

**APPENDIX ONE**  
**EXEGESIS OF ACTS 4:27-28, A LOCUS CLASSICUS FOR GOD’S UNCONDITIONAL  
PREDESTINATION OF ALL EVENTS**

In these five appendices are covered topics that either were not covered at all in the main part of the book or that need further treatment. These are topics also that may be of interest to many readers since they have bearing upon divine sovereignty and human choice.

We begin with Acts 4:27-28, which is part of the prayer of early believers on the heels of Peter and John’s arrest and release, a passage that addresses why people opposed the Father and Son, leading to the crucifixion—and how the same pattern of purpose and actions has now happened to them.

The explanatory *gar* (“for”) shows the reader that Luke is now recording in the continued prayer of these early Christians just how they see the just quoted Psalm 2:1-2 applied in their own contemporary context.

They prayed here that “both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and peoples of Israel were gathered together (*synēckthēsan*) against truth (*ep alētheias*) in this city (*en tē polei tautē*), against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed (*epi ton hagion paida sou Iēsoun hon echrisas*)” (author’s own translation).

The choice of the verb *sunagō* (“gather together”) is significant since it appears in the 4:26 quote of Ps. 2:2. This heightens the reality that here in verses 27-28 we see how these early Christians are seeing the pattern of meaning in Ps. 2:1-2 fulfilled in their day. The mentioning of Herod, Pilate, and the fact they had gathered against Jesus, all work together to show that first and foremost they see the pattern of meaning applying to and being fulfilled in what happened with Jesus weeks earlier in his trials and crucifixion.

It is also noteworthy that they saw the nations (Gentiles) and the Jews both conspiring against Jesus. The wording here is all-inclusive and reminds the readers that no matter who the readers are, they have been involved in the rebellious sin of Ps. 2:1-2. What is more, it was the sin of all kinds of sinners that placed Jesus upon the cross.

We must also note that all these peoples were gathered together (this is a passive) “against truth” and “against your holy servant, Jesus.” I believe the best way to render the preposition both times it appears is by “against” (*epi* in BAGD, 287). Certainly it is not impossible for this preposition to have two different meanings in close proximity, but there must be compelling evidence for that. It makes perfectly good sense (and I would argue better sense) to render it the same in both instances. All these peoples gathered against truth, which was the same as gathering against Jesus. Jesus is also referred to as “your holy servant...whom you anointed,” showing it was believed he was the ultimate David, the one to whom the king pointed (cf. v. 25). There might even be some intent to connect Jesus with the Holy Spirit (v. 25) in referring to him as “holy”).

Finally, that these Christians affirm of Jesus, “whom you anointed” also ties Jesus to the Psalm 2:2 quote which speaks of God’s anointed. Jesus was anointed to carry out a special task by the Father—namely that of inaugurating and consummating the kingdom through his life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, ongoing session, and eventually his second coming and subsequent reign. He is the ultimate royal son of God, the king, the one who enables mankind finally to submit to and enjoy the saving benefits of God’s reign.

In verse 28 it appears that this infinitival complex purpose clause completes the idea first communicated in the gathering together of v. 27. Why were these peoples gathered together (v. 28 now shows why an aorist passive was used)? These early Christians answer in this manner:

“to do (*poiesai*) all which (*hosa*) your hand (*hē cheir sou*) and your will (*kai hē boulē sou*) predestined (*proorisen*) to be (*genesthai*).” (author’s own translation)

First, we see that Herod, Pilate, the nations, and the Jews were all truly doing something(s) when they acted against Jesus. Especially in light of what is already seen in Acts 2:23,<sup>1</sup> men were responsible, men truly acted and freely acted in the sense that they did that which they truly wanted. Yet, behind all of what took place (“all which” [i.e. every detail]) God was working, God was gathering these men together that they might truly do all which took place!

This sense of absolute divine sovereignty in the providential workings of God is also heightened in that these early Christians and Luke argue all that took place God’s “hand and will predestined.”

The hand of God the Father often refers to his power or powerful doing by which he accomplishes his works—and this sometimes is also used of the Son (cf. BAGD, 880; Lk. 3:17; 23:46; Jn. 3:35; 10:28, 29; 13:3 Acts 7:25, 50; 11:21 [strong emphasis upon God’s power to change people]; 13:11 [God’s blessing power and will]). Lk. 24:7; Acts 2:23; and 28:17 display the opposite—being delivered into the hands of men is to be under what they desire to do or carry out. Similarly, Acts 7:41 and 12:1 show that for something to be done by men’s own hands is also to be done by their will and power. But, we see in Acts 14:3 and 19:11 something can be done by man’s hands, but also ultimately given/granted by God to do. It is very noteworthy that Ac. 17:25 affirms God is not served by men’s hands since he needs nothing from them and he gives to all mankind life, breath, and everything!

In light of the way Luke uses “hand” elsewhere either to speak of God’s power and works or men’s, that God’s hand predestined all that took place is making the point that the predestination

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:23 reads: “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

(the determining beforehand what would happen) is motivated by the true work of God that he desired to take place.

Though it does not go as far as to say explicitly it is or must be independent of the foreseen actions of man, I believe it is most likely that this is what Luke intended. It seems that when Luke wants to emphasize the additional causation to human hands (e.g. Ac. 14:3; 19:11) he states that explicitly (e.g. Acts 2:23).

Not only do Luke and these early Christians attribute this predestination to God's hand, it is also attributed to his "will" (*boulē*). In other words, God determined ahead of time by his will, his purpose (BAGD, 145), what would take place, and this was also determined by his hand (his power). Elsewhere in Acts (2:23) *boulē* speaks of God's decretive will. It seems most likely, then, that what Luke is writing is that these early Christians affirmed God's unconditional predestination of the events surrounding the trials, suffering, and crucifixion of Jesus. It is also noteworthy that Luke still affirms the responsibility and sin in these human actions (2:23). Finally, we will note that in Acts 13:48, where different terminology is used, the same concepts are present—namely that God's choosing (his free, unconditional choosing) determines the genuine saving faith of individuals.

Now that we grasp what these early Christians were praying, we must ask the question, "Why did they bring up the events of the suffering in the life of Jesus and how they were the true sinful acts of men, but at the same time the predestined acts of God the Father? The answer is simple. They believe that the same pattern holds true for their own situation now as the followers of Jesus. The persecution of Peter and John, along with any other persecution that takes place, is the result of the sinful actions of men that should not take place (they are against the truth,

against Jesus, contrary to God's moral will). Nevertheless, they are ultimately decreed by God the Father.<sup>2</sup>

What is more, in the same way that God orchestrated in Jesus' suffering all things toward redemptive God-honoring ends, so also God can and will do that in the case of the Church. So, we see that in their address of God as "Sovereign Lord," their quoting of Ps. 2:1-2, and in their application of this to the situations surrounding Jesus, they are reminding themselves of who God is; by implication they are praising and worshiping him for who he is, and they are thus preparing themselves for asking him in faith to work in and through them redemptively and for his glory alone as their ultimate end. As such, we not only learn here about the providence of God, we discover a great pattern for how we should pray—both in reminding ourselves of God's greatness and power and also in praying Scripture!

How would a Molinist explain this text? We do not have to guess, for William Lane Craig deals with a similar text (Acts 2:23) in one of his essays. Here I quote him at length:<sup>3</sup>

*Here we find a staggering assertion of divine sovereignty over the affairs of men. The conspiracy to crucify Jesus – which involved not only the Romans and the Jews in Jerusalem at that time, but more particularly Pilate and Herod, who tried Jesus – is said to have happened by God's plan based on his foreknowledge and foreordination. How are we to understand so far-reaching a providence as this?*

*If we take the term "foreknowledge" as encompassing middle knowledge, then we can make perfect sense of God's providential control over a world of free agents. For via his middle knowledge, God knew exactly which persons, if members of the Sanhedrin, would freely vote for Jesus' condemnation; which persons, if in Jerusalem, would freely demand Christ's death, favoring the release of Barabbas; what Herod, if king, would freely do in reaction to Jesus and to Pilate's plea to judge him on his own; and what Pilate himself, if holding the prefecture of Palestine in A.D. 27, would freely do under pressure from the Jewish leaders and the crowd. Knowing all the possible circumstances, persons and permutations of these circumstances and persons, God decreed to create just those circumstances and just those people who would freely do what God willed to*

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<sup>2</sup> In 1 Peter 3:17; 4:19 we discover the suffering of Christians at the hands of evil men takes place ultimately because of God's decretive will (he decreed he would allow it). In Rev. 6:11 we discover that the number of martyred saints has been ultimately determined by God.

<sup>3</sup> The following is taken from William Lane Craig, "The Middle-Knowledge View," in James K. Beilby, Paul R. Eddy, Ed's, *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 134-35.

