

CHAPTER SIX
...BUT GOD DOES NOT GOVERN ALL THINGS IN THE SAME MANNER

The Molinist Position: God has a different relation to good than he does to evil. Yet, in both, his governance is limited by and dependent upon free human choices.

Theological Truth #3 That Favors Calvinism: God has a different relation to good than he does to evil. He causes the former and permits the latter, and both in such a way he is not limited by or dependent upon free human choices.

I want to return to a situation I introduced in Chapter One, that of my own conversion in 1973. I raised several questions there, some of which we have already answered. For example, the fact that all the people who attended those special meetings that week, as well as all community members who did not, were sinners living in a fallen world and in need of salvation, was ultimately ordained by God so that he might magnify his attributes—especially that of his mercy and love to a greater degree. We have also discovered from the biblical material that though God has known from eternity past what people in the Belleville, Indiana area would do that week (e.g. whether they attend the meetings or not; whether they would attend and ignore or believe), God’s absolute and meticulous governance of those events did not ultimately depend on, nor were they limited by those human choices. Instead, the choices were dependent upon his decrees.

Yet, there are some questions that remain unanswered. For example, for those people who ignored the meetings or came and ignored the call to trust Christ as savior and who never trusted in Christ since, how can they be responsible for their sin and how can God judge them justly for their sin? If God decisively worked in my intellect, desires, and will so that I trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior and so had the Holy Spirit “poured out on [me] richly through Jesus Christ” (Titus 3:6), an outpouring and permanent dwelling of the Spirit that Jesus won for his people

through his death and resurrection (cf. Acts 2:33), resulting in my transformation so that I desire to “live [a] self-controlled, upright, and godly [life] in the present age” (Titus 2:12), why do I still sin and when I sin, is God causing me to sin? Is God, who has foreordained all and is the governor of all, causing unbelievers to sin?

And looking beyond this event to later in my life, based upon what we have seen so far, am I to conclude that God caused the brain aneurism in my mom’s brain at birth and that he caused it to burst in her early fifties—leading to temporary paralysis and permanent changes in her for the rest of her life? Did God cause her Parkinson’s Disease that came on in her sixties, a condition that little by little closed in on the life of this godly woman and prayer warrior before her death?

Though we have answered some of our questions, if we would leave our study at this point, we may leave many readers appalled at the conclusions we might reach—namely thinking that we are mere robots in the hands of a fatalistic God, our decisions and actions do not matter, God cannot justly judge our sin, and God arbitrarily causes pain and suffering upon the world.

This chapter forms a hinge in our discussion. On the one hand, it closes out our look at what the Bible teaches about God’s governance (his sovereignty and providence). On the other hand, it opens up the door to the remainder of the book—namely how humans make significant and genuinely free choices—choices for which we are responsible—even while God exercises his absolute sovereignty through his meticulous providence.

So far, though our focus has primarily been on God’s sovereignty, we have also introduced the reality that humans make real and responsible choices at the same time (see especially the case study in Chapter Four). Yet, how can this be true? To answer that question, we need to see in this chapter that though God governs all things meticulously (as we have presented especially in Chapters 4-5), nevertheless, he does not govern all things in the same manner. The sixteenth

century English Puritan theologian, William Perkins, astutely made this same point: “[The decree of God] do[es] altogether order every event, partly by inclining and gently bending the will in all things that are good, and partly by forsaking it in things that are evil.”¹ More recently Paul Helm put it this way: “Although God works all things after the counsel of his own will, the way in which he works his will regarding evil is different from the way in which he works good, since being immaculately holy, he cannot be the author of sin, that is, he is incapable of having evil imaginations and wicked desires that immediately bring forth evil.”²

In other words, through an immeasurable (from the human perspective) combination of causative and permissive governing movements and influences on the part of God, all that he has decreed happens. It all is ordered in such a way we can say he bears ultimate moral responsibility for all that is righteous, yet evil sentient beings, as secondary causal agents, bear moral responsibility for evil. “...God causes all things that happen, but...he does so in such a way that he...upholds our ability to make willing, responsible choices, choices that have real and eternal results, and for which we are held accountable.”³

It should be noted at this point that there is a similarity with Molinism in what I am presenting. “...God not only conserves the universe in being, but...he also concurs with the operation of every secondary cause in the universe so that he is quite literally *the cause of*

¹ William Perkins, *A Treatise Of The Manner And Order Of Predestination, And Of The Largenesse Of God's Grace*, in William Perkins, *The Workes Of That Famous And Worthy Minister of Christ In The Universitie Of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, (London: John Legatt, 1612-13), 2:621, cited in Joel R. Beeke, Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine For Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 122.

² Paul Helm, “Shunning Middle Knowledge,” in Paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com (May 1, 2009, accessed 12/27/16). Paul Helm, *The Providence Of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 172-73, demonstrates there has been a long history of this distinction in Reformed thought.

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000, repr.), 321.

everything that happens.”⁴ (emphasis added) The difference between Molinism and what I am presenting is seen in what I argued in Chapters 4-5—namely that God is not dependent upon or limited by innate knowledge of what humans would decide in certain circumstances.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3.2, makes this very point: “Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath He not decreed any thing because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.”

Similarly, in regard to pain and suffering in the world that is not directly tied to the evil of sentient beings (Parkinson’s, cancer, tornadoes, hurricanes, etc.), these are experienced in part because of God’s decree to permit sin and, as a result, to place creation under a curse, and to leave this broken world in this state until the Lord returns (see Chapter Two). So, on the one hand, we can say that evil happens in the world because humans are sinful and make sinful choices, and natural disasters happen because this world is broken due to sin. And yet, all through these realities, we understand that God is absolutely sovereign and exercising his meticulous providence in all things, to bring about his eternal purpose. He governs all things, but he does not govern all things in the same manner.⁵

As someone else has said, “God’s ‘concurrent’ or ‘confluent’ involvement in all that occurs

⁴ William L. Craig, “Middle Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?” in Clark H. Pinnock, Gen. Ed., *The Grace Of God And The Will Of Man* (Mineapolis: Bethany House, 1995, repr.), 153, writing approvingly of Molina’s view.

⁵ Three points beg for clarity from this paragraph. First, all pain and suffering in the world is ultimately the result of sin, as learned in Genesis 3. When I write that some pain and suffering is “not directly tied to the evil of sentient beings, I am saying, for example, that my mom’s Parkinson’s disease and the recent devastation of hurricane Matthew in Haiti are not necessarily tied to the sin of the suffering persons (cf. Job; John 9). However, all suffering is ultimately tied to sin in the fall.

Second, by “natural disasters” I in no way intend to communicate that the creation around us operates blindly and apart from God’s sovereignty.

Third, when I speak of the world as it is—resulting from God’s decrees to permit sin and the ongoing curse of the world, I am in no way denying God’s immanence. At one and the same time that God is exercising his meticulous providence in all that happens in the world, we also can speak of logical consequences of what God has decreed for this world. The world, our souls, and our bodies are broken and in need of his redemptive repair.

does not violate the natural order, ongoing causal processes, or the free, responsible agency of human beings. God's sovereign control does not take away the responsibility and power of second causes; on the contrary, they are created and have their roles by His appointment."⁶

Let's turn our attention to the proof for this understanding.

Proof: God Does Not Govern All Things In The Same Manner

Where we want to begin is by looking at the biblical evidence that differentiates between how God governs righteous and evil events. This forms the foundation for the rest of the chapter.

Divine Permission Distinguished From Divine Causation

If there is a *Locus Classicus* in this discussion, it is Lamentations 3:33. This verse is found in the midst of a third alphabetic acrostic poem in a book that expresses great grief over the fall of Jerusalem and the state in which the city and nation currently find themselves.⁷

In this poem, the author⁸ stands in the place of Judah/Jerusalem and speaks of the pain and shame faced, that is, the affliction. It feels like God has shut out his prayers (8) and that he, along with the city, are full only of shame, having no hope from the LORD (18) in all their afflictions (14-20). At verse 21 the direction of this poem changes. To that point hopelessness and despair are the focus because of the circumstances of the exile and destruction. However, with the

⁶ "Providence," in the RSB (2005), 900.

⁷ The evidence points to a date for the writing of Lamentations shortly after the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple (586 B.C.) and before the restoration of temple worship in Jerusalem (520-516 B.C.). It was likely written earlier in this period rather than later.

⁸The book does not identify its author, which should keep interpreters from unnecessarily contentious debates. It is best to treat Lamentations as the book itself does. That means accepting it as (1) an anonymous work that agrees with the theology of books like Deuteronomy and Jeremiah; (2) a literary masterpiece; and (3) a work that reflects eyewitness testimony. Though it is possible that Lamentations was penned by more than one poet (as were the Psalms), its unity of theme, movement, and poetic form is best accounted for by accepting a one-author hypothesis. For this discussion, I am largely dependent upon Paul R. House, "Introduction To Lamentations," in the ESVSB, 1475.

twenty-first verse, the author begins to focus upon who the LORD is, what he is like, with special emphasis upon his faithfulness and goodness.

Verses 31-33 comprise the K (Hebrew *Kaph*) verses in this poem, a poem that has three verses per Hebrew letter. As such, these three verses comprise a unit. They also appear to be part of a sub-section of the poem that spans from verses 19-39. In these twenty-one verses the prophet calls to mind the steadfast love of *Yahweh*, along with his mercies, faithfulness, and the fact he has covenanted to be the inheritance of his people and so this brings hope (21-24). As a result, those who truly trust in the LORD should wait upon him and seek him, for he is good to those who do such (25-27); and so, even if things are currently difficult (28-30), such a person(s) must remember that the LORD will not cast off forever, but will have compassion according to his abundant steadfast love, and this flows from his character and that he moves toward the current situation differently than if he were bringing blessing (31-33). What is more, even though it may seem like injustice is taking place (34-36), nevertheless, *Yahweh* has brought the current situation to pass as punishment for their sins—and this is just (37-39), and so one should be motivated to seek and wait upon the LORD (25-26). So, bottom line, at this point, the poet is showing what the LORD is like and how his character leads him not to cast off Israel forever (the very thing which was of central concern to the original readers).⁹

⁹ The fact this poem is three times longer than the other four, as well as the fact it is in the middle, draws the reader to see it as central to the entire work. What is more, what we find at the very heart of this central poem is a discussion of hope in *Yahweh* based upon his character. This realization is particularly important as we look at verse 31. In this verse the poet answers the question he knows others are asking (cf. esp. 5:21-22). This verse gives the reason why (*kiy*) the true believer can wait upon and seek *Yahweh* (25-26), the reason why such a one can make it through the hardships and not give up (27-30). The reason given is: “The Lord will not cast off forever.” God is referred to here as *Adonay*, an emphatic form of *Adon* (Lord). The emphasis is upon the fact that God is master, he is in charge (cf. BDB, 10). “When [the term] appears in the special plural form, with a first common singular suffix [as here], it always refers to God. It appears in this form more than three hundred times, mostly in Psalms, Lamentations, and the latter prophets” (Robert L. Alden, “*Adon*,” TWOT, 1: 13). It is of interest that though it occurs often in Lamentations, it does not appear in this particular poem until this verse. The verb translated “cast off” (*zanach*) is used only two other times in the book—2:7 (God casts off his altar and gives it and the temple to the enemies [the idea of rejecting]) and 3:17 (literally, “my soul is cast off from peace”). So, already in the book the poet has spoken of God casting off his temple and the soul of the man who represents

The logical movement in Lamentations 3:31-32 is as follows: (1) God's promise-keeping (i.e. faithful) attribute of his steadfast love (a love that is committed to his glory), moves him to act in compassion eventually toward Judah (those who are truly his people). (2) As a result, he will not permanently leave them in a state of being cast off and under grief, which he ultimately caused (but for which they are morally responsible and which was brought upon them by other morally-responsible agents).

