discovered in the previous chapter as we unpacked 1 Chronicles 29:10-19, namely that it was assumed in the Old Testament that God could and did initiate and bring about the power and ability to do his will, is brought forth with greater clarity and force in the New Testament.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ For the content of this paragraph and the understanding of this text, I am dependent on G. K. Beale, with David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 84-85.

¹⁰⁰ We will merely introduce the subject here, to display the exhaustive nature of God’s governance, but deal with it more in depth in Chapter Nine.

¹⁰¹ As we have already discovered, the Old Testament promised a New Covenant, a time in which God would transform his people more deeply and internally by his Spirit, as he gives to them the desire and power to carry out his will (See Dt. 30:6; Jer. 31:31-34; 32:38-41; Ezek. 11:19-21; 36:25-27; 37:24). So, we should expect this greater emphasis and more detailed treatment in the New Testament.

One New Testament passage that emphasizes God’s New Covenant governance in the believer’s growth is Hebrews 13:20-21. Here we read:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

After offering the paraenesis of Hebrews 13:1-19 that flows from the rich gospel teaching the author has previously presented in this sermonistic epistle, and after requesting prayer from the readers (13:18-19), he offers prayer for the readers in these two verses. He does this in a manner that is very much in keeping with biblical prayers elsewhere (e.g. see the treatment of 1 Chron. 29:10-19 in the previous chapter): He describes God in a manner that grounds his prayer request and encourages faith in the prayer (20) and offers the actual prayer (21).

Several things are said of God in verse 20 that qualify him to carry out the following request:¹⁰² (1) He is the God who brings peace with himself through the saving work of Jesus Christ—a reconciliation that stands at the heart of ethical behavior in Hebrews.¹⁰³ (2) He brought again from the dead Jesus, thus displaying his power and also in that resurrection defeating sin

¹⁰² The presence of terms that have a strong presence elsewhere in the NT and early church (e.g. “peace,” “shepherd,” “sheep”), and even the topic of the resurrection—all of which are not prominent in Hebrews—gives this description of God the feel of an early tradition or creed.

¹⁰³ The genitive, *tēs eirēnēs*, is most likely objective. In other words, it is the God who brings or accomplishes peace between himself and sinners. The term is used three other times in Hebrews—twice to speak of the absence of conflict and close (or reconciled) relationship between individuals (11:31; 12:14) and also to explain “Salem,” the place where Melchizedek was king and priest. Most likely in this latter context the peace is intended to connote peace between God and man, the same kind depicted elsewhere in the book when the atonement and its entailments are explained (e.g. 4:14-16; 7:25; 9:14, 15, 26; 10:1-23 (esp. 19-23), but without using the terminology of “peace.” Given the trajectory of teaching elsewhere in the book, it is most likely that what is intended here is, “the God who brings peace with himself.”

Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary On The Epistle To The Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 589, agrees.

For other references to the God of peace or similar phrases, cf. Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23.

and death.¹⁰⁴ This victory is crucial for our ethical change as Christians. (3) He identifies Jesus as the “Great Shepherd of the sheep,” thus, revealing he is the promised Messiah-and-Davidic-King, as well as the sacrificial lamb-and-priest of the sheep.¹⁰⁵ This is significant, since in Hebrews the death of Jesus Christ is necessary for the saints’ ethical change. (4) The resurrection could take place because Jesus ratified the new covenant by his atoning death.¹⁰⁶

So, in verse 20 we see that the author is addressing the kind of God who has accomplished the complete work of salvation in behalf of sinners so that those who are in Christ can live out the new life to which God calls them. He has accomplished, applied, and provided all that is needed. With that focus in mind, now he can turn to the actual prayer request in verse 21.

¹⁰⁴ In the participial clause, “the one who raised again from the dead,” the author not only renames God, but also describes him. He is not only “God who raises the dead” and so can be trusted in (2 Cor. 1:9), but more particularly, as we will see in the rest of this verse: He raised Jesus Christ, which is foundational to our change and empowerment. F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews*, 411, adds: “This is the only reference to our Lord’s resurrection in the epistle; elsewhere the emphasis is on His exaltation to the right hand of God, in keeping with the exegesis of Ps. 110:1, 4, and the exposition of Jesus’ high priesthood.” I would add that the resurrection makes the exaltation, session, and ongoing priesthood of Jesus Christ possible and it is as our High Priest that the Great Shepherd and Lord Jesus Christ continually supplies us with transforming and empowering grace. See also the phrase below in v. 21: “through Jesus Christ.”