***happen.** Thus, the whole scenario, as Luke insists, unfolded according to God's plan. This is truly mind-boggling. When one reflects that the existence of the various circumstances and persons involved was itself the result of a myriad of prior free choices on the part of these and other agents, and these in turn of yet other prior contingencies, and so on, then we see that only an omniscient mind could providentially direct a world of free creatures toward his sovereignly established ends. In fact, Paul reflects that "none of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). Once one grasps the doctrine of divine middle knowledge, one is led to adoration and praise of God for his breathtaking sovereignty. (emphasis added)*

Craig goes on to comment on how the other approaches (Open-Theism; Augustinian-Calvinism; and Simple Foreknowledge) would deal with this passage. His expressed understanding of these other views is instructive:<sup>4</sup>

*Now what account of divine providence can be given in the absence of middle knowledge? Advocates of divine openness freely admit that without middle knowledge, a strong doctrine of divine providence becomes impossible. But such a viewpoint can make no sense whatsoever of scriptural passages such as those cited above. I am bewildered that partisans of this camp can deny divine foreknowledge while claiming to be biblical, when, as seen above, "foreknowledge" is part of the very vocabulary of the New Testament. Nor can it be said that God's plan was hit upon by him late in the game, once he could reasonably guess what the relevant agents would do. For as Paul was wont to emphasize, this was an "eternal plan," made from the foundations of the world but hidden for ages in God and now realized in the fullness of time, as God sent forth his Son, manifesting the wisdom of God to the principalities and powers who oppose him (Gal. 4:4; Eph. 3:9-11; cf. 1 Pt. 2:20).*

*The Augustinian-Calvinist perspective interprets the above passages to mean that foreknowledge is based upon foreordination: God knows what will happen because he makes it happen. Aware of the intentions of his and his almighty power, God knows that all his purposes shall be accomplished. But this interpretation inevitably makes God the author of sin, **since it is he who moved Judas**, for example, to betray Christ, a sin that merits the hapless Judas everlasting perdition. But how can a holy God move people to commit moral evil and, moreover, how can these people then be held morally responsible for acts over which they had no control? **The Augustinian-Calvinist view seems, in effect, to turn God into the devil.***

*The proponent of simple foreknowledge can make no good sense of God's providentially planning a world of free creatures. For logically prior to the divine decree, God has natural knowledge of all the possible scenarios, but he does not have knowledge of what would happen under any circumstances. Thus, logically posterior to the divine decree, God must consider himself extraordinarily lucky to find that this world happened to exist. ("What a break!" we can imagine God saying to himself, "Herod and Pilate and all those people each reacted just perfectly!") Actually, the situation is much worse than that, for God had no idea whether Herod or Pilate or the Israelite nation or the Roman Empire would even exist posterior to the divine decree. Indeed, God must be astonished to find himself existing in a world – out of all the possible worlds he could have created – in which mankind falls into sin and he himself enters human history as a substitutionary sacrificial offering to rescue them! Of course, I am speaking anthropomorphically here; but the point remains that*

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<sup>4</sup> The following is taken from Craig, "The Middle-Knowledge View," 135-36.

*without middle knowledge, God cannot know prior to the creative decree what the world would be like. If the defender of simple foreknowledge goes on to say that God's foreordination of future events is based upon his simple foreknowledge, then this trivializes the doctrine of foreordination, making it a fifth wheel that carries no load since, as we have seen, the future by definition cannot be changed. Once God knows that an event really is future, there is nothing more left to do; foreordination becomes a redundancy. Surely, there is more substance to the biblical doctrine of foreordination than the triviality that God decrees that what will happen will happen! (emphasis added)*

I believe there are four reasons why the soft determinist Calvinist understanding is more likely for Acts 2:23 and 4:27-28 than what Craig has proposed. To begin, the language in Acts 4:28 appears to emphasize ultimate causation to God—and this in a fashion that man's actions are conditional upon God's predestination and will, not that God's will is conditional upon knowledge of man's choices.

Second, in the larger context of Acts we discover this same pattern—namely that human choices are dependent upon God's sovereign movement, not the other way around (13:48; 16:14).

Third, in light of the larger context of Scripture (as seen throughout this book), we discover the very thing Scripture does not allow is for God's sovereignty to be dependent upon or limited by human choices. Similar to this, the Bible never presents a divine innate knowledge of what would happen in certain circumstances to be the motivation for what God decrees.

Finally, rather than read into the word "foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23) the concept of middle knowledge, it is best to decide its meaning from elsewhere in Scripture. As I demonstrate in Appendix Two, the term never carries with it the idea of "middle knowledge."

## APPENDIX TWO: THE MEANING OF “FOREKNEW” IN ROMANS 8:29

The term translated “foreknew” (*proginōskō*) is used 5 times in the New Testament: Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pt. 1:2, 20.<sup>5</sup> Three of these passages have to do with the salvation of man (Rom. 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pt. 1:2) and two of them with God’s foreknowledge of Christ himself as a Savior who would die (Acts 2:23; 1 Pt. 1:20).<sup>6</sup> In all five instances the verb does not speak merely of a simple foreknowledge or even middle knowledge of what persons would or might do. Rather it denotes that God determined beforehand to bring about certain situations or a certain intimate relationship with one(s) that involves his blessings (a person to be saved or of the Son’s mission). In the texts concerning Jesus Christ, the Father determined beforehand that the Son would be blessed as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of sinners. In 1 Peter 1:2 Peter writes that saints are elected according to God’s foreknowledge. He chooses them based upon whatever foreknowledge is. Yet, to determine what more specifically it means and to see that it means something other than awareness of what would or might happen, we need to turn to the background for the word.

The background to this verb is found in the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup> God’s knowledge is vast. His thoughts number more than the grains of the sand (Ps. 139:18), his understanding is infinite (Ps.

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<sup>5</sup> S. M. Baugh, “The Meaning Of Foreknowledge,” in Thomas R. Schreiner, Bruce A. Ware, ed’s., *The Grace Of God The Bondage Of The Will*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 188.

<sup>6</sup> It must be noted that in none of the five passages is faith the object of the foreknowledge (as one would expect, if the passages were referring to middle knowledge). When an object is clearly stated, it is always a person(s).

<sup>7</sup> In this discussion I am dependent upon Baugh, “Foreknowledge,” 185-92, for its direction. Yet, I have also added much of the specific content.

The verb *proginōskō* (or its cognates) is not found in the canonical Old Testament. It appears eight times in the Apocryphal books—only one of which is clearly action on the part of God (Judith 9:6), and which appears to be synonymously parallel to “will/determined” and “prepared”. The rest speak either of a human’s or wisdom-personified’s prior knowledge (Judith 11:19; Wisdom 6:13; 8:8; 18:6; 19:13; 2 Macc. 14:3; 15:8), most of which could be understood similar to how the indeterminist would understand foreknowledge on the part of God, namely awareness ahead of time. Given the lack of Old Testament background for this verb, especially in relation to God, it appears that the best reservoir for understanding how it may be used is to examine how the non-prefixed *ginōskō* is used, especially since it is used of God in ways that appear to have bearing upon the topic-at-hand.

147:5). Yet, “there is [also] an intimacy about God’s knowledge: it reaches even to people’s thoughts (Ps. 139:2) and to the motives of the heart (Prov. 16:2; Is. 66:18).”<sup>8</sup> Isaiah deals with God’s foreknowledge more than any other book of the Old Testament. For him, knowing future events shows that *Yahweh* is the true God, above mere idols (41:20-29; 42:9; 44:7, 25; 45:21). God also foretold Cyrus’ restoration of Israel from captivity (44:24-45:13; cf. Ezra 1:1-4). Yet, some would ask in our time: “But how can this be? How can God know the future free actions of a human?”<sup>9</sup> It appears that the Old Testament would argue that whatever answer is given must take into account God’s absolute sovereignty and unconditional foreordination: ‘The king’s heart is in the hand of *Yahweh*; he directs it like a canal wherever he pleases’ (Prov. 21:1).”<sup>10</sup>

Even more to the point, Jeremiah 1:5 provides background for “foreknow.” There we read, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you as a prophet to the nations.” Here, in context, the verb “knew” (Hebrew: *yada`*; LXX:

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>9</sup> This question is asked in regard to libertarian (indeterministic) freedom that would require either simple foreknowledge or foreknowledge according to the middle knowledge scheme—a prior knowledge of choices that always involve alternativity.

<sup>10</sup> Baugh, “Foreknowledge,” 185-92.

Isaiah 46:10-11 (a passage dealt with in Chapter Five) comes as close as any in the Bible to setting forth a solution to the puzzle of how foreknowledge relates to God’s sovereign decrees. In that passage three parallel participles proclaim what God has done and will do in regard to Cyrus and Judah’s future deliverance: “declaring...saying...calling.” Though neither *proginōskō* or *ginōskō* is used in the LXX (or their equivalents in Hebrew), yet, the text does say with the first participial clause that God is “declaring the end from the beginning.” This could very well be similar to the idea God knows what will happen and so he declares it. Yet, in the other two participial clauses we discover both that God’s future plan is certain (“calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel...”), but also that these future events certainly happen because they flow from his counsel and eternal purpose: “saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’” In other words, God does not decide what will happen based upon his knowledge of what humans would do in given circumstances (as if he were dependent upon or limited by such choices). Rather, God’s declaration of what would happen flows out of his counsel and eternal purpose. God, in other words, is the ultimate one who decides and not angels or man. This demands free human choices in the deterministic (compatibilistic) understanding.

*epistamai*) carries with it more than mere awareness.<sup>11</sup> It appears to be synonymous to other places in the Old Testament where the verb *yada`* (“know”) connotes “choose” or “determine to focus upon with special blessings” (Gen. 18:19; Amos 3:2 [here the LXX has *ginōskō*, a cognate of *proginōskō*]), which have behind them passages where the “know” verbs clearly mean more than “have awareness” or “be acquainted with,” but rather “enter into intimate relationship” (cf. also Gen. 4:1).

Because of this background, we should not be surprised to discover that in Psalm 1:6 for God to “know” a group of individuals can also be virtually synonymous with being focused on them to give saving blessings and true life: “For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” Here “knows” (Hebrew: *yada`*; LXX: *ginōskō*) is opposite of “perish” (Hebrew: *'abad*; LXX: *apollymi*). The verb “perish” in this context and many others (Pss. 68:2; 73:27; Is. 60:12; Lk. 13:3, 5; John 3:16) connotes the undergoing of God’s eternal judgment, i.e. the opposite of true and full life.<sup>12</sup> The background of this word used in this manner is God’s judgment of Israel by removing them from their promised land due to their covenant breaking (Dt. 30:18; Josh. 23:16), a type of the ultimate judgment for sin.

We discover similar uses of “know” in the New Testament, some of which most likely are influenced by the Old Testament. In John 10:27-28 the apostle records words of Jesus and uses the verb *ginōskō* (“know”) to speak of entering into an intimate relationship (a saving relationship) with others: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give

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<sup>11</sup> Note how it is parallel with “sanctified” and “ordained.” In other words, it suggests a meaning that God, in eternity past, determined to set Jeremiah aside for the blessing of a particular and special calling, a set of tasks as a prophet.

<sup>12</sup> Read in the context of this psalm, for God to know the way of the righteous involves the blessings of life and fructification (v. 3), whereas perishing involves lack of blessing, life, and fructification—all part of God’s judgment (vv. 4-5).

them eternal life, and they will never perish,<sup>13</sup> and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” It is obvious the Lord is not speaking of mere awareness of his sheep. Based upon context, as well as the Old Testament background we have covered, his knowing of them is a turning of his attention in their way to save and enter saving relationship—to give saving blessings.