Lamentations 3:33 is an explanation of why the logical movement of verses 31-32 takes place (note the "for" [*kiy*]). The fact that we have a synthetically parallel statement, one that further explains and adds something new, is not only seen in the presence of "for," but also in the repetition of the verb *yagah* ("grieve").¹⁰ In other words, the verse does not merely repeat what is said in v. 32, but it adds to it and tells us something more about *Yahweh's* character that further supports v. 31.¹¹ The argument is from a general principle of how God deals with all mankind toward a more specific application of it to his covenant people.

The key to understanding this verse, and to grasping its significance for our current discussion is found in the clause, "he does not willingly afflict," which literally is "he does not afflict (from the verb '*anah*) from the heart (*millibo*)."¹² The prepositional phrase should be

Judah in this poem, as if they have been discarded. Here, the negative particle, along with the adverb, "forever" (*le'olam*), shows that this casting off of God's people, sanctuary and, by implication, his promised covenantal blessing and protection are not permanent. The reason this can and should move the person of God to trust in, wait upon, and seek him, is that it opens the door to hope. Things will not always be as they are now!

¹⁰ In verse 32 the Hiphil of this verb ("cause grief") clarifies that *Yahweh* is the ultimate cause of the grief.

¹¹ This is seen in the reality verse 33 appears to be teaching something about how God deals with all mankind and not merely Israel and/or believers (see below on "children of men").

¹² This consists of the prefix *min* + the noun *leb* + the 3rd person, masculine, singular ending. The exact phrase occurs only here in the Old Testament.

understood to mean “as his ultimate and most intense desire and delight.” There are seven reasons for this understanding.

- “Heart” is used in Lamentations to speak of the depth of one’s being, so the phrase moves us to think about what God is decreeing in the depth of his being.¹³
- “Heart,” used with *Yahweh*, can speak of the depth of his being having a response that can coincide with other responses or emotions he has (Gen. 6:6) or deciding something from the depth of being that will not be changed (Gen. 8:21; Job 34:14; Is. 63:4), i.e. something he truly wants to do and is not being forced to do (2 Sam. 7:21), so we are set up for understanding the phrase here as communicating that *Yahweh* does not desire affliction and grief as much as he does compassion.
- The same kind of phrase (i.e. *min + leb*) can be used of man to communicate something he decides of his own will and not from outside himself (1 Kings 12:33), i.e. that which one truly wants to do—that is their ultimate movement in the heart that displays a deeper movement than what is being put forth outwardly (Is. 59:13), and so doing something from the heart in this kind of context communicates **a more ultimate movement or desire, but not a competing desire or lack of willingness.**
- Though God truly responds to man’s desires, thoughts, actions and man’s change of all these (e.g. Gen. 6:6; Ex. 32:14; 1 Sam. 15:11; 2 Sam. 24:16; 1 Chron. 21:15; Ps. 106:45; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:10; Jer. 18:8, 10; 42:10), nevertheless, God cannot be forced to do something against his will, against what he is pleased to do (cf. 1 Sam. 15:29; Pss. 115:3; 135:6; Jer. 32:14). Carrying even more weight is a statement in the context of this passage (Lam. 3:38): “Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?” The expected answer is, “Yes.” So, this text cannot be saying that God afflicts and grieves men in a way that he does not truly desire to (i.e. against his will).
- In context it is clear that the poet is asserting that *Yahweh* will not cast off his people forever or that his causing of grief is the end of the story. Eventually, his compassion will be displayed. So, verse 33 seems to explain further that distinction—namely that there is a difference between how God goes about blessing and cursing; anger and compassion—one that is worked out in relation to his people in that discipline or grief will not last forever, even though God’s blessing and pleasure upon them will (cf. Ps. 16:11). The difference cannot be that God willingly blesses and shows compassion and does not willingly show anger or judgment or grief for the reason mentioned above. **The difference, then, appears to be located at intensity of movement in the heart of God, i.e. what is a more ultimate movement.** Thus, the phrase is not exact in its

¹³ Andrew Bowling, “*leb*,” in TWOT, 1: 466-67, writes: “By far the majority of the usages of [the term] refer either to the inner or immaterial nature in general or to one of the three traditional personality functions of man: emotion, thought, or will.” “The whole spectrum of emotion is attributed to the heart...[and] centered in the heart...” “The heart is the seat of the will.” BDB, 525, adds: “spec. ref. to inclinations, resolutions and determinations of the will...seat of the emotions and passions...”

communication, but is used as the best way the truth can be displayed—a communication that evidently readers would have understood as an idiomatic expression—namely something like “not as his ultimate desire”.

- Elsewhere there is a distinction drawn between God’s anger and favor, and how both are displayed toward his people—particularly in regard to longevity: Ps. 30:4-5. There also is even a distinction drawn between the anger *Yahweh* exercises toward his people for sin and that which he exercises toward those who are not his people and who are his enemies: Zech. 1:15. This **suggests God can also have different levels of pleasure and/or delight in what he does**. He can have delight or pleasure in all he does, **but greater delight and pleasure in some things**.
- Elsewhere distinction is made between penultimate and antepenultimate desires of God.¹⁴ In Ezekiel 18:23 the question is asked by *Yahweh*, “Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?” The expected answer is, “No I do not have pleasure in this, because morally I would rather have him turn and live!” The answer is stated even more clearly in Ezekiel 18:32: “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.” Nevertheless, when one does not turn to God and so God judges them, he does not bring this divine response against his will. In one sense he does it out of delight since it is in accordance with his attributes. Deuteronomy 28:63 affirms this: “And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it.” Here comparison is made between God’s blessing and cursing—namely that he delights to do both (and implied seems to be that it is in accordance with his righteousness). Nevertheless, when we read this verse in light of Ezekiel 18:23, 32, we conclude that God has greater pleasure in one turning to him and living—and so blessing that one—than he does in his not turning and thus judging that one. So, love, mercy, and compassion appear to be more ultimate movements in God, more intense movements, than that of anger, judgment, discipline, and grief caused.¹⁵

¹⁴ I word the sentence in this manner because God’s ultimate desire and pleasure is his glory.

This also introduces us to the potential problem of multiple aspects of the will of God. For a discussion of this, see *Appendix Four: Potential Problems Arising From God’s Governance Of All Things*.

¹⁵ One may ask, then, why does God decree that he will permit sin and thus exercise anger, judgment, discipline, and cause grief? The answer has to do with what he ultimately desires and has pleasure in—namely his glory. The glory of his love and grace is intensified by the presence of sin and also the presence of sin displays more of God’s attributes. See Chapters 2-3.

What we must remember, though, as this chapter is arguing throughout, God’s governance of all things is such that he is not morally responsible for evil. This is important as we apply what we are discovering to the problem of evil. For a fuller discussion of this, see *Appendix Four: Potential Problems Arising From God’s Governance Of All Things*.

Since this is how God moves toward mankind in general¹⁶ (he has greater and more ultimate desire and pleasure to have compassion and bless than he does to cause grief and curse), then it is even more certain that he will move to restore his people and thus not grieve or afflict them permanently.

When it comes to sin, evil, suffering, grief, and the like (all those things that happen which are outside his moral will), God truly does permit what he hates to accomplish what he loves.¹⁷ Nevertheless, theological care leads us to conclude that God is not being moved from outside himself, against his character, or against his decretive will to permit such things (See Chapters 4-5). In this sense, he permits it willingly, with pleasure and delight in what will be accomplished and revealed of his glory, but not with the same intensity and ultimate movement with which he would have pleasure toward that which is morally good.

¹⁶ I say “mankind in general” because of the presence of “children/sons of men” later in the text, that speaks of mankind in general. I understand the phrase, “from his heart” to modify both the verb “afflict” and “grieve” and so “children of men” is the direct object for both verbs, and so the poet is clearly writing about how God deals with all kinds of people in both clauses. The argument is from the general principle to the more specific application. If it is this way with all mankind, then certainly when applied to those people to whom God has made specific covenantal promises, God will not afflict and grieve them permanently. The phrase “children/sons of men” (*benei-ish*) occurs only here in Lamentations. The word son/child is used elsewhere in the book to speak of suffering children in Judah (1:16) and also to speak of those who are part of Zion (lit. “sons of Zion”) and who had been God’s treasured possession (cf. Ex. 19:5-6) like gold, but now are treated as mere earthen pots of a potter to be cast off (Lam. 4:2). In fact, this is the only place this exact phrase (“children of men”) occurs in the Old Testament. “Children of man” occurs at Prov. 8:4 as a poetic reference to mankind (there it is parallel to “men”) and “son of man” occurs in Psalm 8:4 as parallel to “man” and thus a poetic reference to a human. It appears that “children of men” is a reference not merely to Israel/Judah or even merely to believers, but rather to mankind in general. This is further demonstrated through the reality that “sons of Zion (Lam. 4:2) is used to speak of those who are mixed descendants of the commonwealth of Israel (believer and unbeliever). What is more, “children of Israel” and “children of Judah” are used in Jer. 32:32 with the same significance. In other words, there are other options to use if the focus is only on Israel or only on believers. It appears, then, that the poet is drawing from a principle or reality that is true of how the LORD deals with all mankind. In other words, this characteristic of God is true of him in regard to all people without exception.

¹⁷ Elsewhere we discover God hates sin. Psalm 5:5 reads: “For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. ⁵ The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers.” In Psalm 11:5: “The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.” Proverbs 11:20 adds: “Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the LORD, but those of blameless ways are his delight.” And in Romans 1:18, Paul writes: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” Similarly, in Eph. 5:6, the apostle teaches: “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”

In Lamentations 3:33, then, we discover God exercises his compassion, grace, and love with greater and more ultimate desire and delight toward people than he does his anger, wrath, judgment, and man's grief. This is not to discount God's attributes or to diminish some of them. He is always and at one and the same time all of his attributes (e.g. Ezek. 18:1-32). Nevertheless, there does seem to be a logical priority of importance among them according to this text.

In this text, we move toward a solution for some difficult statements elsewhere in the Bible. Though there is a sense in which God has "no pleasure in the death of anyone" (Ezek. 18:32), including the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:23), yet, there is also a sense in which he does: "And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it" (Dt. 28:63).¹⁸ John Piper helpfully states the tension we discover:

So we are brought back to the inescapable fact that in some sense God does not delight in the death of the wicked (that is the message of Ezekiel 18), and in some sense he does (that is the message implicitly of Psalm 135:6-11 and explicitly of Deuteronomy 28:63). In other words, one cannot simply oppose the thesis... (that God had pleasure in all that he does) by quoting texts like Ezekiel 18:32. The Bible shows (in Deuteronomy 28:63; Proverbs 1:24-26; Revelation 18:20; Ezekiel 5:13; and Isaiah 30:31-32) that even acts of judgment which in one sense do not please God in another sense do please him. Our method is not to choose between these texts, or to cancel out one by the other, but to go deep enough into the mysterious mind of God to see (as far as possible) how both are true.¹⁹

How do we solve this tension or can we? Again, I come back to Piper, whose explanation fits with what we have found in Lamentations 3:33:

The answer I propose is that God is grieved in one sense by the death of the wicked, and pleased in

¹⁸ This tension is increased when we are reminded that all God decrees and brings about he does because he is pleased to do so (Pss. 115:3; 135:6) and he is not being constrained or limited from outside himself (cf. Job 42:2; Is. 43:13; Dan. 4:35).

¹⁹ John Piper, *The Pleasures Of God: Meditations On God's Delight In Being God* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1991), 65-66.

another. God's emotional life is infinitely complex beyond our ability to fully comprehend. For example, who can comprehend that the Lord hears in one moment of time the prayers of 10 million Christians around the world, and sympathizes with each one personally and individually as a caring Father (as Hebrews 4:15 says), even though among those 10 million prayers some are broken-hearted and some are bursting with joy? How can God weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice when they are both coming to him at the same time – in fact are always coming to him with no break at all? Or who can comprehend that God is angry at the sin of the world every day (Psalm 7:11), and yet every day, every moment, he is rejoicing with tremendous joy because somewhere in the world a sinner is repenting (Luke 15:7, 10, 23)? Who can comprehend that God continually burns with hot anger at the rebellion of the wicked and grieves over the unholy speech of his people (Ephesians 4:29-30), yet takes pleasure in them daily (Psalm 149:4), and ceaselessly makes merry over penitent prodigals who come home? [cf. Luke 15:7, 10, 22-24!] Who of us can dare say what complex of emotions is not possible for God? All we have to go on here is what he has chosen to tell us in the Bible. And what he has told us is that there is a sense in which he does not experience pleasure in the judgment of the wicked, and there is a sense in which he does.²⁰

So, how might there be a “sense in which he does not experience pleasure in the judgment of the wicked...and a sense in which he does”? Again, Piper furthers our understanding in a way that fits with our findings in this book:

From this I conclude that the death and misery of the unrepentant is in and of itself no delight to God. God is not a sadist. He is not malicious or bloodthirsty. Instead when a rebellious, wicked, unbelieving person is judged, what God delights in is the exaltation of truth and righteousness, and the vindication of his own honor and glory.