¹⁰⁵ This is the only occurrence of “shepherd” in Hebrews and also the only occurrence of “sheep” in the book. Though these terms have not been used in the book, nevertheless, they have a strong presence and meaning in the early church—referring to Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the divine and messianic shepherd motif in the Old Testament (cf. Pss. 23; 80:1; Is. 40:11; Ezek. 34:23; 37:24; Zech. 10:3), the one who lays down his life for the sheep, i.e. the church, and calls them to himself and directs them (John 10:11, 15-16, 26-30). As such, Jesus Christ is the chief shepherd who directs the under-shepherds and the sheep, the flock (1 Peter 5:1-4). Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Hebrews*, vol. 15, in William Hendriksen, Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Baker New Testament Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 430, explains: “In effect, the metaphor of the shepherd who dies for his sheep is equivalent to that of the high priest who offers himself as a sacrifice for his people. Especially the adjective ‘great’ is telling, for the writer of Hebrews calls Jesus the great high priest (4:14).”

¹⁰⁶ Most likely this instrumental prepositional phrase, by its positioning directly after the statement about raising again from the dead the great shepherd (and before the renaming of the direct object) is intended to be emphasized and to highlight that the raising was done based upon the ground of the blood (*en haimati*), i.e. the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, a death which brought about or cut a new covenant—i.e. an eternal covenant. So, there is emphasis here upon Jesus ratifying the long awaited and promised New Covenant, an eternal covenant, through his substitutionary and atoning death. In Hebrews Jesus is the “guarantor of a better covenant” (Heb. 7:22); “the mediator of a new covenant” (Heb. 9:15; 12:24).

John Piper, *The Passion Of Jesus Christ: Fifty Reasons Why He Came To Die* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 26-27, writes: “The death of Christ did not merely precede his resurrection—it was the price that obtained it....” We should also note that in Zechariah 9:11 God promised his people salvation through “the blood of my covenant.” This blood would be shed by one who would come on a donkey (Zech. 9:9), i.e. Jesus (cf. Mt. 21:5).

In verse 21 we gain a mini-biblical theology on how God works in the New Covenant among believers. To begin, the author prays that God will provide the desire, ability, and wisdom to Christians that they can do as God desires (“equip you with everything good that you may do his will”).¹⁰⁷ This request, in light of the descriptions of God in verse 20, leads to the conclusion the author is asking God to do what he has promised to do through the blood-bought New Covenant. If I am right in my understanding of this first request, it communicates an often repeated theme in the New Testament, namely, that we can do the things God desires of us, in the ways he desires, and for the purposes he desires because he has transformed us from the inside out, including the changing of our desires (cf. Rom. 6:1-23; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 4:17-6:20; Phil. 2:12-15; Col. 2:6-7; 3:1-4:6; Titus 2:11-15; 2 Peter 1:3-11, et. al.). As we will discover in Chapters 7-10, the Bible never suggests that our desires and movements leading to faith and obedience must originate in our own wills or else they are not genuine or free. It argues for the very opposite, namely, that apart from God’s initiating work in a person, they will never desire what God wants

¹⁰⁷ Kistemaker, *Hebrews*, 431, accurately explains: “The verb ‘to equip’ (*katartizō*) actually means to make someone complete. It connotes the act of restoring—that is, perfecting—something.” Morris, “Hebrews,” 155, suggests the helpful meaning, “supply you with what you need for the Christian life.” According to BAGD, 417, this verb has the following field of meaning: “put in order, restore...restore to its former condition...Mt. 4:21; Mk. 1:19...; “Put into proper condition, complete, make complete...1 Thes. 3:10...1 Pt. 5:10...; “Prepare, make, create...of God...Heb. 11:3...Rom. 9:22...prepare something for someone...Heb. 10:5....” Most likely the intended meaning here is the second one: “Put into proper condition, complete, make complete.” This meaning is used in Luke 6:40: “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when *he is fully trained* will be like his teacher.” (emphasis added) In this verse to be fully trained is to be like Jesus! Also helpful is the statement in 1 Thes. 3:10: “as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and *supply* what is lacking in your faith...” (emphasis added). Here we discover that prayer for equipping or to be fully prepared (as we see here in Heb. 13:21) is very much in line with the use of means or agents. Finally, most likely the use in 1 Peter 5:10, where it refers to what God will do with suffering and persecuted saints in the future connotes both restoration (of what was lost—and even more) and completely bringing them to the state of glory or moral perfection (see earlier in v. 10). Because the following purpose clause has to do with the will of God, the equipping or the making perfect or complete must include giving moral ability (i.e. supplying desire to carry out the will of God and seeing it as good—which comes through other agents [1 Thes. 3:10] and also through the habits that arise from discipline [Heb. 5:14]). The author, then, is praying for the movement of the readers’ hearts by the new covenant transforming grace of God through his Spirit!