A similar use (but in this case used of men toward men and men toward the Lord Jesus) is found in 1 John 3:1, where the apostle attributes the lack of acknowledgment, care, and respect (similar to relationship) for Christians by the un-saved world to the fact that they don’t have those affections for (or relationship with) Jesus Christ: “The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him” (*ginōskō* in both instances).<sup>14</sup>

Finally, in 1 Corinthians 2:2 the Apostle Paul affirmed to the Corinthians that when he was among them, he had determined not to focus intently on anything else as central, except the crucified Jesus: “For I decided to know (*eidō*) nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” The meaning is not that Paul forgot all knowledge except this. He is focusing upon a sense of “know,” which his readers would have understood, and that focused upon more than mere awareness of information. It is a turning of heart and affection toward this central message and viewing it as more important than all others.

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<sup>13</sup> Note how “know” and “perish” are opposing terms here, just as in Psalm 1.

<sup>14</sup> Part of the background to this verse appears to be Isaiah 61:9, where the prophet speaks of the future inaugurated kingdom and New Covenant time in which the nations will come to God and be part of his people in this manner: “Their offspring shall be known (Hebrew: *yada*; LXX: *ginōskō*) among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge (Hebrew: *nakar*; LXX: *epiginōskō*) them, that they are an offspring the Lord has blessed.” What is significant about this text is the parallelism between the Hebrew verbs *yada* and *nakar*. The Hiphil form of the latter verb suggests the idea of “acknowledging with honor” (Gesenius’ Lexicon on-line). There is a thread of use of “know” words throughout both testaments which speaks of affection for, the presence of honor and a sense of importance, and the idea of intimacy or relationship—turning toward with praise, honor, or blessing. See John 8:55 for another time John uses *ginōskō* to speak of man’s intimate knowledge of, their relationship with, God (or actually the lack thereof).

What we discover in the Bible, then, is that “know” verbs—used both with God and with man—often focus upon more than mere awareness, but instead connote a turning of the heart and affections toward a message or toward others. In the case of God, for him to “know” someone(s) is to turn his heart toward them in order to bestow saving blessings or at least to bless or use them in some special way. For him to foreknow them, most likely, then, appears to mean that God has determined ahead of time to turn his heart and affections toward them to bestow blessings in regard to a special calling and/or in regard to salvation.<sup>15</sup>

Now, returning to Romans 8:29, given the reality that in Romans 9:11 we discover election is not based upon future works done by the individual (including faith), it follows that an understanding of “foreknew” here in this passage, that it is merely an awareness ahead of time, is untenable.<sup>16</sup>

What is more, John Piper also highlights how the thought flow of Romans 8:29-30 affirms this understanding of “foreknew.”

*The plain point of this passage is that God is working infallibly to save his people, from foreknowing in eternity past to glorifying in eternity future. None is lost at any stage of redemption along the way.*

*...Notice that Romans 8:30 says, “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” Focus for a moment on the fact that all whom God calls he also justifies. This calling in verse 30 is not given to all people. The reason we know it is not is that all those who are called are justified – but all people are not justified. So this calling in verse 30 is not the general call to repentance that preachers give or that*

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<sup>15</sup> Feinberg, *No One*, 519-22, agrees. He writes (522) that so many of the terms in the Old and New Testaments that speaks of knowledge or knowing refer to “knowing by personal relationship and experience. To know someone in this sense...is to make that person on object of concern and acknowledgment and to regard that person favorably. It means having a relationship with that person.” Feinberg continues: “When we add to this the notion of foreknowing, or knowing beforehand, all that is added is that at some time prior to the present, there was a decision to establish such a relationship. Hence, foreknowledge in this sense can be defined as committing oneself beforehand to someone in an act constituting a relationship and making that person an object of care and concern for the one uniting with him.”

<sup>16</sup> Craig, *The Only Wise*, 34, wrongly asserts the following about the use of “foreknow” in Romans 8:28; 1 Peter 1:1-2: “On the basis of his personally knowing certain individuals, before they come to be, God elects them and foreordains them to glorification. I think we have to allow that this is a plausible interpretation of ‘foreknow’ in these passages.”

God gives through the glory of nature (Ps. 19:1-2). Everybody receives that call. The call here is given only to those whom God predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, as verse 30 says.... And this call leads necessarily to justification.... All the called are justified, not just some of them.

But we know that justification is by **faith** (Romans 5:1). So if all the called are infallibly justified, then the call itself must effect or guarantee the faith, since none can be justified without faith. Between God's act of predestination and justification there is a divine act of calling. Since justification is only by faith, the calling in view must be the act of God whereby he calls faith into being. And since it necessarily results in justification, it must be effect[ive] or irresistible. None is called (in this sense) who is not justified. All the called are justified. So the calling of verse 30 is the sovereign work of God which brings people to faith by which they are justified.<sup>17</sup>

Piper continues:

Now notice the implication this has for the meaning of "foreknowledge" in verse 29. When Paul says in verse 29, "those whom he foreknew he also predestined," he can't mean (as so many try to make him mean) that God knows in advance who will use their power of self-determination to come to faith, so that he can predestine them to sonship on that basis. It can't mean that, because we have seen from verse 30 that people do not come to faith on their own. They are called effect[ively]. That is why Paul can say that everyone who is called is infallibly justified – justification is by faith, and so the divine call guarantees the faith. **It is not the product of self-determination that God responds to. It is the product of God's grace which God initiates.** (emphasis added)

So the **foreknowledge** of Romans 8:29 is not the mere awareness of something that will happen in the future apart from God's active grace. Rather it is the kind of foreknowledge referred to in Old Testament texts like Genesis 18:19 ("I have chosen [literally: known] Abraham so that he may charge his children...to keep the way of the Lord"), and Jeremiah 1:5 ("Before I formed you in the womb, I **knew** you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations"), and Amos 3:2 ("You only [Israel] have I **known** from all the families of the earth"). As C. E. B. Cranfield says, the foreknowledge of Romans 8:29 is "that special taking knowledge of a person which is God's electing grace." Such foreknowledge is virtually the same as election: "Those whom he foreknew (that is, chose) he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."<sup>18</sup>

When we understand "foreknew" in Romans 8:29 in accordance with its near and far contexts, in accordance with the thought flow of these two verses, in accordance with the Old Testament background, and in accordance with other New Testament uses of the "know" (including "foreknow") word group, we conclude that a good amplified translation for this clause

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<sup>17</sup> Piper, *The Pleasures*, 140.

<sup>18</sup> Piper, *The Pleasures*, 140-41.

seems to be: "...those whom he long ago thought of in a saving relationship to himself..."<sup>19</sup> or "those whom in eternity past he determined to turn his heart toward and love in a saving manner with his saving blessings." It does not speak of simple foreknowledge or middle knowledge (see Introduction and Chapter One for explanations and definitions).

"Once we understand the biblical concept of foreknowledge, we see that God's doing things in accord with his foreknowledge means that he does them according to what he desires, wants, purposes, wills"<sup>20</sup>—and this includes entering into an intimate relationship with them that brings the blessings of salvation and/or a special mission.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 2000), 676.

<sup>20</sup> Feinberg, *No One*, 526. Martin Luther, *The Bondage Of The Will*, J. I. Packer, O. R. Johnston, Translators (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 80, similarly once wrote: "God foreknows nothing contingently, but that He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to his own immutable, eternal, and infallible will." Now that I have explored the biblical usage of the "know" and "foreknow" words, it should also be noted that I am not arguing that "foreknew" and "predestined" are being used as synonyms, nor that "foreknew" merely means "choose" or "elect" as Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 32, 34, suggests of Calvinists.

<sup>21</sup> Given the strong biblical evidence for how the "know" and "foreknow" words are used elsewhere, it would seem most likely that Peter (who introduces "foreknowledge" with no other indicators of what he means by it) would use the word "foreknowledge" in 1 Pt. 1:2 in a way consistent with this biblical background. Additionally, his strong view of God's absolute sovereignty, exercised through meticulous providence, present elsewhere in the epistle (e.g. 3:17; 4:19), as well as his strong emphasis on God's determinative relationship to regeneration in the immediate context (cf. 1:3), would also suggest this understanding.

**APPENDIX THREE**  
**HOW WE KNOW PAUL IS DEALING WITH INDIVIDUAL ELECTION UNTO**  
**SALVATION AND NOT MERELY NATIONAL HISTORICAL DESTINY OR**  
**CORPORATE ELECTION UNTO SALVATION IN ROMANS 9<sup>22</sup>**

Though Calvinists usually have appealed to Romans 9 for support of their doctrine of unconditional election, recently more and more scholars have questioned their interpretation, suggesting that they have read into the text an understanding that is not intended—namely, this deals with individual election unto salvation.

The two most common objections are these. First, the text does not deal with salvation. Instead, it deals with the historical destiny of different nations, especially of Israel. Second, even if the text does deal with salvation, it does not deal with individual salvation.

Thomas R. Schreiner offers several reasons why he believes Craig Blomberg (and others) are wrong when they espouse that the main subject is historical destiny.<sup>23</sup>

(1) Paul's anguish in verses 1-5 is not simply over the fact that Israel is missing out on temporal blessings. Instead, it has to do with the fact that he believes they are cut off from Christ for eternity and unto perdition (the sense of *anathema*). The only explanation which is sufficient as to why Paul would be willing to be cut off himself vicariously is if he thought that many in Israel were in this same predicament.

(2) "The thesis of Romans 9-11 in 9:6 to the effect that 'the word of God has not failed' refers to God's promises to save his people Israel. The assertion that God's word has not failed in verse 6 should be linked to what Paul has just suggested in verses 1-5 about his kinsmen being

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<sup>22</sup> The content of this Appendix is a summary of Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election Unto Salvation?" in Thomas R. Schreiner, Bruce A. Ware, Ed's., *The Grace Of God, The Bondage Of The Will*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 89-106.