...When Moses warns Israel that the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon them and destroying them if they do not repent (Deuteronomy 28:63), he means that those who have rebelled against the Lord and moved beyond repentance will not be able to gloat that they have made the Almighty miserable. God is not defeated in the triumphs of his righteous judgment. Quite the contrary. Moses says that when they are judged they will unwittingly provide an occasion for God to rejoice in the demonstration of his justice and his power and the infinite worth of his glory (Romans 9:22-23).

Let this be a warning to us. God is not mocked. He is not trapped or cornered or coerced. Even on the way to Calvary he had legions of angels at his disposal. “No one takes my life from me; I lay it down of my own accord” – of his own pleasure, for the joy that was set before him. At the one point in the history of the universe where God looked trapped, he was in charge, doing precisely what he pleased – dying to justify the ungodly like you and me.²¹

We find a similar teaching in the New Testament, only there it is clear that God's good pleasure is focused upon Jesus Christ and his work of salvation. He appears to take greater

²⁰ Piper, *The Pleasures*, 66.

²¹ Piper, *The Pleasures*, 66-67.

pleasure in these aspects of his eternal decrees than those that focus on judgment. In Matthew 11:26 we read: “At that time Jesus declared, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such [became well pleasing before you].”²² On this clause William Hendriksen helpfully writes the following:

*It is comforting to note that throughout the New Testament the good pleasure or delight of the Father, when positively expressed, everywhere else has as its object Christ and/or the work of salvation in connection with him. It seems logical, therefore, to believe that also here (in Matt. 11:26 and in its parallel Luke 10:21) the positive thought of revealing to babes the things pertaining to salvation is uppermost in Christ’s mind when he mentions the Father’s good pleasure. Says H. Bavinck [in **The Doctrine Of God**, 1955, p. 390], “In a certain sense, the fall, sin, and eternal punishment are included in God’s decree and are willed by him. But this is true in a certain sense only, and not in the same sense as grace and salvation. These are the objects of his delight; but God does not delight in sin, neither does he take pleasure in punishment.” Cf. Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11.²³*

The reality that God has greater and lesser movements of his heart standing behind his holy pleasure that brings about all his eternal purpose most likely implies that God has a different relationship to diverse events of the world and actions of men he has ordained. J. Todd Billings captures this thought when he writes: “But not all things are ‘God’s [decretive] will’ in exactly the same way—some things God works through his permission, and other things God works through his actively bringing about conformity to Christ’s reign by the Spirit’s power.”²⁴ Billings

²² The last clause is my own translation. In context, what became well pleasing before God the Father was enabling those who were humble and receptive of heart (“little children”) to understand their need for Jesus, to understand the gospel, and to desire him—that is, grasp who Jesus is and what he has come to do (cf. 11:27), to gain a knowledge and the affections that would lead to repentance (11:21) and the desire and ability to come to Jesus in faith (11:28-30). Also, in context, God initiates the process and determines whose hearts will be the objects of this divine revealing work (v. 27): “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.”

²³ William Hendriksen, *Exposition Of The Gospel According To Matthew*, vol. 9 in William Hendriksen, Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Baker New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 500-501.

²⁴ J. Todd Billings, *Rejoicing In Lament: Wrestling With Incurable Cancer And Life In Christ* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015, Kindle Edition), 68. Billings adds here, as an example of something God more actively wills: “God’s active will is demonstrated in bringing new life that gives eyes to see and ears to hear....”

highlights that such a distinction has historical precedent: "...in the words of one Reformed confession about the 'ordaining' or 'willing' of God, 'God does not ordain evil in the same way that God ordains good—that is, as something pleasing to God—but as something God hates. Yet God freely permits the evil of creatures, 'and in a wonderful way uses [it] for good.'"²⁵

The most helpful way to distinguish between the causative and permissive governance of God is to give some examples. First, we will consider a tragedy that took place because we are in a broken world, but that is not tied to the intentional moral action of a secondary agent (an accident). Last month, on the interstate thirteen miles north of where we live, a semi-trailer truck was traveling in the east bound lanes as a pick-up truck was passing it. The semi-trailer truck most likely blew a front tire which made it swerve sharply into the passing lane—colliding with the pick-up and making both bolt through the median and into the west bound lanes. They collided with another semi-trailer truck and at least two other vehicles. Several people were injured and three were killed. Why did this happen and what relationship did God have to it?

In the big picture we can answer that God decreed that humans would sin and, as a result, that the world would be under a curse. As such, things wear out, humans miss problems with tires, and/or production mistakes are made, and accidents like this happen.

More directly with the events surrounding this accident, God ordained to all the antecedent choices and events to take place that led to the people being present on the interstate as they were

²⁵ Ibid, 69. This is from the *Reformed Bremen Consensus* (1559), quoted in Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 62-63.

The early 18th c. Scottish pastor, Thomas Boston, in his *The Crook In The Lot, Or The Sovereignty And Wisdom Of God Displayed In The Afflictions Of Men* (New York: Robert Carter, 1848), 33, wrote: "Now the [evil afflictions] of this kind are not of God's making, in the same latitude as those [that are not evil]; for he neither puts evil in the heart of any, nor stirreth up to it: 'He cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man' (James 1:13). But they are of his making, by his holy permission of them; powerful bounding of them, and wise overruling of them to some good end." (cited in LeAnn Trees, "A Grieving Mother's Tribute To Thomas Boston, *Modern Reformation*, 21, 3 [May-June 2012]: 23)

and at the times they were.²⁶ God could have ordained that different choices and timing would be in place so that the accident would not happen or would not happen as it did. Working through the ways God decreed the world to work (and the consequences that arise therein) God allowed what he hates (death and suffering—effects of sin) somehow to accomplish what he loves (his glory). We most likely will never know in this age how this outcome was realized, but what we learned in Chapters 2-3 leads us to this conclusion. To put it another way, God could have ordained he would stop the accident from happening at any time (and based upon the countless times mechanics find problems with tires during maintenance and repairs, for example, many times he does this very thing).

God has a different relationship to this type of event and its immeasurable antecedent events and choices, as well as to the secondary agents, than he does to someone's salvation or to a mediate or immediate healing.²⁷ "...God's foreordaining x is not equivalent to God's making x happen. For according to the Augustinian-Calvinist perspective, God ordains evil by willingly permitting it."²⁸

A second example, one that includes intentional moral choices on the part of secondary agents, also will help clarify what we are saying. On September 11, 2001, when radical Islamic terrorists sought to turn four different airplanes into large bombs, almost 3,000 people were killed and many others injured—as the direct result of the sinful choices of humans. On the one

²⁶ As we will discover in Chapter Seven, all the immeasurable antecedent events were the result of real choices on the part of the people involved (the secondary agents).

Helm, "An Augustinian," 182, helpfully adds: "[What we are speaking of is a particular permission—God permits particular acts—which is distinct from general permission, as when a teacher permits a class to write an essay on any topic they choose."

²⁷ This has been the typical understanding among Reformed theologians. For examples, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996, new combined edition), Part 2, 105; J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View Of Man* (Carlisle, Pa: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1999, repr.), 43-45; and Arthur W. Pink, "The Decrees Of God," in *Free Grace Broadcaster*, 237 (September 2016): 1-4 (citing *The Attributes Of God*).

²⁸ Paul Helm, "An Augustinian-Calvinist," 158-59.

hand, as we discovered in Chapters 4-5, these events took place as part of God's meticulous providence, his absolutely sovereign governance of all things.

Yet, on the other hand, God has a very different relationship to this kind of events than he does to a team of people traveling to Haiti, for example, to install and repair water pumps for villages so they can have clean water. At any point along the way God could have worked, for example, through law enforcement in such a manner that the plot was foiled. However, for reasons that are not fully known to us, he did not.²⁹

These men, acting truly and genuinely out of their own evil hearts, in accordance with their reasoning, desires, and wills that were fallen, blinded to truth, and evil, planned these evil events (they acted freely and responsibly).³⁰ The choices and outcomes could not have taken place had God not decreed to permit them. Yet, God was not the actor in these events or the author of what took place, nor was he morally responsible. They were!³¹

²⁹ And in fact God did foil the plans of the terrorists when it came to the plane that went down in Pennsylvania, and which most likely was headed toward another target in Washington, D.C. God seemingly did this through a combination of his causative and permissive governance in the lives of the passengers on that plane so that they would take action to stop the terrorists from achieving their ultimate goal. As such, we see that God decreed that the terrorists in this case would not be allowed to achieve their ultimate end and he decreed the death of all on board—yet in such a manner that he is not the morally responsible cause of these choices and events. He permitted what he hates to accomplish what he loves.

³⁰ Precision is in order here. There is also a sense in which these men were bound or enslaved to their evil actions. Blinded by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4) and morally incapable of seeing their need for Christ and transformation by his Spirit (Rom. 3:10ff.; 1 Cor. 2:13-14; Eph. 2:1-3), these men were slaves to sin (Rom. 6:16-17). However, all along the way through their decisions, actions, and habituation, they were deciding and acting as they wanted and in accordance with their greatest motive of the moment. So, we can say they were free to act as they desired and to sin as God permitted. They lacked the moral ability to do righteousness and in that sense lacked the freedom of moral goodness.

³¹ D. A. Carson, "Reflections On Christian Assurance," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 54, 1 (Spring 1992): 24-25, writes: "...although God, by virtue of the fact that he is sovereign, stands behind both good and evil (e.g., God can be portrayed as the one who incites David to number the people, the one who sends a strong delusion so that people will believe the lie, the one who sends nations to war, the one of whom Rom. 8:28 is predicated), he stands behind good and evil asymmetrically. He stands behind evil in such a way that none of it takes place outside the limits of his sovereign sway, but so that no evil is chargeable to him; he stands behind good in such a way that all of it is credited to him."

Paul Helm, "An Augustinian," 180, agrees: "God is the source of all creaturely power, but the powers of creatures, even when efficaciously empowered by God, are really their own and so are distinct from his.... The wicked men who crucified Jesus were the cause of his death even though he was crucified by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:33)."

We deal with similar distinctions in causative and permissive governance elsewhere in life and in relation to human “governors.” Consider the parents who have warned their teen son about ignoring his alarm, sleeping in and being late to school. They have the authority and ability to wake him up so he will not be late. However, they choose not to wake him up one morning, permit him to be late to school, and to face the consequences. In this set of events, the parents have a good purpose in mind—to help their son learn responsibility as well as the importance of discipline.³² What is more, their relationship to the events not only has different motives than his (out of laziness and not caring, he just wants to sleep in), but the manner in which they are actualizing the outcome is different than when he was younger and they would read books to him so he could learn from them. Their relationship as governors to the events is more passive than active, even though they are also decisive.

Consider police officers in a city who have amassed enough evidence against a drug dealer to secure a conviction, as well as knowing where he lives and having the power to go and arrest him. However, learning of an upcoming meeting he has with his supplier, they choose to permit him to go ahead and commit the crime of purchasing more drugs—not because their motive is criminal (as if they wanted him and the supplier to make more illegal money and for users to place themselves in jeopardy from the narcotics), but because their motive is good and noble.³³

³² It should also be noted the parents have a different relationship to the sleeping-in events. Though they are governing and, in one sense, acting decisively to allow the son to sleep in and be late, they are not the ones exercising laziness, sleeping in, and being late to school. So it is with God when he ordains allowance of sin. As will be seen in the next chapter, the person who sins is following their nature, their greatest desires at the moment, and also arguments in their own mind of which they are convinced—and so they are genuinely acting in a free manner, even though God has decreed to permit them to do so. In such instances, we can say God is not the one tempting them, he is not the one committing or causing directly the sin.