of them, nor will they trust and obey. Yet, God can work in a decisive manner and the results are true liberty and free choices (cf. 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1, 13; Philemon 14).

Next, the author further explains what he is requesting: “working in us that which is pleasing in his sight.” The participle (*poiōn*) introduces a clause that further explains what the author is praying for in asking that God will equip for completion with everything good so they can do his will.¹⁰⁸ Here, “what is pleasing in his sight” is parallel to “his will.” What is very significant and theologically pregnant in this clause is that the author is praying that God will work in the saints in such a way that the outcome is “what is pleasing in his sight”!¹⁰⁹ God is pleased in our faith-fueled obedience that truly comes from our own heart, yet it is something he must ultimately bring about through his resources (see Chapter Four and the treatment of 1 Chron. 1:29:10-18).

Simon Kistemaker helpfully adds:

*In preceding verses the reader is encouraged to live a life that is pleasing to God (11:5–6; 12:28; 13:16). A person who lives such a life is commended by God himself and is rewarded (2 Cor. 5:9–10). But man looks to God for help, direction, and wisdom. And because of the eternal covenant he has made with us through Jesus Christ, he grants us assistance. The writer of Hebrews prays that God may work in us to do that which pleases him.*¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ This is an exegetical continual present active participle.

¹⁰⁹ Jesus affirms in John 8:29: “I always do those things that please him.” In other words, he always does the will of the Father.

¹¹⁰ Kistemaker, *Hebrews*, 431–432.

The author is stating he believes God works, that is he ultimately brings about, the doing of his own will. Read in light of Heb. 5:14, we would conclude that God can and does work upon antecedent movements to the performance of his will and through the habits and discipline in the person such that they want to do his will and are morally able to do as much (cf. also Heb. 6:7-9). In the book of Hebrews doing the will of God also involves other means or agents: exhorting each other (3:12-13) and spurring one another on to love and good works as believers assemble together (10:24-25), the development of habits that stand behind discipline (5:14), God’s Word (e.g. 4:12-13)—at the heart of which is an understanding of the gospel in its salvation-historical context (cf. most of the book), the specific commands or exhortations to be faithful and/or persevere (2:1-4; 6:1-10, et al), the specific exhortations to do what is pleasing to God (11:5–6; 12:28; 13:16), and prayer (4:16; 13:20-21). In this near context we also would assume that God’s continual working of peace and also the ongoing priestly ministry of the risen Christ are also part of the resources needed to be transformed and to do the will of God, i.e. that which is pleasing in his sight.

To further emphasize how dependent the saint is on divine resources, the next prepositional phrase is added: “through Jesus Christ.” As this sermonical epistle or treatise has argued throughout, the salvific work of Jesus Christ wins and accomplishes all that is needed (e.g. forgiveness, access to God, the Spirit [the new covenant!], the ongoing priestly work of Christ, the moral ability or change of the heart) that we might do God’s will, yes, what is pleasing before him. Apart from Christ, there are no good things or movements or works of God that undergird the saint’s new ethical God-honoring life.¹¹¹

It is not only in Hebrews 13:20-21 that we see God’s governance of the Christian’s growth by the directing and empowering of his desires and will, but also in Titus 2:11-14. Here we read:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.¹¹²

Here Paul affirms that in Jesus Christ’s first coming a redeeming, transforming, and empowering grace has come that not only brings salvation for all kinds of people (11), but enables Christians to desire to follow God and to obey him (12), as they earnestly look forward to the second coming of Jesus Christ, our great and blessing-bringing certain hope (13). The reason this all can happen and the Christian can be so transformed is Jesus Christ gave himself