<sup>23</sup> Schreiner cites Craig L. Blomberg, "Elijah, Election, And The Use Of Malachi In the Old Testament," *Criswell Theological Review* 2 (1987): 109-16.

separated from Christ.” “Those interpreters who assert that Paul is referring merely to the historical destiny of Israel and not to salvation do not account plausibly for the relationship of verses 1-5 to the rest of the chapter, for verses 1-5 make it eminently clear that the reason Paul brings up the question of the faithfulness of God in verse 6 is that a great portion of Israel is not saved.”

(3) The following context (9b and following) shows that individual election unto salvation is the topic.

(a) “Paul argues that mere ethnic descent from Abraham does not make anyone a child of God (9:6b-9). It is the children of the promise who are truly children of God. the phrases ‘children of God’...and ‘children of the promise’...always refer in Paul’s writings to those who are the saved children of God (cf. 8:16, 21; Phil. 2:15; Gal. 4:28).”

(b) “Romans 9:11-12 confirms that the topic is salvation and not merely the reception of earthly promises, for Paul says that God’s election is not ‘by works but by him who calls’. Elsewhere when Paul speaks of works he refers again and again to the thesis that no one can be justified by ‘observing the law’ or by doing works at all.... Since Paul typically claims that salvation is not by works, the burden of proof is on those who see him employing this terminology in a nonsalvific way....”

(c) “Second Timothy 1:9 supports the idea that salvation is in view in Romans 9:11-12, for the subject matter of the verses is remarkably similar.”

(d) “Romans 9:22-23 also suggest that Paul is speaking of salvation and eternal destruction, for he contrasts the ‘objects of wrath—prepared for destruction’ with the ‘objects of mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory.’ The word for ‘destruction’ (...Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 2

- Thes. 2:3; 1 Tim. 6:9) Paul often uses for eternal destruction, while ‘glory’ (...Rom. 2:10; 8:18; 1 Thes. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; cf. Col. 3:4) is sometimes utilized to describe eternal life.”
- (e) “We should note again that all of this fits with the main issue that troubled Paul when he wrote this chapter—namely, that Israel was not saved. He has not left this issue when he comes to the end of the chapter, for he cites Isaiah to the effect that ‘the remnant will be saved’ (Rom. 9:27).”
- (f) “Another argument in favor of the idea that Paul has salvation in mind in Romans 9 is the connection between Romans 8:28-39 and 9-11. In 8:28-39 Paul asserts that those who have been predestined to salvation will be glorified, that God will give them all good things, that no charge will stand against them in God’s court, and that nothing will separate them from the love of Christ. But how can believers count on these great saving promises...if God’s promises to Israel have not been fulfilled? If the saving promises made to Israel come to nought, then the saving promises to the church may as well.”
- (g) “A compelling argument against the view that Paul is merely discussing the historical destiny of nations is the wider context of Romans 9-11. It is generally agreed upon by N.T. scholars that these chapters are a unit and should be interpreted as such.” The fact that ch. 10 deals with the lack of Israel’s salvation and ch. 11 deals with the salvation of a remnant suggests that the overall subject is that of salvation, which would imply that is the case in 9:6-29 also.”
- (h) Schreiner suggests that the strongest opposition against this passage dealing with salvation and not historical destiny is that the Old Testament passages cited do not deal with salvation. He goes on to answer that even if that were true, the real issue is how Paul uses them in this

passage. The overwhelming evidence is that at the very least he uses the principles to verify the reality of salvation in this passage.

Schreiner goes on to write that, “The second objection (linked to the first for many scholars) to a Calvinist reading of Romans 9 is that even if the chapter refers to salvation, it describes the salvation of groups, not the salvation of individuals.” Thus, William Klein says that “Paul’s concern is the elect people of God, a corporate entity.”<sup>24</sup> Schreiner adds: “I will argue that the election Paul describes in this passage is both corporate and individual and that a reference to the former does not rule out the latter. Four lines of argument converge to support this thesis.”

(1) “Evidence that individual election is also in Paul’s mind is found in Romans 9:15, where he cites Exodus 33:19....” He adds: “The word ‘whom’ ...is singular, indicating that specific individuals upon whom God has mercy are in view. The singular is also present in the inference Paul draws from Rom 9:15 in 9:16.” He adds: “Those who say that Paul is referring only to corporate groups do not have an adequate explanation as to why Paul uses the singular again and again in Romans 9.”

(2) “The selection of a remnant out of Israel (Rom. 9:6-9; 11:1-6) also involves the selecting out of certain individuals from a larger group.” “One should not conclude...that since the remnant is made up of a group of people that individuals are not in view. Paul uses himself as an example of one who is part of the remnant (11:1).”

(3) “Romans 9:30-10:21 calls sharply into question the thesis that Paul is speaking only of groups in Romans 9-11 and is not referring to individuals.” ...Calvinists have sometimes been criticized for not considering all of Romans 9-11 in formulating their doctrine of election. But those who espouse the view that Paul is speaking only about corporate realities in Romans 9-

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<sup>24</sup> Schreiner is citing William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View Of Election* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

11 are consistent with their own position in 9:30-10:21.” Schreiner goes on to show that no interpreters he knows of says that when Paul writes of Israel pursuing the law of righteousness by the works of the law (9:30-32ff.) that this is corporate Israel and not individuals. He concludes: “Now Paul says that ‘Israel’ ((9:31; 10:19) as a whole or corporate entity has failed to attain the righteousness of God. Of course he is not intending to say that this is the case with every individual within ethnic Israel, for elsewhere we are told that there is a remnant from ethnic Israel that is saved (9:6-9; 11:1-6). His point is that the majority of ethnic Israel has stumbled on the stumbling stone and has failed to believe in Christ (9:32-33). We can conclude, then, that Paul is speaking of corporate Israel in 9:30-10:21 but what he says about Israel corporately is also true of individual Israelites. One cannot legitimately say that Paul is merely describing corporate Israel but not individual Israelites.... The conclusion I want to draw is this: If it is inappropriate to draw a distinction between individuals and groups in 9:30-10:21, then there seems to be no exegetical basis for drawing such a distinction in 9:1-29 or 11:1-36.”

(4) “To say that election involves the selection of one group rather than another raises another problem that warrants an extended explanation. Most scholars who claim election is corporate argue that personal faith is the ultimate and decisive reason why some people are saved rather than others. Calvinists, on the other hand, assert that faith is the result of God’s predestinating work. But those who opt for corporate election think they have a better conception of election than do Calvinists, and at the same time they can maintain that faith ultimately determines one’s salvation. A flaw in this reasoning is fatal [to the position]. If God corporately elects some people to salvation, and the election of one group rather than another was decided before any group came into existence (9:11) and it was not based on any works that this group did or

any act of their will (9:11-12, 16), then it would seem to follow that the faith of the saved group would be God's gift [logically decided to be] given before time began. But if the faith of any corporate entity depends upon God's predestinating work, then individual faith is not [ultimately] decisive for salvation. What is [ultimately] decisive would be God's election of that group. In other words, the group elected would necessarily exercise faith since God elected this corporate entity. ...But if what I have said is correct, then one of the great attractions of the corporate view of election vanishes. Many find corporate election appealing because God does not appear as arbitrary in electing some to salvation and bypassing others."

Schreiner goes on to critique the corporate election view because it involves God choosing a "thing" or an "entity," yet the Church is not a thing, it is made up of people. He uses an analogy of the purchase of a baseball team and how that involves the selection of one group of baseball players over another, but also the selection of the individual that make up the team. If God truly does elect a group to salvation, then it necessarily involves the selection of individuals as well.

Schreiner also critiques the notion that our election consists of the Father choosing the Son and when we place our faith in Christ, we, as a result, partake of the benefits of the Father's choosing of the Son (which is how some interpret Eph. 1:4).<sup>25</sup> He rightly argues that is a misunderstanding of that passage.

Schreiner has successfully answered objections to the understanding of this passage sees it dealing with individual election unto salvation. As such, this Romans passage can and should be used by Calvinists to address issues related to individual election unto salvation and also issues related to God's purpose in permitting sin in the world (as we did in Chapter Three).

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<sup>25</sup> Sam Storms, *Chosen For Life: The Case For Divine Election* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 25-26, cites Roger T. Forster, V. Paul Marsten, *God's Strategy In Human History* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1973), 145, as some who take this position.

## APPENDIX FOUR POTENTIAL PROBLEMS ARISING FROM GOD'S GOVERNANCE OF ALL THINGS

There are at least three potential problems arising from the view of God's sovereignty and providence I have set forth that have not been addressed in full, even though in the case of each much of the groundwork has already been set forth in the main part of the book. Here I will tie up loose ends.

### The Problem Of Evil

First, I will address some matters left over regarding the problem of evil. Here is the problem of evil clearly stated:

*The problem of evil as traditionally understood in philosophical discussion and debate is stated succinctly in David Hume's **Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion**: "Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent? Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent? Is he both able and willing? Whence then evil?"<sup>26</sup>*

Typically, the problem of evil is raised after a horrible event is experienced by someone personally or at least after an awareness of a horrific event in the world. For example, after the 2004 tsunami killed more than 250,000 people around the rim of the Indian Ocean, one columnist wrote: "If God is God, he's not good. If God is good, he's not God. You can't have it both ways, especially after the Indian Ocean catastrophe."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces Of Evil: Theological Systems And The Problem Of Evil* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004, revised and expanded, Kindle Version), ch. 1.

For the reality that some see Calvinism as intensifying the p.o.e. because of the strong view of God's sovereignty and providence, see David Hunt, "A Simple-Foreknowledge Response" (To William Lane Craig, "The Middle Knowledge View"), in James K. Beilby, Paul R. Eddy, Ed's., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 152. Hunt also argues here that Molinism fares no better because of its strong emphasis upon God's sovereignty and providence—albeit that is based upon middle knowledge.

<sup>27</sup> Ron Rosenbaum, "Disaster Ignites Debate: Was God In The Tsunami?" *New York Observer*, January 10, 2005 (cited in Timothy Keller, *The Reason For God: Belief In An Age Of Skepticism* [New York: Dutton, Penguin Group, 2008], 23).