³³ This sentence would still be true, even if we threw in a more active movement on the part of the police—namely having another genuine supplier who also is an informant (and who has cut a deal with them) approach the drug dealer in order to encourage him to seek out the ultimate supplier that the police want to catch and to set up the meeting. So, even in the human realm we can see how a combination of causative and permissive movements can lead to choices and events for which the governing humans are not morally responsible for the evil that takes place.

They not only want to arrest him, but also want to arrest the supplier so that they can take both off the streets and accomplish even greater good. Again, though in one sense the officers' decisions and actions are decisive, they are not the ones committing the crime. Nor are they directly causing the crime to be committed in a manner they are morally responsible.

Certainly we know God is a different kind of governor than mere humans and so at some point the analogies break down. However, they still help us grasp to a greater degree what we mean by causative and permissive governance—there are different levels of pleasure or desire on the part of the governor (in the case of the police, they take greater desire in the arrests than in the drug deals—the latter being something they hate because of the devastation they have seen in their city), there are different motives on the part of the governor vs. the secondary agents in the carrying out of the choices and events, and there is a different relationship the governor has to the agent in his permissive governance than what would be true in other situations in which the governor takes more of a causative approach.

At this point some might say, “Ok, Tom, we see what you are saying about different levels of desire or pleasure on the part of the governor and how Lamentations 3:33 introduces this for God’s governance. We also understand the analogies that you just provided. But where is the more direct proof from Scripture for a distinction between God’s causative and permissive governance?” Let’s turn to that evidence.

Acts 14:16, one very significant text that provides proof that some of God’s governance is permissive, reads as follows: “In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.” What Luke is recording that Paul communicated is that throughout much of world history, throughout many successive generations or ages, God has not directly challenged the Gentile ethno-linguistic people groups of the world in such a way that he has sought actively to

turn them to him in large numbers, to trust in him, and to follow him. Instead, he has permitted them to follow their own thoughts and plans about what is right and wrong and how one finds meaning, purpose, and hope.

This does not mean that God left himself without a witness. After all, God had previously shown to man what can be known about him, namely his invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature, seen in the things that are made—and this so much the case that man is without excuse (Rom. 1:19-20). The way this is worded here in Acts 14:17 is this: “Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” Though this all is sufficient to leave man without excuse, it is not sufficient to save (Rom. 10:13-17). The implication behind this text is that now this all has changed. Now, God is clearly sending his special revelation, the word of his gospel, out into the world.

The main clause for our consideration is, “he allowed.”³⁴ The field of meaning for the verb is: “allow, permit...not to restrain, to let alone...to give up, let go, leave.”³⁵ There are only three other times that there is a divine subject of the verb. In Luke 4:41 Jesus restrained demons from speaking or in other words, he did not allow them to speak. In Acts 16:7 Luke writes that the Spirit did not allow Paul and Silas to go into Bythunia, as he was bringing them to a place where they would receive the Macedonian call (cf. 16:8-10). The agency or means whereby the Spirit restrained them are unknown. In 1 Cor. 10:13 Paul writes that God, who is faithful, will not allow the Christian to be tempted or tested beyond his ability, but with the temptation/test will

³⁴ The verb is a constative aorist (i.e. providing an overview, a snapshot of the entire era and what God did), from *eaō*.

³⁵ Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, on-line. The verb is used twelve times in the New Testament, ten of which are in Luke-Acts (counting this sentence).

provide the way of escape that he might be able to endure it.³⁶

The verb, then, can mean the opposite of seeking to determine causatively or directly the actions of another person or an object (even if that causative determination would merely include restraint). It also can simply mean not to take action; so that one is giving space and freedom for another person or object to go the direction they decide or the direction decided by others causes. What Luke seems to be writing in this verse is that in the past God did not take steps to restrain the nations from going on paths they chose, which includes their opposition to God, their rebellion against him, their not trusting in him, and so a continuation in full-fledged sinfulness. This statement appears to be a companion statement to what Paul writes in Rom. 1:24, 26, 28, that though he had given a knowledge of himself to all mankind, that knowledge had been suppressed and he had given over Gentiles to their sin to run head-long into it, as part of his judgment upon them.

What Acts 14:16 teaches us is that at least in some instances God carries out his decrees by allowing or permitting people to carry out their own plans—and without restraining them. What is clear is that this could very well account for how all things can be ordained and governed by God, but he is not the morally responsible (i.e. direct) cause of temptation or sin. What is also noteworthy is how God permits different things in the lives of different people—the nations to go their own way in past generations (i.e. to sin since that is what they have chosen), but he will not allow or permit believers to be tempted or tested beyond their ability (1 Cor. 10:13). The witness of Scripture appears to be that God governs all things, but he does not govern all things in the same manner.

³⁶ This text is significant and will be examined more thoroughly in Chapter Nine. For now, we simply need to note that though God is not the direct or the moral cause of temptation (cf. James 1:13), nevertheless, he is absolutely sovereign over it and governs it meticulously by permitting it.

Before we move on, we must also see there are other places in Scripture where it is explicitly affirmed God carries out his eternal purpose in a more permissive manner.

In Exodus 21:13 (a text we have already examined earlier) God is spoken of as allowing a person to die as a result of the actions of another person who did not intend it. Nevertheless, God's permissive governance was behind it: "But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee."

Hebrews 6:3 is particularly powerful in reference to God's permissive governance, since it is placed within the context of the need for God's causative governance as well. Hebrews is a book that makes clear that for a person to desire to carry out God's will and also to be able to carry it out in the way God wants, for the purposes God desires, and to the extent God will be pleased (see our earlier treatment of Hebrews 13:20-21 in Chapter Five), God must causatively, decisively, and effectively transform the person. Yet, here in Hebrews 6:3 we read of the need for God's permissive governance for such persons when it comes to learning and teaching true Christian doctrine: "And this we will do if God permits."³⁷ In other words, the author of Hebrews is speaking of the need to learn and teach sound Christian doctrine and believes that those who are true followers of Jesus Christ have the capacity to learn and teach (cf. Heb. 5:12; 6:1). Nevertheless, it will ultimately take place if God brings it about through an immeasurable combination of causative and permissive movements on his part such that these saints will be convinced they need to learn and teach such doctrine and so make the choice to do it.

³⁷ The verb is *epitrepō*. It is used elsewhere to speak of the permission granted to someone to do something by superiors (cf. John 19:38; Acts 21:39, 40; 26:1; 27:3; 28:16). As such, Paul uses it in 1 Cor. 16:7 to tell the Corinthians he not only desires to see them, but to spend significant time with them, "if the Lord permits." Paul's statement appears to be a conceptual (but not lexical) parallel to the statement of James in 4:15 ("If the Lord wills") wherein the latter affirms that each detail of our life is dependent upon God's decretive will as carried out through his meticulous providence, and so we should act in conscious dependence upon and submission to God as we plan.

Hebrews 6:3, then, helps tie together what we discover about God’s causative and permissive governance with what we have already discovered about God’s exhaustive, meticulous, and free governance in Chapters 4-5. God has foreordained all that comes to pass. God is not dependent upon or limited by human choices. Yet, even in the case of a Christian who has been actively and decisively saved by the initiative-taking acts of God, and so can carry out God’s moral will now, God has also decreed that in this age the saint will not be perfected such that they always carry out his moral will. So, the saved saint, through an immeasurable combination of God’s causative and permissive governance, will sometimes trust in and obey God and sometimes disobey God.³⁸

Multiple Causes Of Events

A reality that both follows from what we have been discovering and that also provides additional proof God does not govern all things in the same manner is the presence of multiple causes in many events. “[Some] contemporary Christians conclude that God is the sole actor in history—that every event comes in a direct, unmediated way from God. Yet this view is one-sided....”³⁹ “Monocausality,” the idea that God is the sole cause for what happens in the world is not truly what the Bible teaches.⁴⁰ “This approach fails to recognize the agency of creatures who have a will that is distinct—and often opposed to God. Such a monocausal approach is condemned as an extreme position by a wide-range of theologians—patristic, medieval, and

³⁸ Another way we see God’s meticulous and decisive governance carried out through more permissive movements is the frequent use of the aorist passive of the verb *didōmi* in Revelation (e.g. 9:5; 13:5, 7, 14, 15; 16:8). In a book that presents in a strong way that God is sovereign over all things—and especially history as it is unfolded for the church during the current age and as a result of the saving work of Christ (cf. Rev. 4-5), John clarifies that much happens in this world because “it was given” to sentient beings by God to do what God has ordained.

³⁹ Billings, *Rejoicing*, 61.

Helm, “An Augustinian-Calvinist View,” 180-81, explains what I am attempting to here, namely that God is the primary cause of all—he governs all, he is the secondary cause of much (e.g. morally good and morally indifferent choices), but he is not the secondary cause of evil.

⁴⁰ Billings, *Rejoicing*, 64.

Reformation-era, Arminians and Reformed alike.”⁴¹ Monocausality is part of fatalism,⁴² a subject we will look at again shortly.

Paul Helm, explains one of the reasons acknowledgment of multiple causation is significant for our discussion:

While it seems clear that intramundane causation is transitive – given events A, B, and C, if A causes B, and B causes C, then A causes C – there is no necessary transitivity in the case of any causal aspects or features of the divine knowing and willing permission.... It is thus not necessarily the case that if God governs by knowingly and willingly permitting some event B, and B causes C, then God causes C; rather God may will by permitting that B causes C and so knowingly and willingly permit C. God’s willing permission is thus not a straightforward case of intramundane causation, and those who seek to assimilate God’s knowing and willing permission of evil to the actions of someone manipulating a puppet, or to hypnotism, or to brainwashing or programming, have not recognized the truly unique character of such permission.⁴³

Biblical evidence for multiple causes behind events is plentiful. Here are a few examples.

One of the most well-known passages that affirms dual causality contains the words of Joseph to his fearful brothers after their father, Jacob, has died and when Joseph now has the power to retaliate against them. Genesis 50:20 reads: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

We see multiple causes in the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart in Exodus 4-14, passages we examined in Chapter Two. Though the ultimate causation is attributed to God, nevertheless, the text is clear that Pharaoh was also hardening his own heart. God was accomplishing his decrees through the responsible and real choices of humans.

⁴¹ Ibid, 64-65.

⁴² Ibid, 87.

⁴³ “An Augustinian,” 180.

In Judges 14:4 we discover that Samson’s sinful desire to marry a Philistine woman was “from the LORD.” Evidently, God had decreed this movement of Samson’s heart and actions (something God hates) to accomplish something that God loves.

In 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1, two parallel passages,⁴⁴ we discover that God can be the ultimate or far cause of one’s volition and sinful actions such that: (1) God himself is not morally responsible, even though his causation is ultimate; (2) A morally malicious agent can be the near and responsible cause (be it Satan, another adversary, or both); (3) The person who is exercising their volition and carrying out the action can be morally responsible as another near cause; and finally, (4) God can ordain choices that are contrary to his moral will and therefore what he hates, to accomplish something(s) he loves—namely in this case judgment upon Israel and preparation for the temple (and possibly the revelation that David was not the ultimate King in whom the eternal covenant would be accomplished and applied—there was need for a greater King!).

The Proverbs clarify that we cannot hold to a monocausal view of the world. Planning, preparation, choices, actions, and work (or the lack thereof) are all very important to outcomes (cf. 6:6-11; 16:3, 21:5)⁴⁵ and yet the ultimate outcomes—whether they are effective and successful or not—are from the LORD (16:9, 33; 21:31).⁴⁶ Part of the implication of this is

⁴⁴ 2 Samuel 24:1 reads: “Again the anger of **the LORD** was kindled against Israel, and **he incited David** against them, saying, “Go, number Israel and Judah.” (emphasis added)

1 Chronicles 21:1 reads: “Then **Satan** stood against Israel and **incited David** to number Israel.” (emphasis added) In each passage the verb translated “incited” is a hiphil (causative active) form of the verb *suth*.