¹¹¹ Hebrews 13:21 ends with this clause: “...to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” The antecedent of “whom” appears most likely to be “Jesus Christ” because of proximity in the sentence. The idea of “be” is to be understood. The author desires that glory would be given to Jesus Christ forever and ever based upon the reality that saints are saved and transformed by his work. One cannot be forgiven apart from him and subsequently one cannot be transformed to please and honor God apart from him. He is the ultimate one who reveals and communicates the Godhead and this divine saving work (John 1:1-18; Heb. 1:1-3). So, when he is glorified, the result is that the Father and Spirit are glorified also (cf. Mt. 28:19; John 5:23; 14:13; 15:5, 8; 16:12-15; 17:1-5). We should note that which is pleasing to God glorifies him. To put it another way, God is pleased when he is glorified. And, the proximate cause is found in our own transformed heart. The ultimate cause is him.

¹¹² For further explanation of this text see Tom Barnes, *Atonement Matters: A Call To Declare The Biblical View Of The Atonement* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2008), 13-17.

for his people, not only to redeem them from lawlessness, but to transform them into a people who are his own and who are zealous to carry out good works.

This entire paragraph in Paul's letter to Titus grounds a number of ethical injunctions in the preceding paragraph, Titus 2:1-10. The reason that followers of Christ can do all that Paul mentions in the earlier paragraph is because of what Jesus Christ has accomplished for and applied to them, as set forth in Titus 2:11-14. It is clear that Paul sees God working decisively upon all true Christians to transform their desires and wills such that they desire what is right and godly and can carry out this kind of ethical behavior.

I am not saying that God in this present age so transforms the desires and will of the Christian that she is unable to choose to do evil. When it comes to a regenerated person and their relationship to righteousness and evil, I would view their freedom similar to the classic Arminian or the Molinist, at least from one perspective: They have the ability to choose righteousness or evil (unlike the unregenerate, who is morally unable to choose the former). You might ask, "Tom, are you saying, then, that the Christian exercises indeterministic or libertarian freedom?" My answer is, "No." The reason for the negative answer is that I see the human and their will having a very different relationship to God and his governance than the Molinist who holds to indeterministic freedom. And, it is this difference that is foremost in this chapter. Regarding God's governance through his immeasurable causative and permissive movements in and behind the choices of the Christian, we can say without doubt that God has so moved in their will that their overall desire is to please him and they have the moral ability to do this. When it comes down to specific choices in which they engage, the difference between the soft determinist and the soft indeterminist is that in the case of the former it is not asserted that God's decree of the choice and action is dependent upon or limited by his innate knowledge (i.e. middle knowledge)

of what they would do. Yet, God’s relationship to a sinful choice is very different than it is to a righteous choice, even though neither are ultimately dependent upon human freedom and both are ordained by God.

As we have discovered in Chapters 4-5, God governs all things!¹¹³ He does it such that it maximizes his glory. This is why he decreed sin, suffering, brokenness, including the long-term and continual sin, suffering, and brokenness of this age (See Chapters 2-3).

Yet, if this is true, how can we escape the conclusion that God is the author of and thus morally responsible for sin, and how can we conclude that man is free in any manner? To answer this all important question, we need to move on to our next key truth in this book: Though God does specifically and meticulously govern all things in the way we have set forth in this chapter, he does not govern all things in the same way.

Before we move on to Chapter 6, let’s pause and join the Apostle Paul in worship of our mighty and sovereign God (Romans 11:33-36 [NLT]):

Oh, how great are God’s riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways! 34 For who can know the LORD’s thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice? 35 And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back? 36 For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen.

¹¹³ As Grudem, *Systematic*, 318-21, highlights, God’s governance extends to inanimate objects (Job 37:6-13; Pss. 104:4, 14; 135:6, 7; 148:8; Mt. 5:45); to animals (Mt. 6:26; 10:29); to the affairs of nations (Ps. 22:28; Dan. 4:34-35; Acts 14:16; 17:26); and to all aspects of our lives—food supply (Mt. 6:11), all our days (Ps. 139:16), our plans before birth (Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15), all our actions (Acts 17:28), our very steps (Prov. 20:24; Jer. 10:23), success or failure (Ps. 75:6-7; Lk. 1:52), whether or not we have children (Ps. 127:3), the possession of gifts and talents (1 Cor. 4:7), military skill and training (Ps. 18:34), and even leader’s decisions (Prov. 21:1).