I agree with John Feinberg that the problem of evil is not monolithic. For example, there is the theological/philosophical p.o.e. vs. the religious;<sup>28</sup> there is the moral vs. the natural p.o.e.;<sup>29</sup> there are multiple answers that various theistic positions offer for each of the different versions of the p.o.e.;<sup>30</sup> and there are also other issues that attach to the problem.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, what I will focus on is the theological/philosophical p.o.e., since it is the foundation for the entire discussion and it is typically what a person thinks about, especially when interacting with the material we have in this book.

Any answer to the problem of evil must deal with the following propositions:<sup>32</sup>

- (1) God is omnipotent (in some sense of omnipotent).
- (2) God is good in that he wills that there be no evil, in some sense of “evil”.
- (3) Evil, in the sense just alluded to in (b), exists.

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<sup>28</sup> In this paragraph I am dependent upon Feinberg, *The Many Faces*, ch. 1. The theological/philosophical p.o.e. deals with the problem in general and tends to focus upon the logical coherence of the various issues involved and how a person seeks to answer it. The religious p.o.e. deals with the personal experience of pain and evil and demands not just answers to the theological/philosophical p.o.e. (even though this forms a foundation), it demands other people to come alongside the person, and maybe even pastoral care.

<sup>29</sup> Feinberg, *The Many Faces*, ch. 1, explains: “The problem of moral evil is actually the theological/philosophical P.O.E.... Natural evil includes various phenomena like pains and diseases, earth-quakes, fires, floods, pestilences, hurricanes, and famine.” The problem, like with the moral or theological/philosophical p.o.e. is general: “If God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent, why doesn’t he remove natural evils?”

<sup>30</sup> For example, there is a difference between how an indeterministic (libertarian) system like Molinism answers the p.o.e. and how a soft deterministic (compatibilistic) system like Calvinism answers it. Contrary to those who have argued the problem cannot be answered by theists, the reality is that various theistic systems can and do answer the p.o.e. The discussion between these systems, then, comes down to which does the best job of dealing with the biblical data. As I have argued in this book, I believe soft deterministic Calvinism does the best job in this area.

<sup>31</sup> Feinberg, *The Many Faces*, ch. 1, adds: “In addition to these problems of evil, there are also problems about the quantity, intensity, and apparent gratuitousness of evil.... The problem about quantity grants that there may be a satisfactory explanation as to why God would allow evil in general. However, this problem asks why there should be so much evil in our world.” For example, why doesn’t God stop a killer after the fourth or fifth murder? “The problem of the intensity of evil...[asks]...why are some evils as bad as they are? For example, if someone has to get cancer, why must it be excruciatingly painful and so resistant to any medication that would remove even some pain? ...Then, there is the problem of the apparent gratuitousness of many evils. Some evils seem attached to some good end, but others seem to serve absolutely no purpose whatsoever.” He mentions some animal suffering such as a deer getting caught in a forest fire, getting burned, and suffering for a long time before dying.

<sup>32</sup> The following is from Feinberg, *The Many Faces*, ch. 1.

Before dealing with these propositions, it is important to state that I approach the p.o.e. as a modified rationalist. In other words, God's choice of the world he created is not arbitrary. As we discussed in Chapter Two, God created the world as he did for reasons and purposes that emerge from his nature. At the same time, God did not have to create at all, nor was this the only good possible world, yet it is a good possible world. Finally, it also means that some of the things about God and the world (e.g. why he created) can be known only by divine revelation.<sup>33</sup>

It is also important to state up front that I approach the issue with a non-consequentialist ethic. Feinberg explains what is meant by this:

*As to their ethics, Modified Rationalist theologies incorporate one or the other of two general approaches. They hold either a non-consequentialist or a consequentialist account of ethics. For Modified Rationalists committed to non-consequentialism, if God creates a world that is inherently evil, that is evidence that he isn't good. Thus, non-consequentialists hold that the world as created by God was good, but was corrupted by the creatures in it. On the other hand, Modified Rationalists who are consequentialists claim that it isn't wrong for God to create a world which, as created, contains evil, as long as that world is one in which good is maximized. Often, these theologians argue that the existence of evil is justified, because God will use it ultimately to maximize good.<sup>34</sup>*

I must be clear at this point about what I am affirming in the non-consequentialist ethic. By it I am denying that God can do anything he desires and then call it good or right—merely because it has good outcomes. Instead, as God has revealed, that which is good and right is defined by God's very nature (e.g. Lev. 19:2; 1 Pt. 1:16). Since God's will moves in line with and out of his nature, then God has decreed a world that was good when he created. He also decreed that sentient beings in this world would sin and the world itself would be cursed because of the sin, and yet he would redeem it—and all of this flows out of his holy character that stands behind his greatest motives—to put on display his glory, through the display of his manifold attributes. I

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<sup>33</sup> I am dependent upon Feinberg, *The Many Faces*, ch. 4, for this paragraph.

<sup>34</sup> Feinberg, *The Many Faces*, ch. 4.

have laid the groundwork for this approach in Chapters 2-3.

Now, as to the first proposition (God is omnipotent), as I wrote in Chapter Two, this attribute speaks of God's ability to do all his holy will, i.e. all he desires, that does not contradict his nature. This means God can do that which is outside the bounds of what normally happens in the world (e.g. he can perform miracles: He can resurrect the dead, immediately turn water into wine, heal the sick, etc.), but he cannot sin and he cannot do the logically impossible (e.g. make a square circle or married bachelor). As such, though God is omnipotent, he cannot bring a world into being in which he allows sin and suffering and, at the same time, bring a world into being in which he does not allow sin and suffering. Additionally, I have demonstrated throughout the book that God's absolute sovereignty, related to his omnipotence, does not imply that humans do not make real and responsible choices. In other words, humans are not robots, nor are they caused to sin by the omnipotent God against their will.

Next, as to the second proposition (God is good in that he wills there be no evil, in some sense of "evil"), I first affirm that God's goodness—defined as the Bible defines it—speaks of the reality he always acts in such a way that what he does is proper, fit, well adapted to his character and the resultant God-glorifying, holy ends he desires. The goodness of God speaks of his always acting in accordance with his end of glorifying himself through the judgment of sin and the saving of sinners. What is more, God, out of his goodness, created a good world without evil.

What I have demonstrated in this book is that, flowing out of his holiness and resultant good purposes, God decreed that angels and then humans would sin and, by this, the world would be filled with evil. Through an immeasurable (from the human perspective) combination of causative and permissive governance, this omnipotent God has brought about, is bringing about,

and will bring about the very world he decreed, and yet in a manner that sentient beings are responsible for the evil in the world—evil which God hates. What is more, God has decreed the very good ends that those who reject his love and mercy will be judged and those who, by his grace, accept his love and mercy will be freed from evil and enjoy eternity in a world that has been fully redeemed (he will eradicate evil!). He truly is “the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth” (Jeremiah 9:24).<sup>35</sup>

One of the struggles that emerges from evil is the sense that it is pointless—or at least the particular evil I am experiencing appears that way (and so this may call into question God’s goodness). And certainly, the point of any given evil event may not be evident. Nevertheless:

*Just because you can’t see or imagine a good reason why God might allow something to happen doesn’t mean there can’t be one. ...we see lurking within supposedly hard-nosed skepticism an enormous faith in one’s own cognitive faculties. If our minds can’t plumb the depths of the universe for good answers to suffering, well, then, there can’t be any! This is blind faith of a high order.<sup>36</sup>*

Finally, as to the third proposition (evil exists, in the sense just alluded to in the second proposition), what I have demonstrated in this book, is that though God has decreed evil exist through his permission of it, God does not himself do evil, he is not its author, nor is he morally responsible for the evil that does exist.<sup>37</sup> Yet, in accordance with the way he governs all, it is

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<sup>35</sup> We discovered in Chapters 2-3 that God brought into existence the world that is so that he can display more fully his manifold attributes, especially his glorious mercy, grace, and kindness (cf. Rom. 9:23; Eph. 1:6, 12, 14; 2:7)—and has ordered history such that the supremacy of Christ is magnified and through him the triune God. This explains the existence of evil and why the world has continued so long in its broken state in which so much suffering happens.

<sup>36</sup> Keller, *The Reason*, 23. Keller (25) adds: “If you have a God great and transcendent enough to be mad at because he hasn’t stopped evil and suffering in the world, then you have (at the same moment) a God great and transcendent enough to have good reasons for allowing it to continue that you can’t know. Indeed, you can’t have it both ways.”

<sup>37</sup> Paul Helm, “An Augustinian-Calvinist Response” (To William Lane Craig, “The Middle -Knowledge View”) in James K. Beilby, Paul R. Eddy, Ed’s., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 159, insightfully writes: “...on the question of the authorship of evil, there’s not a hairsbreadth between the Augustinian-Calvinist perspective and Craig’s Molinism. According to Craig’s description of Molinism, ‘God decreed to create just those circumstances and just those people who would freely do what God willed to happen....’ While this description does not entail that G-od is the author of sin (any more than the Augustinian-Calvinist perspective does), it does entail God decreed all sinful acts to happen and decreed them precisely as they have

clear (and will be even that much more perspicuous in the age to come) that God deals justly with all and he also is one who saves sinners (Romans 3:26)—in other words, it is clear that God is the one who is bringing about redemption for the world and for humans (Revelation 5:9; 7:9-10; 21:3-7).

Behind my responses to the three propositions are two important truths that need further attention. To begin, though God has permitted evil (and the suffering that comes from it), God sees such a world as not right. In fact, the very presence of human objections to the world as it is (“It should not be like this!”) is evidence for the existence of a being beyond humans who has set forth a standard of justice that transcends merely human intramural ethics. In fact, if no God exists and all we have is natural selection found within a mechanistic evolutionary process, then there is no basis for saying that the current world and its suffering is evil or not the way things should be.<sup>38</sup>

The other truth that needs focus is the reality that God has taken significant steps to do away with evil and to restore humans and the world to a state that does not include evil (and this, more than anything, demonstrates God’s love!).