⁴⁵ Proverbs 6:6-11: “Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. ⁷ Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, ⁸ she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. ⁹ How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? ¹⁰ A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, ¹¹ and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.”

Proverbs 16:3: “Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.”

Proverbs 21:5: “The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty.”

⁴⁶ Proverbs 16:9: “The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.”

multiple causation (divine and human) in these events.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7 Paul writes: “So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelation, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated.” Paul appears to imply that ultimate causation belongs to God since the purpose stated is to keep him from being proud. Humility is something God loves, but not Satan. However, causation is also ascribed to Satan. So something can be ordained by God (in this case whatever it is, the thorn appears to be the result of a fallen world and sin) and yet not be in line with his moral will.

In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul writes of his own gospel ministry: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.” Paul makes some significant points that are worthy of closer attention for our present purpose. First, the apostle strongly affirms that God’s unmerited favor was decisive in his moving from an unsaved persecutor of the church (v. 9) to a saved and transformed gospel minister (v. 10). The instrumental of means (*chariti*), translated “by the grace,” is used by Paul to convey the means whereby he became who he is now—it is by the grace (the unmerited favor) that comes from or originates in God (*theou*: ablative of source]). So, the first phrase shows very clearly that the source or cause of Paul’s changing and becoming his present self is God working through his unmerited favor to save and to transform. To look at it from another direction, Paul is affirming that left to himself he could not have become what he now is.

Sometimes “grace” speaks more of God’s unmerited favor to save, sometimes it focuses upon God’s unmerited favor to transform and/or to empower a person for the Christian life and

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

Proverbs 21:31: “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD.”

service.⁴⁷ Here, since Paul is speaking of going from a church persecutor to a saved person who is also an apostle and, now as an apostle, is serving Christ, most likely his intent is to include all of the aspects of grace—to save, transform, and empower.

Next, Paul writes that rather than God’s grace coming to him in a non-effective manner,⁴⁸ it did accomplish God’s intended purpose and not only saved him, but transformed him into a hard-working gospel minister: “I worked harder than any of them,⁴⁹ though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.” Note that Paul affirms he has been an actor, a worker (a causative agent) in his ministry, but also God has been as well. In fact, the way this verse is worded, God decisively changed Paul in such a way that a transformation emerges, but Paul is still seen as truly working as a causative agent also.⁵⁰ In fact, this dual causality (with God’s work being ultimately decisive) is crucial for understanding not only how salvation works, but also our growth in the sanctification process.

As we look in the rest of the New Testament epistles, multiple causation is verified from the reality that exhortations are given and yet their application is dependent ultimately upon the

⁴⁷ “Grace” is used in 1 Corinthians to speak of God’s unmerited favor whereby he saves (1:4), as well as God’s unmerited favor whereby he empowers for service (3:10), and finally to speak of God’s unmerited favor whereby he continues to grow and transform believers (16:23 [“grace of the Lord Jesus”]). In 2 Corinthians it is also used to speak of growing, transforming, persevering grace (1:2; 6:1; 9:8, 14; 12:9; 13:14 [“grace of the Lord Jesus Christ”]), empowering grace (1:12; 8:1, 4, 6, 7, 9 [virtually synonymous with “gift”]; 9:8, 14; 12:9; 13:14 [“grace of the Lord Jesus Christ”]), and saving grace (4:15).

⁴⁸ The relevant clause is, “and his grace toward me was not in vain.” In other words, it was effective and accomplished its divinely-intended purpose. To be clear on this point, I am arguing that God’s gracious gift of salvation as expressed in the gospel can be offered to individuals in a non-effective manner. The very exposure to the gospel is a grace (e.g. Heb. 6:4), for it is the message one needs to hear that the essential saving work of Christ can be applied through faith. However, in some people this grace is effective, i.e. it accomplishes its intended ends of salvation and transformation. Paul is arguing here that this grace came to him with impact and effect—a truth he makes even clearer in the next clause. We will see especially in Chapter Eight that grace is effective in God’s elect.

⁴⁹ “Them” appears to refer back to the other apostles (see verse 9).

⁵⁰ We will examine the last clause of this verse more closely in Chapter Nine.

gracious work of God in the person (e.g. 1 Thes. 5:23; Heb. 12:14)⁵¹—and some of them also through other means and agents, as well as antecedent movements of the heart (cf. Heb. 3:12-13; 4:16; 5:14; 10:24-25; 11:6 [in light of Rom. 8:8]; 13:20-21).⁵²

To close out this sub-section on the reality of multiple causation in God’s governance of the world, I can do no better than quote an Arminian who, on this point, “nails it” when he attributes man’s truly free and significant choices ultimately to being created in the image of God:

*Man is created and wholly governed by God. What freedom human beings have is therefore relative, entirely subject to God’s government of all things for the accomplishing of his will. Even so, in the image of God, persons have a will and are constitutionally free to make moral choices and responsible for them. God is not the only actor in the universe. Man also acts – for good or evil.*⁵³

Determination And Necessity

⁵¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:23: “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Compare this with 1 Thes. 4:3-4 (“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor”) and Hebrews 12:14 (“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord”).

⁵² Romans 8:8: “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Hebrews 3:12-13: “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

Hebrews 4:16: “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Hebrews 5:14: “But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”

Hebrews 10:24-25: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Hebrews 11:6: “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

Hebrews 13:20-21 (a text we previously examined): “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, ²¹equip 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.”

⁵³ Robert E. Picirilli, “Foreknowledge, Freedom, And The Future,” JETS, 43, 2 (June 2000): 261. Certainly, I would disagree with Picirilli on what exactly that freedom means and how it is worked out. Nevertheless, his awareness of the connection of the *imago dei* and the function of man’s will, as well as the acknowledgment of multiple causation, is profound.

At this point it is important for us to take up a challenge from Molinists, who argue there can be no true freedom, when the kind of determination and necessity are present that we argued for in Chapters 4-5. Since the solution to this problem is found, in part, in the diverse ways God governs (causative and permissive), it is helpful to take up this subject here. First, let's explain the challenge from Molinists.

As we discovered in Chapter One, the Molinist affirms that what God has decreed is certain, but it is not determined or necessary.⁵⁴ With any given choice, had the person chosen something else (he has the ability to do this), then what God would have decreed to be part of the actualized events of the world would have included that choice instead. Yet, since God decreed (or freely willed) the world that is, based upon his innate knowledge of what humans would do in given circumstances, our choices and actions are certain. They are just not necessary.⁵⁵ The Molinist argues that lack of necessity is important for human choices, for apart from it, there is no genuine freedom.

The other challenge comes from the idea that determination (even if of the soft variety) does not allow for freedom, even if the soft determinist appeals to multiple causation. Kenneth Keathley, using the illustration of 10,000 dominoes falling as each causes the next, suggests that

⁵⁴ A non-Molinistic Arminian also affirms this. See Piccirilli, "Foreknowledge," 262-63. By "certain" we mean: "Not having any doubt about something : convinced or sure.... Fixed, settled...known or proved to be true" (Merriam-Webster, on-line).

⁵⁵ Two questions arise at this point—the first of which we have raised previously. (1) If human decisions are somehow dependent upon the sets of circumstances God chose to actualize, it appears that at least some determination is present. If not, then one must ask what difference do the circumstances make? (2) If, as some Molinists argue, there may be some persons who would never choose God's moral will (e.g. to trust in Jesus Christ as Savior), then does it not follow, there is some necessity present in their situation? Of course a Molinist will give the reminder, "No, at every point all along the way, the person was freely choosing (in the libertarian/indeterministic sense) what he or she wanted to do. Though they truly could have chosen Jesus Christ, they would not no matter the set of circumstances present." To this, we say the following: If we grant this, the necessity is found, then, with God. Though God would have willed their salvation, if he could, the reality is he could not. And such is precisely what Scripture will not allow when it comes to divine sovereignty and meticulous providence.

it helps little to push back the causes. Ultimately, he argues, the one responsible is the one who pushed the first one.⁵⁶

To respond to the Molinist who would argue that necessary and determined decisions cannot be free, I will provide three answers. To begin, we must not lose sight of the fact that the greatest evidence for the position I am advocating is Scripture. I am not suggesting that Molinists do not attempt to have Scriptural stances. They do. However, I am convinced that the soft determinist Calvinist does the best job with the biblical data. The result appears to be somehow that human choices are both determined and free (more on this in Chapter Seven).

Second, when it comes to necessity, if we are precise in what we mean by something being necessary, we can see that the human will⁵⁷ can still be free (in the biblical sense) when choices are necessary.⁵⁸ The reason this is true is because I am asserting moral necessity for free human choices rather than natural necessity.⁵⁹ Natural necessity is the necessity men are under through

⁵⁶ Keathley, *Salvation*, 84.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom Of The Will* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College: Christian Classics Ethereal Library Edition, accessed April 2015 at www.cel.org/ccel.org/ccel/edwards/will), Part 1, Section 1, Page 3, explains that the will is: “That by which the mind chooses anything. The faculty of the will, is that power, or principle of mind, by which it is capable of choosing: an act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice.” Edwards goes on to argue there is no difference between volition and preference. Edwards adds (1, 1, page 4): “A man never, in any instance, wills anything contrary to his desires, or desires anything contrary to his will.” As we will discover in Chapter Seven, I believe Edwards’ view is consistent with what the Bible teaches.

⁵⁸ Edwards, *Freedom*, 1, 3, page 15, explains: “Philosophical necessity is...the full and fixed connection between the things signified by the subject and predicate of a proposition, which affirms something to be true. When there is such a connection, then the thing affirmed in the proposition is necessary, in a philosophical sense....” Examples would include the following: God cannot lie. God tells the truth. That which God has decreed will take place. This last example gets to the heart of what we are currently discussing. Human choices are not only certain, but they are necessary because God has decreed them—and this not contingent upon innate knowledge of what the human would do.

⁵⁹ It was Martin Luther, *The Bondage Of The Will*, J. I. Packer, O. R. Johnston, Translators (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 81, who wrote: “I could wish, indeed, that a better term was available for our discussion than the accepted one, *necessity*.... Its meaning is too harsh, and foreign to the subject; for it suggests some sort of compulsion, and something that is against one’s will, which is no part of the view under debate.” What Luther is arguing here is accurate when we do not go on to distinguish between different kinds of necessity.

force of natural causes, e.g., pain when wounded, $2+2=4$, gravity, et al.⁶⁰ To look at this from another perspective, “We are said to be naturally unable to do a thing when we cannot do it if we will....”⁶¹ Simply-put, moral necessity involves the genuine movement of a person’s will. Though there is a necessity in the outcome (since God has ordained it), nevertheless, the outcome occurs because the person had a preference for the choice and action and so that is what he willed. He also had that preference based upon his bent, previous decisions and circumstances, as well as previous free decisions. In that sense also it was necessary.

It is precisely because of this distinction that Keathley’s illustration of the dominoes (his attempt to show that necessity rules out human freedom) does not work and so it is reductionistic.⁶² All Keathley proves is that natural necessity does not include free decisions. Yet, when it comes to the human will, choices are truly made in men—i.e. they truly think about, reason, desire, and choose in their wills what they have a preference to do—and often this is based upon habits they have formed, as well as antecedent decisions made and actions they have taken in the past. What is more, humans change their minds based upon new data, and also based upon a change in their perception toward the same data (without the latter changing). And, in many of these decisions, they are not under natural necessity to do so.⁶³

⁶⁰ Edwards, *Freedom*, 1, 4, page 19. Edwards goes on to explain that there can be a moral necessity in the way men naturally are. He then adds (1, 4, page 20): “I suppose that necessity which is called natural in distinction from moral necessity, is so called, because mere nature, as the word is vulgarly used, is concerned, without any thing of choice.”

⁶¹ Edwards, *Freedom*, 1, 4, page 22.

⁶² See Helm, “An Augustinian,” 179-80.

⁶³ Most indeterminists make a mistake when it comes to defining necessity for they do not distinguish between natural and moral necessity. Consider Picirilli, “Foreknowledge,” 262-63, who wrote: “Necessary events are those that can transpire in just one way because they are caused by some other force, and therefore must inevitably be the way they are. For such events there were causes leading to the event that allowed no freedom of choice, causes that *necessarily* produced the event. These are cause-effect events, where the cause can issue in no other result than the effect.” Picirilli goes on to say three things: “All events—past, present, or future—are certain. Some of those events are necessary—produced by causes that allow no other possibility. Others of those events are contingent—produced by free decisions that really could be otherwise in exactly the same sets of circumstances.”

When a human makes evil choices that God has ordained, it is not because at the time the person's greatest motive was to do right, but alas divine causation by-passed greatest motive and will, as if these do not matter. That would equal the domino illustration. Through an immeasurable combination of divine causative and permissive governance, the person acts on his greatest motive at the time which is to sin. Did God decree this outcome? Yes. But he also decreed the immeasurable combination of causative and permissive antecedents—and this in such a manner that person is acting freely, i.e. of their own will.

Consider the true story of the man (we'll call Chris) who grew up in a Christian home where parents took him to church, yet, as an adult he walked away from that faith. Part of the reason Chris did this was due to emotional pain he experienced in his late teens and early twenties that was compounded by a very painful marriage (“If there is a God, he must not be worth following, for he must not love me!”). When Chris was approached several times through the years by a family member—encouraging him to consider Christ—he was courteous, but had no desire genuinely to consider it or to trust in Christ. The reasons not only had to do with pain, but also what appeared to be confirmation from co-workers around him that life could be lived reasonably-well without “religion.” Through an immeasurable combination of causative and permissive movements on God's part, Chris had been exposed to truth, but he was allowed by God to follow his own reasoning and feelings, his greatest motives at the time, and so he freely made the choices he did (even though each time they were necessary because God had decreed them and because of his genuine preferences).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Part of what we see in this true story is also evidence that, as Edwards suggested in *Freedom Of The Will* (1, 4, page 19), and as the Bible teaches, a moral necessity or inability can also become a natural necessity or inability because those without the effective work of the Spirit in their lives, are naturally unable to see their need for Christ and to trust in him—not because God actively rendered or created them this way. Rather, it is because of the entrance of sin into the world and the spiritual death that comes with it (a moral inability that men now naturally have) leaves men without the ability to trust in Christ (Rom. 3:10ff.; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1-3). What we see then, is that the key in

Without Chris knowing it, throughout the years many people were moved by God to pray for him.⁶⁵ What is more, someone very close to him trusted Christ and began to influence Chris. As a result, his attitude toward Christ and the Church began to change. At times he was still tentative and wanted to keep his distance. Yet, little by little the reluctance began to dissipate. All this time God was working in the man through an immeasurable combination of causative and permissive governance that eventually led to Chris receiving and resting upon Jesus Christ as Savior. Could he have done this without the active and effective working of God in him? No! See Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Peter 1:3. Did God keep Chris through the years from trusting in and following him when he really wanted to do so? No! The fact that God governs both causatively and permissively enables necessary choices to be free choices.

Our third answer to critics who suggest that our position cannot include genuinely free decisions because of the presence of necessity and determinism is simply this:⁶⁶ Determination of choices does not mean choices cannot be free, if we understand the kind of determination that is involved. “By determining the will [what is meant is this, the] causing that the act of the will or choice should be thus, and not otherwise: and the will is said to be determined, when, in

what we are saying is the presence of the will and genuine movements on the part of humans. We also see how our current discussion of the causative and permissive governance of God makes possible the explanation we are offering. We also see that Chris, like all humans apart from the effective work of the Spirit, have lost the moral ability to trust in Christ and thus to please God (Rom. 8:7-8; Heb. 11:6).

⁶⁵ Prayer, as much as anything, reminds us of several of the truths we have uncovered: Though God always brings about what he has decreed, he works through means and agents (God has decreed that he often works in response to prayer: e.g. Ps. 50:15; Mt. 7:7-11; James 4:2); God, in order to answer prayers that deal with the change of another’s will, must be able to change their will in order to answer, which speaks in behalf of soft determinism; and God works through an immeasurable combination of causative and permissive governance, to answer prayer. A great treatment of this subject is Bruce A. Ware, “Prayer And The Sovereignty of God,” in Sam Storms, Justin Taylor, ed’s., *For The Fame Of His Name: Essays In Honor Of John Piper* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 126-143.

⁶⁶ The discussion of necessity focuses more upon the overall reality that God’s decrees have a causative relationship to the choices men make and that these choices must take place as a result. Determination focuses in more closely upon the cause-and-effect relationship antecedent movements, decisions, and conditions have upon specific choices made.

consequence of some action, or influence, its choice is directed to, and fixed upon a particular object.”⁶⁷ Edwards argues that the will is determined by the strongest motive.⁶⁸ To put it another way, “the choice of the mind never departs from that which, at the time, and with respect to the direct and immediate objects of the decision, appears most agreeable and pleasing, all things considered.”⁶⁹

Returning to our example from the life of Chris, the fact that his choices were determined, means that with each choice there were prior influences, conditions, choices, actions, experiences, and the like that led him to be convinced of and to prefer the choices he made.⁷⁰ And, in fact, the reality this is the case, actually strengthens our case that humans act freely. Were this not the case, we could not be certain that humans act freely out of their strongest motives and not simply conditioned by mere naturalistic causation (e.g. an evolutionary process of survival of the fittest).

God’s will is determined by his nature, as we have already discovered. Man, created in God’s image, also makes decisions determined by his nature—a nature shaped by previous movements. There is certainly difference between God and man at this point, but there is also a similarity.

⁶⁷ Edwards, *Freedom*, 1, 2, page 6.

⁶⁸ Edwards, *Freedom*, 1, 2, page 6. He adds (1, 2, page 6): “By motive I mean the whole of that which moves, excites, or invites the mind to volition, whether that be one thing singly, or many things conjunctly.”

⁶⁹ Edwards, *Freedom*, 1, 2, page 11. Again, we will defend this understanding of the will’s operation in Chapter Seven.

⁷⁰ Virtually all people, whether they are Calvinists, Molinists, or Arminians, will acknowledge the presence of at least influences (and in many cases even strong influences, such as deeply-formed habits) upon decisions. (e.g. Picirilli, “Foreknowledge,” 269, writes: “As I have often said, if God keeps me from going to work in my garden by sending the rain, he has not thereby interfered with my freedom.” See also Keathley, *Salvation*, 151) The difference comes down to this: Are there some antecedent influences that determine the person will decide in a certain direction and not in another? The soft-determinist answers, “Yes, there are. This is how the will functions. It does not choose arbitrarily. And even in cases where supposed arbitrary decisions are made (perhaps a reader right now says, “I will prove to you that I can decide something arbitrarily”), there is a decisive motive that determines the decision. Since this is the way the will functions and since the Bible sets forth God’s causative and permissive governance, we can still conclude that such decisions are free in the biblical sense.

Finally, similar to our discussion of necessity, we must distinguish between natural and moral determination. Natural determination involves choices and events that by-pass the movement of the human will. Examples would include: A person who sits in his wheel chair rather than play in a basketball game, because his legs have been injured—even though he desires to play; a person refusing to take a peanut butter cookie due to a peanut allergy—and yet would like to have one; and a child going on a long trip in a car with a kidnapper. Moral determination can include strong and decisive influence, but also still include a positive movement of the will: A dehydrated person choosing to drink water out of a canteen after three days of being lost and injured in the mountains; a woman always and forever refusing to drink alcohol because she grew up in an alcoholic family and hated what it did to her parents; and a Nebraska man cheering adamantly for the Nebraska Cornhusker football team against any and every team they play.

God does not work upon humans against their will in order to bring about what he has decreed. Through an immeasurable combination of his causative and permissive governance, God’s decrees are realized, and yet in a way that man’s freedom is not compromised.

Not Fatalism

Sometimes the position of soft determinist Calvinism that I am advocating in this book is accused of being fatalism. Molinist, William Lane Craig, for example, as he interacts with D. A. Carson’s position, argues that it is a denial that people are “genuinely free,” it is “fatalism,” and “reduces humans to mere puppets.”⁷¹ Additionally, he writes: “Church fathers and medieval theologians sought to refute...theological fatalism, but some later theologians willingly

⁷¹ Craig, *The Only Wise*, 44. The work by Carson he was interacting with is D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty And Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives In Tension* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981).

embraced it....”⁷² Among these he includes Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, and Paul Helm.⁷³

To navigate through this issue, we must first grasp what is meant by the word fatalism. To begin, we need to understand that fatalism argues that whatever will happen must happen and this is not dependent upon human choices. In other words, fatalism has concluded that the outcomes of the world are set no matter what takes place among humans, their choices, and their actions. The basic tenet of fatalism is that human events are inevitable, no matter what humans do.⁷⁴

It is generally acknowledged that there are three kinds of fatalism.⁷⁵ First, there is a logical or metaphysical fatalism, that might, in part, argue that based upon naturalistic evolutionary processes, chemical reactions in the body, decisive biological impulses, and/or decisive previous life experiences, man inevitably does what he must do and cannot choose to change that course. Second, there is Theological fatalism, a position found throughout Islam, that based upon God’s nature and how he works, the events of history happen, regardless of man’s choices or actions. Third, in the past some philosophers have spoken of deterministic fatalism, which simply includes the reality that choices are determined by previous causes, such as antecedent choices,

⁷² Craig, *The Only Wise*, 15.

⁷³ Craig, *The Only Wise*, 15. A refutation of the stance that Edwards was a fatalist is found in Donald J. Westblade, “The Sovereignty of God In the Theology Of Jonathan Edwards,” Sam Storms, Justin Taylor, Ed’s, *For The Fame Of His Name: Essays In Honor Of John Piper* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 116. A refutation that Helm is a fatalist is found in Paul Helm, “An Augustinian-Calvinist Response” (To William Lane Craig, “The Middle Knowledge View”) in James K. Beilby, Paul R. Eddy, *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 157-158.

⁷⁴ *Merriam-Webster* (on-line) defines fatalism this way: “A doctrine that events are fixed in advance so that human beings are powerless to change them.” Helm, “An Augustinian,” 157-58, highlights that fatalism involves the by-passing of the human will and its impact upon events. Billings, *Rejoicing*, 87, also highlights that fatalism by-passes the human will and is monocausal.

⁷⁵ The material on these three kinds of fatalism is taken from “Fatalism,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (accessed 11/2/16 at www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/fatalism). This entry was first published 12/18/2002 and substantively revised 11/7/14.

nature, circumstances, and the like. This position, however, is no longer considered as fatalism by most philosophers.⁷⁶

Though soft deterministic Calvinism posits the absolute sovereignty of God as presented in this book, this is not the same as metaphysical or Theological fatalism for the following reasons.

To begin, because God governs all things through an immeasurable combination of causative and permissive causation, as well as through secondary causes, room is left for man to think, reason, desire, and make choices in ways that result in human choices being genuinely free and arising from his own will. In other words, the will is not by-passed or ignored, as would be the case with fatalism. This reality also forms the foundation for the rest of the reasons.

Next, a person can change the course in life that he is going—including how he thinks, what he desires, what he does, and can even discipline himself to form new habits—for good or bad (see Rom. 10:13-17; 12:1-2; Phil. 2:12-13; 3:1; 4:4-13; 1 Tim. 4:7; Heb. 3:12-13; 5:14; 2 Peter 2:14, 19).⁷⁷ What this means is that what he thinks, how he develops his desires, and what choices he makes, all truly matter for outcomes in his life (Gal. 6:7-8).

Additionally, it is clear that a person can have an impact, for good or for bad, upon the direction of another person's life. Through the influence of their bad example or good (e.g. Psalm 1:1), their words or teaching (Rom. 1:16; 10:13-17; 1 Tim. 4:2-16; Rev. 2:14, 20), and through prayer (Mt. 7:7-11; Mk. 9:29; 11:17; Eph. 6:18-19; Col. 4:2-4), humans can significantly influence (leading to change) how another person thinks, chooses, and acts.