*The death of Jesus was qualitatively different from any other death. The physical pain was nothing compared to the spiritual experience of cosmic abandonment. Christianity alone among the world religions claims that God became uniquely and fully human in Jesus Christ and therefore knows firsthand despair, rejection, loneliness, poverty, bereavement, torture, and imprisonment. On the cross he went beyond even the worst human suffering and experienced cosmic rejection and pain that exceeds ours as infinitely as his knowledge and power exceeds ours. In his death, [the] God[-man] suffers in love, identifying with the abandoned and godforsaken. Why did he do it? The Bible says that Jesus came on a rescue mission for creation. He had to pay for our sins so that someday he can end evil and suffering without ending us.*

*...If we...ask the question: “Why does God allow evil and suffering to continue?” and we look at the cross of Jesus, we still do not know what the answer is. However, we now know what the answer isn’t. It can’t be that he doesn’t love us. It can’t be that he is indifferent or detached from*

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happened. If this is so, the God of Molina...seems to be implicated in the fact of evil as much (or as little) as the God of the Augustinian-Calvinist perspective.”

<sup>38</sup> See Keller, *The Reason*, 26-27; C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1978, repr.), 26-39.

*our condition. God takes our misery and suffering so seriously that he was willing to take it on himself.*

*...For the one who suffers, the Christian faith provides as a resource not just its teaching on the Cross but also the fact of the resurrection.... The Biblical view of things is resurrection – not a future that is just a **consolation** for the life we never had but a **restoration** of the life you always wanted. This means that every horrible thing that ever happened will not only be undone and repaired but will in some way make the eventual glory and joy even greater.<sup>39</sup>*

I believe that the view of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility I have presented in this book successfully answers the philosophical/theological p.o.e and lays a foundation for answering the religious p.o.e., as well as the natural p.o.e.<sup>40</sup>

## **Hell**

Though many Christians still believe in something called hell, views about it are unsure and pastors rarely mention it, much less teach substantively on it.<sup>41</sup> It appears that many of the reasons for this oversight have to do with nagging problems that many believe are attached to it.

The doctrine of hell is difficult because its traditional form speaks of eternal conscious punishment (some would think "torture") and this for the majority of mankind. It is not only those who heard and rejected Christ who go to hell, but the "noble pagan," the person who never heard and does not accept. So, many ask, "How can anything like the traditional doctrine of hell be consistent with an all-powerful and all-loving God?"<sup>42</sup> Or to word it in another way, "If God is both omnipotent and omnibenevolent, hell wouldn't exist."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Keller, *The Reason*, 30-32.

<sup>40</sup> For a more detailed look at the p.o.e. from the approach I have taken in this book, see Feinberg, *The Many Faces*, ch. 6. See also his treatment of the problem of natural evil in ch. 7.

<sup>41</sup> Owen Strachan, Doug Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards On Heaven And Hell*, in *The Essential Edwards Collection* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 35-39.

<sup>42</sup> For this paragraph I am dependent upon Feinberg, *The Many Faces*, ch. 13. Feinberg also outlines the traditional doctrine of hell. He says it "centers around five main points:  
1. "Hell is a specific place." (Job 21:13; Ps. 9:17; Prov. 5:4-5; 9:17-18; Dt. 32:22; Lk. 16:9-31; Rev. 20:11-15)

There are six truths I offer in response.

To begin, in Chapter Two we did discover that God is always and, at one and the same time, both omnipotent and omnibenevolent.<sup>44</sup> It also is important to note that though God is omnipotent, this does not mean he can go against his own nature, nor that he can do the logically impossible (make a square circle, bring into existence a married bachelor, or violate the law of non-contradiction). So, God cannot decide to permit the presence and practice of evil among free sentient beings and, at the same time, not permit it. Additionally, because God permitted such beings freely to commit evil, he cannot ignore or permanently pass over that evil. To do so would be inconsistent with his justice (Rom. 3:26).

Second, and flowing out of the first truth, is that hell is in existence because of God's justice. Paul goes to great lengths in Romans 1:18-32 to demonstrate that God's wrath (which would include hell) is just and deserved by those who undergo it. Paul is clear there that no one can say, "God is unjust" or "I did not have a chance." The reason is that God has shown himself in creation and, by implication, given to man the faculties needed to see that God is there, something of what he is like, and thus to trust in and worship him. Yet, mankind has chosen to

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2. "It involves both physical and spiritual death and is a place of torment." "Spiritual death refers to our alienation from God and from one another as a result of sin." "There is no second chance to repent and establish a relationship with God." Mark 9:43-48 presents it as a place of torment.

3. Who goes there. "No one who places his or her faith and trust in God for salvation will end up in hell. Only those who reject him (and all who reject him) will inhabit hell. This is true, according to the traditional view of hell, regardless of how much or how little revelation people at any given time and place in history have had. Everyone has always had enough revelation to know at least there is a God with certain characteristics (Rom. 1:19-20), and the impression given is that those who seek God will be given further revelation and will find him."

4. "Hell is a never-ending punishment." Mt. 25:24; Mark 9:48; Lk. 16:26.

5. "Being cast into hell is an act of God's retributive justice." "It stems from God's holiness and justice." Is. 66:3-4; Rev. 20:13-15; Rom. 1:18-32.

<sup>43</sup> Feinberg, *The Many Faces*, ch. 13. See also Keller, *The Reason*, Ch. 5.

<sup>44</sup> This is true whichever way a person defines omnibenevolent. The word benevolent can be synonymous with "good." God is good, i.e. he always acts in such a way that what he does is proper, fit, well adapted to his character and the God-glorifying, holy ends he desires. Yet, when omnibenevolent is used in contexts as we are now using it, the synonym that best fits is probably "love" i.e. that God gives of himself to others for their benefit. So, whichever way the term is defined, God is omnibenevolent.

exchange the worship of the true God for all kinds of substitutes. In Isaiah 66:3e-4, a passage that is speaking of God's just retribution for idolatrous sin, we see with clarity that God's judgment comes because of man's free and genuine choices: "**These have chosen their own ways**, and their soul delights in their abominations; I also will choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and **chose that in which I did not delight.**"<sup>45</sup> (emphasis added)

Third, and flowing out of the second truth, we see God does not send people to hell who have not chosen their own road in life and, at least, chosen to ignore the knowledge of himself he has given in creation. The reality is that God judges in a manner in which he gives people over to that which they desire (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28)—the judgment is an extension of their choices and what they have become. A. W. Pink helpfully explains:

*The doctrine of Reprobation does not mean that God purposed to take innocent creatures, make them wicked, and then damn them. Scripture says, "God ha[s] made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions" (Eccl. 7:29). God has not created sinful creatures in order to destroy them, for God is not to be charged with the sin of His creatures. The responsibility and criminality is man's.*

*God's decree of Reprobation contemplated Adam's race [logically] as fallen, sinful, corrupt, guilty. From it God purposed to save [some] as the monuments of His sovereign grace; the others He determined to [judge] as the exemplification of His justice.... In determining to destroy these others, God did them no wrong. They had already fallen [logically] in Adam...and in their sins He leaves them. Nor can they complain. This is as they wish; they have no desire for holiness; they love darkness rather than light...God "gives them up to their own hearts' lusts" (Ps. 81:12)!*

*...the doctrine of Reprobation does not mean that God refuses to save those who earnestly seek salvation. The fact is that [they] have no longing for the Savior; they see in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. They will not come to Christ.... None will be punished but for their iniquities.... Remember that God is the Creator of the wicked, not of their wickedness; He is the Author of their being, but not the Infuser of their sin.<sup>46</sup>*

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<sup>45</sup> In keeping with what we discovered about why God permitted sin in Chapters 2-3 (to magnify his grace and mercy), we must also see: "Hell shows how horrific the cross really was, and how great God's grace really is." Greg Gilbert, "Why Hell Is Integral To The Gospel," *9 Marks e-Journal*, 7, 4 (September/October 2010): 14.

<sup>46</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty Of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004, repr.), 100-101. Keller, *The Reason*, 79, adds: "The people in hell are miserable.... We see raging like unchecked flames their pride, their paranoia, their self-pity, their certainty that everyone else is wrong, that everyone else is an idiot! All their

Fourth, even though we have discovered God is absolutely sovereign and exercises meticulous providence, yet we also have discovered that God is not the author of sin, nor did he force man against his will to sin. In no way, then, can we say God has merely made some people (people who never had a chance and did not choose their sin) just so that he could judge them eternally.<sup>47</sup> As we discovered in Chapters 6-7, humans are responsible for their sin.

Fifth, we must see that God's justice and wrath against sin are compatible with his love, mercy, and grace. In other words, it is not true that a loving God would not judge people in hell. The Bible is very clear that at the same time God is loving he is righteous in all he does (which demands judgment!). Psalm 147:17, 20 read: "The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.... The Lord preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy."<sup>48</sup>

Also, we must see that judgment by God that fits the crime, not diminishing the crime or even the one or ones sinned against, is a good thing. If God had created a world in which those, for example, who committed atrocities against others (e.g. torture of children or the brutal rape and murder of someone dear to us, such as a child, wife, sister, cousin, or aunt) did not have to

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humanity is gone, and thus so is their sanity. They are utterly, finally locked in a prison of their own self-centeredness, and their pride progressively expands into a bigger and bigger mushroom cloud. They continue to go to pieces forever, blaming everyone but themselves....

"That is why it is a travesty to picture God casting people into a pit who are crying, 'I'm sorry! Let me out!'.... All God does in the end with people is give them what they most want, including freedom from himself. What could be more fair than that?"

<sup>47</sup> It is true that in Romans 9:23 Paul writes of "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction" (and this off-set against "vessels of mercy which he has prepared beforehand for glory"). However, I would contend this must be understood not only in the context of Romans where it is made clear that Paul is not merely saying that some humans were created for destruction without having any chance or apart from exercising their own wills (cf. Rom. 1:18-32; 6:23; 10:13-17), but also in the context of Scripture where we have seen that God's absolute sovereignty truly is compatible with man's genuine, free, and responsible choices.

<sup>48</sup> As we discovered in Chapter Two, when God revealed his glory to Moses, not only did he reveal that he is "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin," he also revealed he is a God "who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation" (Exodus 34:6-7). In other words, God's glory is revealed in salvation and in judgment. It is part of God's glory he does not overlook sin.

face judgment for their crimes, then it would suggest not only that the crime was not that bad, but the person was not that significant. And, of course, the ultimate one sinned against is God (Gen. 39:9; Ps. 51:4; 1 Cor. 8:12), so the ultimate injustice would be to overlook any sin committed against God, and that includes all sins!