Finally, nothing refutes fatalism any more than the reality that God's variegated governance

⁷⁶ Craig, *The Only Wise*, 14-15, distinguishes determinism from fatalism, and even explains that some forms of fatalism do not focus upon causation at all. See also "Fatalism," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (accessed 11/2/16 at www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/fatalism).

⁷⁷ I am not arguing at this point that all these things can be done by man without help from or dependence upon God. Nor am I arguing these things happen apart from God's governance. I am arguing, however, that man can truly do all these things.

and the reality he not only ordains the end, but the means, leaves room for the reality that if man does not engage in certain actions, it will significantly impact outcomes. For example, lack of asking God for things in prayer can leave a person without them and asking him can lead to their reception (Mt. 7:7-11; James 4:2); whether someone shares the gospel with another person or not has significant impact—without this they typically will be lost (cf. 1:16; Rom. 10:13-17); and in one particular instance in Scripture, God promises through Paul to storm-tossed sailors on a ship that they would all be saved, if they remained on the ship, but would be lost if they exited the vessel (Acts 27:23-24, 32).⁷⁸

The Origin Of Sin

In our affirmation that God decrees sin through permitting it among sentient beings and that this takes place through moral determination—their own antecedent sinful nature, decisions, and habits move them to choose sin freely—one aspect of this we have not addressed is sin’s very origin.⁷⁹ When God created, including the angelic world and the first man, we are told that, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).⁸⁰ What is more, we learn that “sin came into the world through one man” (Rom. 5:12), that is, Adam, and so the inference is that sin was not present in the physical world, nor in Adam, prior to Adam’s first sin. So, Adam, without an inclination to sin and without any previous sinful choices or habits, chose

⁷⁸ Soft determinist Calvinists of past and present eras have argued, based upon the reality that God ordains means and not just ends, God works through secondary causes, and God allows for the genuine movement of man’s will, that their doctrine is not one of fatalism. See R. C. Sproul, Jr., *Almighty Over All: Understanding The Sovereignty Of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 100; Westblade, “Jonathan Edwards,” 116; and Helm, “An Augustinian,” 157-58.

⁷⁹ Helm, “An Augustinian,” 177, in speaking of the soft determinist’s explanation of God’s willingly permitting sin, helpfully explains: “Such an account, though perfectly consistent, is not an explanation of how evil came to be desired by people created in God’s image.”

⁸⁰ Confirmation that “good” here includes the idea that all is right morally and without evil is found in Paul’s statement in 1 Timothy 4:4 (taken in context there): “For everything created by God is good....”

to sin. How could this be so?

Of course, one answer is that he and Eve faced temptation at the hands of Satan—incarnated in a snake (cf. Gen. 3:1ff.; Rev. 12:9; 20:2).⁸¹ By this, we can see how the choice to sin was put before them and how there was some influence in Satan’s words to them in that direction. Yet, this raises two more questions: If no previous evil was in the hearts of Adam and Eve (so there was no moral inclination in that direction), how did they sin? How did Satan, who also was free of evil prior to his rebellion, sin?

The second question we will take up first. We know from Scripture there were angels who fell from their righteous positions before God through sin (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Evidently, they were led by one main angel, referred to subsequently as “the devil” or “Satan” (see Mt. 25:41; Rev. 12:9; 20:1-4, 10 [compare with 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6), who fell through pride (1 Tim. 3:6) and so led many of the angels with him, but not all (e.g. Ps. 91:11-12; 1 Tim. 5:21; Heb. 1:14). And so, sometime after the sixth day of creation (cf. Gen. 1:31) and before Satan tempted Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:1ff.), Satan and the demons fell in sin. These are the facts about which we can be reasonably certain from the biblical data.

In light of what we have discovered so far about why God created as he did and how God is absolutely sovereign, we must conclude that God created his angels able to sin, as well as able

⁸¹ I take the Genesis 3 account of the temptation and sin, seen in light of the comments in Romans 5:12 (that sin entered the world through Adam), the comments in 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14 (Eve was the one deceived), and the statement in Genesis 3:6 (“she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband **who was with her, and he ate**” [emphasis added]), to affirm that sin first entered into mankind in Adam’s refusal to protect his wife as he silently stood by and watched the whole temptation and scene unfold with Eve and Satan. Evidently he was already committed to eat even before Eve gave him the fruit. Part of the inference may be that Adam was not deceived to the degree that Eve was by the serpent, but nevertheless, his heart still moved to eat and disobey God. Additionally, though both sinned and both were responsible, Adam bore a greater responsibility as the federal head of mankind (1 Cor. 15:22a).

not to sin, and he decreed that he would permit Satan to sin and other angels with him.⁸² Though this permission did not involve antecedent movements out of any evil nature or evil already in existence, our best inference is that in some way, most likely due to an immeasurable combination of causative and permissive governance on the part of God, these angels chose to sin.⁸³

There are three further statements we need to make about this origin of sin among angels. Though we can infer enough of an explanation for the origin of sin to see we are not dealing with any contradiction when we affirm God decreed sin, but he is not the author of sin⁸⁴ (and there is some mystery because God has not chosen to give us the specific details on how sin originated),

⁸² A good summary statement of what we have discovered thus far—as applied to the origin of sin—is found in *The Westminster Confession Of Faith*, 5.4: “The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extend[s] itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, but such as ha[s] joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering, and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy [purposes]; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceed[s] only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.”

It should be noted that the clause, “and that not by bare permission, but such as ha[s] joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding,” communicates that the permission did not follow merely from God’s innate knowledge of what would transpire given certain sets of circumstances, and based on this God willingly permitted what would happen. Rather, God decreed freely what would take place and the result is the willingly permission of the sinful acts. What is more, the “powerful bounding” speaks of God’s certain and purposeful determination of the events leading up to and including the sin. What the divines were bringing out in this statement is that the absolute and meticulous governing of God took place even in relation to the origin of sin, yet, in such a way that the sin was done freely on the part of the angels and men and in such a manner that God is not the doer or the one committing the sin.

⁸³ Part of our struggle at this point is that all we have ever known is a sinful, fallen, broken world, and so we cannot come up with analogies of how this might happen. Yet, what we can do is imagine scenarios in which interactions between persons go from morally good or neutral situations to morally evil. For example, a son might come to his father with a question that has no evil intent: “May I borrow the car tonight?” We can imagine that in the course of the conversation the father eventually says, “No,” and, as the explanation for why emerges, the son moves in his heart from a morally neutral position to that of frustration, anger, and eventually all-out rebellion. Such an analogy is not exactly the same thing since the father is not perfect as is the heavenly Father and the son already has evil in his heart, unlike the angels who had never sinned. Yet, we could image a scenario that might have happened—this angel who later comes to be known as Satan, comes and asks a morally neutral question(s) and as the interaction develops, he moves from a morally good state, to a morally neutral, and eventually to a place of evil in his heart that he eventually acts upon, and then leads other angels with him (in a similar progression).

⁸⁴ Regarding the reality that “God himself did not sin, and God is not to be blamed for sin” (Grudem, *Systematic*, 492), see the following biblical statements: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gen. 18:25); “A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he” (Deut. 32:4); “...far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should do wrong” (Job 34:10); and “...for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one” (James 1:13).

the inability to explain it any further is a problem faced by all Christians—including indeterminists.⁸⁵ They also must deal with a good world in which no evil existed and yet angels carry out evil. For all of us, we can affirm certain truths surrounding this origin of sin, but need not deny what the Bible does say and yet, at the same time, we do not fully understand.⁸⁶

We also need to be reminded since God created angels (and later men) able to sin and able not to sin and decreed he would permit both angels and men to sin for the purposes we discovered in Chapters 2-3, this permission is something similar to the decreeing of darkness—i.e. the withholding of light.⁸⁷ In other words, God could have decreed they would not sin and carried this out actively by his grace, yet he did not. He withheld such grace and such an active movement from fallen angels and men.⁸⁸

This explanation just given (which is a sound inference from the biblical material we have) also reminds us that for God to decree sin is not for God to commit sin. Louis Berkhof explains:

The decrees [of God] are an internal manifestation and exercise of the divine attributes, rendering the futurition of things certain, but this exercise of the intelligent volition of God should not be confounded with the realization of its objects in creation, providence, and redemption. The decree to create is not creation itself, nor is the decree to justify justification itself. A distinction must be made between the decree and its execution. God's so ordering the universe that man will pursue a

⁸⁵ Helm, “An Augustinian,” 177, rightly argues that all Christians struggle with this problem of the origin of evil, regardless of their view of divine sovereignty and human freedom.: “Invoking incompatibilism at this point does not explain the occurrence of evil in a world created by a good God any more than does the Augustinian account of God’s willingly permitting evil in a world created very good.” For each view, what we have are angels created good, with no evil, and yet, they develop evidently a lack of contentment with God as their king and so desire to rebel against him. Regardless of how we see their freedom working at the moment they chose to sin (determinism or indeterminism), sin is happening where there was not any evil previously.

⁸⁶ In John 8:44 the apostle records Jesus’ affirmation that evil originated in the devil: “You belong to and originate from your father the devil, and you desire to carry out the desires that come from your father. He was a murderer from the beginning and he has not stood firm in the truth, because truth is not in him. When he speaks falsehood, he speaks of his own, because he is a liar and the father of this very thing” (My own translation). It is regularly affirmed by theologians that the specifics of the origin of sin is not explicitly covered in Scripture: e.g. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.14.16.

⁸⁷ This is an explanation that comes from Jonathan Edwards, cited in Westblade, “The Sovereignty,” 111.

⁸⁸ Though it appears that he did not withhold this active movement from all angels, since the elect angels (cf. 1 Tim. 5:21), those who did not sin, appear to have been confirmed in their righteousness by God and so would never sin.

*certain course of action, is also quite a different thing from His commanding him to do so. The decrees are not addressed to man, and are not of the nature of a statute law; neither do they impose compulsion or obligation on the wills of men.*⁸⁹

This leads us to our other question we brought up: If no previous evil was in the hearts of Adam and Eve (and no moral inclination), how did they sin? The answer would be the same that it was for angels, with two exceptions.⁹⁰ By the time of their temptation, sin was already present in the universe (among the demonic world) and they had an evil agent to work upon them to tempt, to influence, whereas the angels did not.

The Order Of God’s Decrees: Affirmation Of Soft Infralapsarianism

Now that we have engaged in a detailed discussion in these last five chapters of God’s ultimate purpose for creating the world as he did, as well as his absolute sovereignty and meticulous providence in his governance of all things, there may be a question lingering in our minds. Even though in this chapter we have looked at the reality God does not govern all things in the same manner—a discussion that prepares us for understanding how humans exercise genuinely free and responsible choices—how can we avoid the conclusion that since God ordained all the events of history, therefore we really have nothing to do with causing those events, and as a result, when it comes to the divine judgment of those not chosen to salvation, there is no justice in what God does, for God created them for this purpose and they never had a real chance?⁹¹

⁸⁹ Berkhof, *Systematic*, 2: 103.

⁹⁰ Beeke, Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 233, explain: “The Westminster divines all agreed that, Adam was able not to sin (*posse non peccare*), but not infallibly or immutably so (*non posse peccare*); in the garden he was not ‘confirmed in a state of goodness, as the Elect Angels and Men are,’ though he was nevertheless elect in the covenant of grace.” Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty Of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004, repr.), 134-35, also agrees.

⁹¹ Hopefully this chapter has enabled us to see fallacies in this way of thinking. This final discussion will help us look in more detail particularly at the second part of this question.

The second part of this question takes us beyond the issues of how the human will functions and the distinctions in God's governance to the logical movements of God's will behind his eternal purpose and what he ordained in the world.⁹² The two main options for how to view these movements (particularly as they relate to salvation and judgment) are supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. Sam Storms explains what each is:

The term "supralapsarian" is derived from two Latin words which, when combined, reflect the view that the decree of predestination (that is, the decree to elect and reprobate) precedes or is "above" (supra) the decree concerning the fall (lapsus). "Infralapsarianism," on the other hand, contends that the decree of predestination is subsequent to or "below" (infra) the decree concerning the fall.

All supralapsarian schemes share one point in common: the decree of election/reprobation is antecedent to that concerning the fall. Similarly, all infralapsarian schemes share a common theme: the decree of election/reprobation is subsequent to that concerning the fall. The question, therefore, "is whether sin is in the Divine thought antecedent to condemnation, the real ground of it, or only a providential means of executing the decree of reprobation formed irrespective of it."⁹³

As we discovered in Chapter One, Molinists appeal to a logical order in God's knowledge (natural, middle, and free), which also implies a logical order in his will. This logical order of God's will for Molinists would look something like this:⁹⁴

1. The decree to create all humanity.

⁹² I say the logical movements, rather than chronological since virtually all theologians acknowledge that "God decreed all at once the whole set of actions, events, persons, and things (that is, a whole possible world). Rather than deciding some things at one time and others later, God decreed all of history at once [in eternity past]." John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine Of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 529. In other words, there was never a time in eternity past when all these things were not decreed.

⁹³ Sam Storms, *Chosen For Life: The Case For Divine Election* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 214-15. The quote Storms cites comes from James Henley Thornwall, *Collected Writings*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner Of Truth, 1974), 2:20. Storms, *Chosen*, 213-14, has accurately highlighted that some theologians believe this topic is "beyond the boundaries of legitimate theological investigation," for "Scripture does not explicitly address the issue or attempt to disclose the pre-temporal operations of the divine mind...." In my estimation Storms rightly argues that we can glean enough information from Scripture to make solid inferences about the order.

⁹⁴ This order is dependent upon Storms' presentation of infralapsarianism from the Arminian perspective (*Chosen*, 217), with adjustments made for Molinism. It should be admitted up front that decretal theology is not an emphasis among Molinism. To highlight this, Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 47-48, writes: "Whatever explanation of evil one adopts, the central point here is that God's foreknowledge of evil deeds...cannot be accounted for on the basis that God has predestined everything that comes to pass."

2. The decree to permit the fall.
3. The decree to provide salvation in Christ for all people.
4. The decree to provide prevenient grace (a resistible grace) to all people, enabling them to believe.
5. Between #4 and #6 we must state God innately knows what each person would do in regard to Christ in the various circumstances in which he puts them.
6. The decree to elect those whom God knows innately will exercise faith in Jesus Christ given the world he has chosen to actualize, and the decree to leave all others to the wages of their sin and unbelief.
7. The decree to apply salvation in Christ through the Holy Spirit to all who believe.

As can be seen from this order, it preserves a reasonably strong view of God's sovereignty and providence and, at the same time, clarifies that sin truly is the ground of condemnation and judgment and not merely "a providential means of executing the decree of reprobation formed irrespective of sin,"⁹⁵ which could call into question the justice of God. Of course, by this point in our discussion, we can see the problems in this order revolve around both the presence of prevenient grace (not taught in Scripture) and also the proposition that God's governance of all things is dependent upon and limited by that which is outside himself, namely human choices. As such, we need to look in a different direction for the logical order of God's decrees.

Between the two main options of supralapsarianism⁹⁶ and infralapsarianism, the latter appears to have a clear advantage because of the biblical emphasis upon man's responsibility for

⁹⁵ Storms, *Chosen*, 215.

⁹⁶ Storms, *Chosen*, 215, outlines three different versions of supralapsarianism:

HIGH SUPRALAPSARIANISM:

1. The decree to elect and reprobate.

sin, God's just wrath poured out upon unrepentant sinners because of their sin, and also the distinction we have discovered in this chapter between how God moves toward and views his governance of righteous events vs. evil events. Of the different versions of infralapsarianism,⁹⁷

2. The decree to create all humanity.
3. The decree to ordain the fall.
4. The decree to provide salvation in Christ for the elect.
5. The decree to apply salvation to the elect through the Holy Spirit.

LOW SUPRALAPSARIANISM:

1. The decree to create all humanity.
2. The decree to elect and reprobate.
3. The decree to ordain the fall.
4. The decree to provide salvation in Christ for the elect.
5. The decree to apply salvation to the elect through the Holy Spirit.

TELEOLOGICAL SUPRALAPSARIANISM:

1. The decree to elect and reprobate.
2. The decree to apply salvation to the elect through the Holy Spirit.
3. The decree to provide salvation in Christ for the elect.
4. The decree to ordain the fall.
5. The decree to create all humanity.

⁹⁷ Storms, *Chosen*, 217, outlines two different versions of non-Calvinistic infralapsarianism:

ARMINIAN INFRALAPSARIANISM:

1. The decree to create all humanity.
2. The decree to permit the fall.
3. The decree to provide salvation in Christ for all people.
4. The decree to provide prevenient grace (a resistible grace) to all people, enabling them to believe.
5. The decree to elect those whom God "foreknows" will exercise faith in Christ and the decree to leave all others to the recompense of their sin.

UNIVERSALISTIC INFRALAPSARIANISM:

1. The decree to create all humanity.
2. The decree to permit the fall.
3. The decree to elect all humanity to eternal life and salvation.
3. The decree to provide salvation in Christ for all people.
5. The decree to apply salvation to all people through the Holy Spirit.

Storms, *Chosen*, 216, outlines two different versions of Calvinistic infralapsarianism in addition to soft:

HARD INFRALAPSARIANISM:

1. The decree to create all humanity.
2. The decree to ordain the fall.
3. The decree to elect and reprobate.
4. The decree to provide salvation in Christ for the elect.
5. The decree to apply salvation to the elect through the Holy Spirit.

AMYRALDIAN INFRALAPSARIANISM:

1. The decree to create all humanity.
2. The decree to permit the fall.
3. The decree to provide salvation in Christ for all humanity.
4. The decree to elect and reprobate.
5. The decree to apply salvation to the elect through the Holy Spirit.

the Calvinistic version of “soft infralapsarianism,” a position that fits well with soft determinism, appears to be the best option. It sees the order of God’s decrees as follows:⁹⁸

1. The decree to create humanity.
2. The decree to permit the fall.
3. The decree to elect and reprobate.⁹⁹
4. The decree to provide salvation in Christ for the elect.
5. The decree to apply salvation to the elect through the Holy Spirit.

There are several reasons why this provides the best understanding of the order of God’s decrees.

To begin, it fits well with what we discovered in Chapters 2-3 about why God created the world in the way he did—permitting sin and evil that he might magnify his attributes, especially mercy and grace.

Yet, it also affirms that the fall is logically prior to election and reprobation, which does a better job of preserving God’s justice and highlighting that condemnation is genuinely and logically grounded in sin than does supralapsarianism.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ The following is taken from Storms, *Chosen*, 216.

⁹⁹ Many Reformed theologians have made a distinction between election and reprobation that follows the distinction we have made in this chapter between causative and permissive governance on the part of God. For example, Thomas Boston, “Election And Predestination,” in *Free Grace Broadcaster*, 237 (September 2016): 30 (from *The Whole Works Of Thomas Boston: An Illustration Of The Doctrines Of The Christian Religion*, Part 1, 157-58): “It was by an eternal decree of God that he passed by the angels that fell and doomed them to everlasting misery.”

¹⁰⁰ Keathley, *Salvation*, 140-148, argues that Infralapsarianism is logically inconsistent since it makes God’s decree to reprobate sinners dependent upon their sin. As such, he argues that Supralapsarianism or Molinism are the only two logically consistent options for Christians who want to hold to a strong view of God’s sovereignty and his meticulous providence. And of course, he believes the former is not able to preserve genuine human freedom. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 527-528, highlights, however, different ways that unconditionality and conditionality are used in regard to God’s decrees. To say that God decreed the world as it is and all its events, and that he did not do this dependent upon human choices is not the same as saying that various aspects of the decrees cannot be conditional upon each other. Both in the order of the decrees, as well as in the order of the application of salvation (e.g. preaching the gospel, regeneration, an effective call, faith, justification, etc.) there can be both an unconditional

Closely related is another reason: this position does a better job than supralapsarianism dealing with the question of hell and whether or not hell is a just option for the soft determinist Calvinist.¹⁰¹

This proposed order also preserves the truth that the atonement Christ accomplished was effective and particular. In other words, he truly did save a definite group of people—purchasing for them all they need for salvation and assuring all that must take place for them to be saved. This is opposed to the idea that Christ merely made man salvable, if they would add faith in Christ to Christ’s work.¹⁰²

Additionally, this order does not make use of prevenient grace, nor does it make God’s decrees dependent upon or limited by human choices.

Finally, soft infralapsarianism leaves room for the distinction between God’s causative and permissive governance as outlined in this chapter.

Wrapping It All Up So Far

In writing about the order of God’s decrees, Sam Storms writes:

decreeing on the part of God, but also a logical connection between the different decrees and also the different aspects of God’s salvation application. Feinberg (528) concludes: When Calvinists say God’s decree is unconditional in relation to salvation, they “mean that God’s decision to save was based on nothing outside of his gracious will. Of course, God ordains means to an end..., and he uses various agents to carry out and accomplish his goals...” If we understand these distinctions, then we can see there is nothing logically inconsistent in the Calvinist soft infralapsarian position.

¹⁰¹ See Appendix Four where I deal with this issue and other potential problems that arise from the view of God’s governance set forth in this book.

¹⁰² For a book length defense of this understanding of the atonement and why it is important to hold to and teach it, see Tom Barnes, *Atonement Matters: A Call To Declare The Biblical View Of The Atonement* (Darlington, England, Evangelical Press, 2010).

We should also note that in regard to the order of God’s decrees and the order of salvation, all God’s movements toward the elect are contemplated by God in relation to the life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and ongoing priestly intercession of Jesus Christ (e.g. Eph. 1:4-5). No one has highlighted this any better than the British Puritan, William Perkins. See Ed Hindson, Ed., *Introduction To Puritan Theology: A Reader* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 137-140. See also the very helpful discussion of Perkins’ Christ-centered view on this doctrine in Beeke, Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 122-123.

The purpose of all theology is doxology. If our effort to understand the natural and logical order of the divine decrees does not add kindling to the fire of love and worship, we would do well to abandon it. Fruitless speculations that feed the flesh (in particular, pride) but fail to nurture the spirit are explicitly forbidden. Paul warns us of the insidious consequences when we lose sight of the fundamental and legitimate objects of theological inquiry in favor of majoring on minors (cf. Titus 3:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:14-18).¹⁰³

A. W. Pink agrees and asserts:

Every truth that is revealed to us in God's Word is there not only for our information but also for our inspiration. The Bible has been given to us not to gratify an idle curiosity but to edify the souls of its readers. The sovereignty of God is something more than an abstract principle which explains the rationale of the Divine government: it is designed as a motive for godly [awe], it is made known to us for the promotion of righteous living, it is revealed in order to bring into subjection our rebellious hearts. A true recognition of God's sovereignty humbles as nothing else does or can humble, and brings the heart into lowly submission before God, causing us to relinquish our own self-will and making us delight in the perception and performance of the Divine will.¹⁰⁴

These words also apply to the entire discussion in which we have been involved. And, as we step back and think about what we have covered so far, it should not be difficult to be moved to awe of God. He has created and ordered a world that maximizes his glory through the magnification of his manifold attributes. More to the point, we see his wisdom, power, goodness, love, faithfulness, mercy, grace, power, holiness, wrath, righteousness, and justice displayed through his governance of all things. And yet, for us to see all these, we must also grasp that he governs all things through an immeasurable (from the human perspective) combination of causative and permissive movements on his part, and so room is left for man to act freely and for God to bring about all he has decreed.

This study has left me with the sense that in the age to come we will see the events of this world unfolded and explained in such a manner that we will gladly, eternally, and with even far greater clarity take up the heavenly praise of Revelation 7:12: "Amen! Blessing and glory and

¹⁰³ Storms, *Chosen*, 214.

¹⁰⁴ Pink, *The Sovereignty*, 179.

wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever!

Amen.” May that worship be a reality for us now!