Similarly, theologian Miroslav Volf, a Croatian who has seen horrific atrocities in the Balkans, argues that only belief in a God of judgment confirms he is worthy of our worship and that we need not retaliate:

*If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end to violence – that God would not be worthy of worship.... The only means of prohibiting all recourse to [retaliation] by ourselves is to insist that [vengeance] is legitimate only when it comes from God. My thesis [is] that the practice of non-[retaliation] requires a belief in divine vengeance.... It takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human non-[retaliation results from the belief in] God's refusal to judge. In a sun-scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, it will invariably die....<sup>49</sup>*

Of course, some will still counter, “Yes, we see the need for judgment, but eternal conscious punishment? That is too extreme!” This leads us to the last point.

Sixth and finally we must see that eternal conscious punishment is not too harsh for those who ignored and/or refused to worship the infinite eternal God. A principle set forth in Scripture is that true justice is present only when the penalty for the crime fits the crime (Lev. 24:17-22).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion And Embrace: A Theological Exploration Of Identity, Otherness, And Reconciliation* (Abingdon, 1996), 303-304 (cited in Keller, *The Reason*, 74).

Additionally, we discovered in Chapter Six that God has a greater movement in his heart toward salvation than he does toward judgment (Lam. 3:33), even though the latter is not done against his will. Ezek. 18:23: “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?” Ezek. 33:11: “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live....”

<sup>50</sup> Leviticus 24:17-22 reads: “Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death. <sup>18</sup> Whoever takes an animal's life shall make it good, life for life. <sup>19</sup> If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him,

<sup>20</sup> fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.

<sup>21</sup> Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, and whoever kills a person shall be put to death. <sup>22</sup> You shall have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native, for I am the Lord your God.”

In response to those who argue that eternal judgment for sins that take a relatively short amount of time to commit is unjust, Puritan Thomas Manton highlighted that often even among men the penalty for a crime exceeds the crime in length of time—and this as the only means of achieving justice. For example, who would think that justice is served for the rapist who committed his crime in less than ¼ of an hour, to sentence him to fifteen minutes in jail? The answer is self-evident.<sup>51</sup>

What is more, Edward Donnelly also reminds us when it comes to the eternity of hell and the supposed shortness of our sin: “Even a momentary sin has an eternal dimension, because it is against the God who is infinite.” He also adds: “We must remember, too, that those who are in hell continue to sin incurring more guilt to all eternity...(Rev. 22:11[; 21:8]).... In other words, those in hell become ever more guilty and accumulate ever more sin, which deserves increasing punishment. After countless ages, they have more to answer for than when they were first condemned.”<sup>52</sup>

Those who ignore and/or reject the infinitely and eternally glorious God can be punished justly only if they face an eternal sentence.<sup>53</sup> As such, “the infinite horrors of hell are intended by God to be a vivid demonstration of the infinite value of the glory of God.”<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Edwards further explains this reality:

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<sup>51</sup> Beeke, Jones, *Puritan Theology*, 800.

<sup>52</sup> Edward Donnelly, *Biblical Teaching On The Doctrines Of Heaven And Hell* (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 2001).

<sup>53</sup> Consider God’s infinite and eternal glory: “From everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Ps. 90:2). “Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting” (Ps. 93:2). “For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory” (Rom. 11:36, NLT). In the book of Revelation those who are thrown into the lake of fire (20:14-15) are those who do not worship the infinitely and eternally glorious God (cf. 14:6-11), the very God whose glory will give to the new heaven and new earth its light (21:23). He is “the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God” and deserves “honor and glory forever and ever” (1 Tim. 1:17)!

<sup>54</sup> John Piper, *Let The Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy Of God In Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 22.

*Rebellion against God's authority and contempt of his majesty, which every sin contains, is an infinite evil, because it has that infinite aggravation of being against an infinitely excellent and glorious majesty and most absolute authority. A sin against a more excellent being is doubtless greater than against a less excellent; and therefore, sins against one infinite in majesty, authority and excellency must be infinite in aggravation, and so deserves not a finite, but an infinite punishment, which can be only by its being infinite in duration. And then one sin deserves that the punishment should be to that degree of intensesness as to be the destruction of the creature, because every sin is an act of hostility, and 'tis fit that God's enemies should be destroyed.<sup>55</sup>*

What we discover, then, is that the absolutely sovereign God who exercises meticulous providence is just in judging humans eternally who have sinned against and rejected him. As Proverbs 16:4 reminds us: “The LORD has done everything for its response” (author’s own translation) and this includes “even the wicked for the day of trouble” (v. 4). The point, as the LXX translators seemed to realize, is that God does all with a righteous response, answer, or outcome. In other words, he always acts righteously.<sup>56</sup> This includes the judgment of hell upon those who ignore and reject God.

### **Multiple Aspects Of The Will Of God**

I list this subject as a potential problem that arises from the way God governs all because some have mistakenly concluded that advocates of the multiple-aspects-of-the-will-of-God view see God as schizophrenic.

*“It is sometimes claimed that there is a serious confusion involved in supposing that God has two wills. For does this not give God a split personality? How can God will what he does not will? It is*

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James M. Hamilton, Jr., “How Does Hell Glorify God?” *9 Marks e-Journal*, 7, 4 (September/October, 2010): 21-22, explains that hell glorifies God because: “It shows that he keeps his word; it shows his infinite worth, lasting forever; it demonstrates his power to subdue all who rebel against him; it shows how unspeakably merciful he is to those who trust him; it upholds the reality of love by visiting justice against those who reject God, who is love; it vindicates all who suffered to hear or proclaim the truth of God’s word; and it shows the enormity of what Jesus accomplished when he died to save all who would trust him from the hell they deserved—if there were no hell, there would be no need for the cross.”

<sup>55</sup> Cited in Strachan, Sweeney, *Edwards On Heaven And Hell*, 70.

<sup>56</sup> The LXX translates the first clause in a manner that is rendered this way in English: “All the works of the Lord [are done] with righteousness.”

*also maintained that the distinction between the two wills of God is a transparent device to avoid facing a crucial difficulty posed by the occurrence of moral evil on the one hand, and an all-embracing divine providence on the other.”<sup>57</sup>*

Yet, there are three answers for this kind of response. To begin, the Bible clearly affirms the multiple aspects of God’s will. There is God’s moral will (that which he places his moral stamp-of-approval on, which he commands us to do, and which we have a responsibility to do) and there is God’s decretive will (that which God has decreed he would cause or allow to take place—be it according to or opposed to his moral will). Consider the following examples:

- Genesis 50:20: “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.”
- Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”
- 2 Chronicles 10:15: “So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by God that the LORD might fulfill his word, which he spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.”<sup>58</sup>
- Acts 4:27-28: “...for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”
- 1 Peter 3:17; 4:19: “For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.... Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Paul Helm, *The Providence Of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 131-32.

<sup>58</sup> What is taking place here (and in the parallel text of 1 Kings 12:15) is that King Rehoboam is opposing godly wisdom shared by others (something God affirms as morally good [e.g. Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; 15:22; 19:20; 20:18; 24:6] ) because God had decreed he would allow this to accomplish other purposes.

<sup>59</sup> Clearly it is wrong to turn justice upside-down and to penalize the righteous for their righteousness, as if they are wicked. This runs counter to the moral will of God. Proverbs 17:15, 26, reads: “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord.... To impose a fine on a righteous man is not good, nor to strike the noble for their uprightness.” Yet, here in 1 Peter, the apostle affirms that there is some way in which the righteous can suffer at the hands of the wicked in accordance with the will of God (his decretive will). In other words, God has decreed he would permit this evil suffering by his people. This is so much the case, that God has even decreed the number of saints who will die for their faith (Rev. 6:11).

Additionally, as we discovered in Chapter Six, what we are dealing with in the multiple aspects of God's will is not divine schizophrenia, but rather the complexity of various, but compatible, desires and purposes within God. We see the same kind of thing among humans and think nothing of it. We mentioned there the example of an Olympic athlete who hates flying, but decided long ago to compete in the Olympics, wants to represent her country there, and so, with that greater desire in view, she boards a plane to fly to Brazil—doing that which she hates, to accomplish that which she loves. Again, if a human can possess multiple aspects of their will in this fashion, how much more, then, should we see this is possible for God and certainly not something that is a contradiction.

The final answer we give is simply that all approaches to the issues of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility (including Arminians and Molinists) must and do admit the multiple aspects of God's will,<sup>60</sup> even though Calvinists give more time to it usually than do others.<sup>61</sup>

What we conclude, then, is there is nothing about the different aspects of God's will that pits God against himself in his eternal purposes, that suggests a negatively peculiar doctrine, or that is not consistent with Scripture. In fact, the biblical data moves us in a strong way toward affirming the multiple aspects of God's will.

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<sup>60</sup> See the fine introductory treatment of how the Bible uses "will" in two key ways in Timothy Fox, "God's Will," at [freethinkingministries.com/gods-will/](http://freethinkingministries.com/gods-will/) (May 7, 2015, accessed 11/23/16). Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation And Sovereignty* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2010, Kindle Version), 54-61 offers an extensive critique of the Calvinist secret vs. revealed will scheme and instead posits an antecedent/consequent wills approach instead( 58): "God antecedently wills all to be saved. But for those who refuse to repent and believe, He consequently wills that they should be unsaved." The problem with this approach should be evident from the biblical data presented in Chapters 4-5 that affirm God's absolute sovereignty is not dependent upon or limited by human choice. What is more, in Chapters 6-7, as we see both the different ways God governs (with immeasurable combinations of active and passive movements) and how the human will functions, there is nothing inconsistent in saying that God's passing over individuals and not extending to them effective saving grace, it is still true that in spite of God's common grace and the general revelation he provides, they truly and genuinely make their choices—responsibly and freely.

<sup>61</sup> As an example, see John Piper, "Are There Two Wills In God? Divine Election And God's Desire For All To Be Saved," in Thomas R. Schreiner, Bruce A. Ware, Ed's., *The Grace Of God, The Bondage Of The Will*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 107-131.

**APPENDIX FIVE**  
**A POTENTIAL ALTERNATIVE TO THE MODEL PROPOSED HERE: TIMELESS**  
**ETERNITY**

C. S. Lewis famously argued the following in order to preserve a sense of indeterministic freedom and, at the same time, to assert God knows all events which, for us, are in the future:

*Another difficulty we get if we believe God to be in time is this. Everyone who believes in God at all believes that He knows what you and I are going to do tomorrow. But if He knows I am going to do so-and-so, how can I be free to do otherwise? Well, here once again, the difficulty comes from thinking that God is progressing along the Time-line like us: the only difference being that He can see ahead and we cannot. Well, if that were true, if God **foresaw** our acts, it would be very hard to understand how we could be free not to do them. But suppose God is outside and above the Time-line. In that case, what we call "tomorrow" is visible to Him in just the same way as what we call "today." All the days are "Now" for Him. He does not remember you doing things yesterday; He simply sees you doing them, because, though you have lost yesterday, He has not. He does not "foresee" you doing things tomorrow; He simply sees you doing them: because, though tomorrow is not yet there for you, it is for Him. You never suppose that your actions at this moment were any less free because God knows what you are doing. Well, He knows your tomorrow's actions in just the same way because He is already in tomorrow and can simply watch you. In a sense, he does not know your action till you have done it; but then the moment at which you have done it is already "Now" for Him.<sup>62</sup>*

And, it is not only indeterminists, like Lewis, who use this view of God's relation to time (timeless eternity) to explain how man can still be free. Some determinists also use it to blunt the causative force of God's meticulous governance: "[God relates] "to creation atemporally, outside of time. If history is a great river, he views the entire sweep of it--twists and turns and all--in one, simple, comprehensive glance from his heavenly mountain."<sup>63</sup>

There are five main points I offer by way of response.

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<sup>62</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity: What One Must Believe To Be A Christian* (New York: Macmillan, 1978, repr.), 148-49.

<sup>63</sup> Joe Rigney, *The Things Of Earth: Treasuring God By Enjoying His Gifts* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015. Kindle Edition), Ch. 2.

First, here is the main question, clearly stated. “Is eternity timelessness, or is it never-ending existence within time?”<sup>64</sup> More to the point:

*If God is timelessly eternal, can he act within time? If he is timelessly eternal, must he also be totally immutable? If so, how can he act and react to his creatures who are in time, since responding to them seems to involve change on God's part? On the other hand, if God's eternity is temporal, isn't God's life as fleeting as ours? In fact, if God is in time, doesn't he become so enmeshed in time and change that our concept of God becomes that of process theology?*<sup>65</sup>

The first understanding would be known as the atemporal view and the second as the temporal view of eternity.<sup>66</sup>

Second, most on both sides (temporal and atemporal) affirm God's decrees have a logical and not chronological relation since they were made all at once—i.e. there was not a time in eternity past in which the decrees of God had not been decided.<sup>67</sup> What we have shown in Chapters 2-10 of this book is that the Bible explains how God is sovereign and man is free and responsible, and this without needing to appeal to one's view of eternity, nor to God's relation to time. For the soft determinist, though the discussion can be helpful, it is not absolutely necessary. Nevertheless, because the idea of God being “outside of time” is common when people speak of his sovereignty and man's responsibility, we will offer more by way of response.

Third, for the indeterminist who holds the atemporal position, he still has several problems, not the least of which is the biblical data on how the human will functions, what genuine human freedom is, and how God is sovereign. Additionally, regardless of God's relation to time, it is

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<sup>64</sup> John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine Of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 375.

<sup>65</sup> Feinberg, *No One*, 375.

<sup>66</sup> Scripture is clear that God is eternal in one or the other way: Gen. 21:33; Ex. 3:14; Dt. 33:27; 32:40-41; Job 36:26; Pss. 90:2; 97:8; 102:24-27; 100:5; Is. 9:6; 45:17, 21; 57:15; 60:19-20; Lk. 1:33; John 5:26; 8:58; Acts 15:18; Rom. 16:26; 1 Cor. 2:7; Rev. 1:8; 4:8.

<sup>67</sup> John S. Feinberg, *No One*, 532.

still true that if God knows certainly something will happen, it certainly will happen and so cannot not happen.<sup>68</sup>

Fourth, it does not appear that Scripture explicitly solves the dilemma of whether or not the eternality of God is atemporal or temporal.<sup>69</sup> However, we can move toward a solution based upon inferences. To do that, we must first describe in more detail the two kinds of eternity.

For something to be timelessly eternal it must possess two characteristics.<sup>70</sup> “It lacks temporal extension, and it lacks temporal location.”<sup>71</sup> To lack temporal extension, means there is no temporal spread or succession, and so, if God is timelessly eternal, it would make no sense to speak of how old he is.<sup>72</sup> Temporal location involves the ability to locate one’s position at a specific point in the continuum of time. There would be no ability to do this with someone timelessly eternal, since they are outside of time.<sup>73</sup> “As for God’s timeless eternity, he may perceive all times at once, but that does not mean he is temporally located at all [in relation to] any [periods of time].” If God is atemporal, the following would seem to follow:

*An atemporal mind like God’s cannot deliberate, anticipate, remember, or plan ahead, for instance; all these mental activities essentially involve time, either in taking time to be performed (like deliberation) or in requiring a temporal view point as a prerequisite to performance (like remembering). In contrast, mental activities such as knowing and willing require neither a temporal interval nor a temporal viewpoint, so an atemporal being can do such things.<sup>74</sup>*

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<sup>68</sup> For this point I am dependent on Helm, “The Augustinian-Calvinist View,” 186-87.

<sup>69</sup> Feinberg, *No One*, 264: “I conclude that while Scripture affirms divine eternity and teaches that this means unending existence always, we cannot answer from the Bible alone whether God’s eternity is temporal or atemporal in nature.”

<sup>70</sup> For this discussion I am largely dependent upon Feinberg, *No One*, 376ff. Feinberg (376) affirms that atemporal or timeless eternity has a strong backing throughout Church history (e.g. Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, Aquinas, et. al.).

<sup>71</sup> Feinberg, *No One*, 376.

<sup>72</sup> Feinberg, *No One*, 376.

<sup>73</sup> Feinberg, *No One*, 376.

<sup>74</sup> Feinberg, *No One*, 378.

From this discussion, it can easily be seen why some indeterminists are interested in advocating for the atemporal eternity of God (e.g. Lewis above)—namely, because it allows for God innately to know what would happen in the future in certain circumstances, and yet removes the problem of how a choice can be free, if God knows about it “ahead of time.” It also can be seen why some determinists (Rigney above) are interested in affirming atemporal eternity, since it holds the potential of blunting the causative nature of God’s relation to events he has predestined.

The fundamental idea in temporal eternity is “existence at all times.”<sup>75</sup> “God’s existence extends endlessly backwards and forwards from our point in time. He never had a beginning, nor will he cease to exist.... God’s existence is temporally infinite in duration, unbounded in the past and future.”<sup>76</sup> So, we can speak of a past, present, and future in the life of God, even though he is necessarily everlasting.<sup>77</sup> Such a view rules out the strong sense of immutability associated with atemporal eternity and it also raises the question, “In what kind of time is God?”<sup>78</sup> Also, it leads us to ask: “Did God create time or a different kind of time when he created the universe?”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Feinberg, *No One*, 378. Temporal eternity is also referred to as “sempiternity.” Others refers to it “by saying God is everlasting, rather than eternal.” (Feinberg, *No One*, 378).

<sup>76</sup>Feinberg, *No One*, 378.

<sup>77</sup> Feinberg, *No One*, 378.

<sup>78</sup> Feinberg, *No One*, 378.

<sup>79</sup> Feinberg, *No One*, 378.

Fifth, though John Feinberg argues that temporal eternity has advantages over atemporal and thus is the better explanation,<sup>80</sup> I disagree and come to the opposite stance for the following reasons.

Since there can be no time as we know it without matter and space,<sup>81</sup> it seems best to see God as atemporally eternal.

What is more, the reality that God is unchangeable (esp. that time does not change God) appears to be related to his atemporal eternity.<sup>82</sup>

Additionally, even though there are, as Feinberg suggests, problems with atemporal eternity, we can say that God sees events in time and acts in time, and that something similar to this ability has been present eternally in the Trinity, and this has made fellowship a reality.<sup>83</sup>

So, if I am correct, then both the indeterminist and the determinist can make use of the atemporal eternity of God in their explanations of how God's meticulous providence relates to man's choices, even though this attribute of God is not sufficient by itself to provide a model.

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<sup>80</sup> Feinberg, *No One*, 428-431, lists the following reasons for preferring temporal eternity: (1) It is hard to make sense of atemporal eternity. (2) Atemporal eternity would suggest that there is no temporal sequence in God's thought and so he is always thinking everything and there is never any variation. (3) Flowing from #2, how can there be fellowship in the Godhead without sequence in what is consciously thought? (4) How can an atemporally eternal God respond differently to different people or differently to the same people in different heart situations? (5) If God is atemporally eternal and thinks and does all things always, he is still doing and thinking things from thousands of years ago (e.g. the Ten plagues; resurrecting Jesus). So, even though the Son has ascended to heaven and with the Father, he is, in the mind of God, still being resurrected (?). Surely, there are problems with this! (6) The time aspect of the temporal eternity of God should not be thought of merely as time is in this world—physical clock time, measured by the earth's rotation in its axis and revolution around the sun. It is a different type of time. (7) There are compelling reasons against believing in divine simplicity, yet rejecting it need not demand rejecting divine aseity. (8) There are ways God is immutable (e.g. his being, attributes, will, purposes, ethical norms) and yet there are ways God can change (how he responds to different people or the same people in different heart situations; the second person of the Trinity becoming man)—the latter of which atemporal eternity's strong sense of immutability would seem to prohibit.

<sup>81</sup> Grudem, *Systematic*, 169.

<sup>82</sup> Grudem, *Systematic*, 168-69.

<sup>83</sup> Grudem, *Systematic*, 168.

However, the problems with indeterminism (including the Molinist version), as set forth in this book, still stand.