

CONCLUSION

In A.D. 62 the Apostle Paul penned a letter from his confinement in Rome to the church in Philippi, to the saints in Christ there who comprised the first European Christian assembly, and this also specifically included the overseers and deacons (Phil. 1:1).¹ This church that Paul was instrumental in starting (Acts 16) and whom he loved dearly (Phil. 1:3, 7-8; 2:12a, 19) was not only experiencing turmoil from outside in the forms of persecution (cf. Phil. 1:29-30) and false teaching (cf. 3:2, 18-19), but also turmoil from within in the form of conflict (2:1-5f.; 4:2-3). How did Paul address them and their situation? I will not give an exhaustive treatment, but will mention a few truths Paul shares that will help us draw together this book's subject.

Paul gave to the Philippians a promise in 1:6: "The one who began in you a good work will bring it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (author's own translation). Implied in this verse are truths #'s 6-7 we uncovered in this book: God initiated and causatively brings about the work of sanctification in a believer—and will continue this work and preserve the Christian until Christ returns or he dies (#6); and God will complete the work at the day of Christ, which means that the saint will be spiritually and physically perfected in the age to come (#7). Later in the letter we discover that this sanctifying work in the Christian has Christ as its model—both for spiritual or non-physical perfection (see 2:5-11, in light of 2 Cor. 3:18) and physical perfection (3:20-21).

In the process of sharing the promise in 1:6, there are three more of the truths we have set forth that are explicit or implicit. To begin, Paul affirms truth #5 when he writes that God must initiate the work of salvation in the life of a saint and, as such, he causatively and decisively brings it about (see "the one who began."). This is also highlighted later in the book when Paul

¹ For the date and place of writing see Sean M. McDonough, *ESVSB*, 2275.

affirms that God is the one who causatively and decisively works in the saint so she desires to and can carry out what is pleasing to God (2:13).

Paul implicitly affirms truth #2 in Philippians 1:6, namely that God governs all things—and in a manner that is not dependent upon or limited by human choice. After all, God “began a good work.” In other words, he initiated it. Again, this is affirmed even more clearly in 2:13, where Paul argues God is the one who causatively and decisively works in the saint so she desires to and can carry out what is pleasing to God.

The other truth that is implied in 1:6 is truth #1, that God’s purpose in why he created in the manner he did was driven by his own glory through the display of his manifold attributes and not by a desire or need to preserve indeterministic human freedom so that humans could love God genuinely. After all, Paul affirms in 1:6 (and in 2:13) that God causatively and decisively works in the saint to initiate the change of heart that leads to salvation and also the moral ability to carry out God’s will. What is more, Paul refers to this work that was causatively and decisively initiated by God (and also will be brought to completion by him) as a “good work.” Clearly then, at the very least it must flow from God’s love and lead to genuine love for God on the part of the Christian. There is no hint in Paul that genuine human love for God must arise contra-causally from the heart.

As Paul continues in this letter, he uses God’s providence behind his current situation of Roman confinement to encourage the Philippians and to demonstrate how they should meet their own difficulties (cf. 1:12-30). Paul affirms that his present suffering has served “for advancement of the gospel” (1:12, author’s translation) as the gospel has spread through the imperial guard (1:13)—no doubt also being carried with the guard to other people—and his suffering has moved others to preach the gospel as well (1:14-18). What this also means is that

Christ is being magnified (1:21a) and, as people come to Christ and are transformed God is being glorified (2:15). Behind Paul's explanation of his own situation are the following truths we have affirmed in this book: God ordains and works all things for the ultimate purpose of his glory—and this includes the permitting of sin (truth #1); God's governs all things in ways not limited by or dependent upon human freedom (truth #2); yet, God does not govern all things in the same manner: He causatively brings about good and permits the bad (truth #3).

As Paul addresses in Philippians 2 the need for the Philippian saints to love one another in the midst of their hardships (cf. 2:2-4), he not only uses Jesus Christ as the example of that love (2:5-11), but he reminds them they have more-than-sufficient resources from the triune God to be able to do this. In 2:1 he writes: "If, therefore, there is any encouragement that is found in and comes from union with Christ—and there is; if there is any comfort that comes from love—and there is; if there is any fellowship that comes from the Spirit—and there is; if there is any affection and sympathy—and there is..." (author's translation), then the ethical injunctions of verses 2-4 can be accomplished by them.² This is another example of the ethical imperative arising from what Christ has accomplished and applied to the saint that transforms his heart. This not only confirms truths #'s 5-6, but also #4, namely that a free human choice is one that flows out of the person's heart and one he truly makes and desires, but at the same time it can be determined decisively by antecedent movements of the heart and by God's work (cf. 2:12-13).³

² The way the verse is worded, the love that generates comfort is love of the Father. This means that Paul intentionally sets forth the believer's amazing Trinitarian resources that stand behind the ethical charge he is about to give (see 2 Cor. 13:14 for a similar statement). Additionally, the structure also sets off "affection and sympathy" from the Trinitarian resources. What this means is that what we have from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, because of the work of Christ accomplished for and applied to us, should lead to affection and sympathy for each other that leads to and enables us to carry out verses 2-5ff.

³ Philippians 2:12-13 reads: "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

Finally, in Philippians 4:10-13, in talking about his own situation and the gracious help the Philippians have provided for Paul, he clarifies that based upon the gracious empowerment that comes through Christ (cf. 4:13 [and 4:19]), Paul has been able to learn to be content in all kinds of circumstances. There is a genuine movement of Paul's heart to make choices here and yet this is empowered by the grace of Christ. This confirms truth #4 we have unfolded in our study about what constitutes a free human choice. It is something a person truly wants to do and that flows from their heart, but this does not mean it cannot be decisively caused and determined by their own antecedent movements and/or by God's transforming grace.

There are three reasons I have come to Philippians to help summarize and conclude our book.

To begin, I believe it is important to see that all seven theological truths we have discovered throughout this book are used throughout the Bible (in this case, one New Testament letter) for very practical purposes—to comfort and encourage faith-fueled obedience. They are not merely academic points of discussion. Along with this realization, we need also to see that if we lose or change the view of God's sovereignty and man's freedom that I have set forth in this study, we also lose some very important entailments for how we trust in God, go about evangelism, encourage self and others to grow, and grow our faith and the faith of others.

Additionally, it is important for us to see in summary form all seven of the theological truths this book has affirmed. I believe all seven explicitly and/or implicitly undergird Paul's very practical letter to the church at Philippi, as well as all the Bible. To state these truths very clearly, they are:

- #1: The Bible reveals that God permitted sin in order that he might display his attributes more fully, and especially to highlight his mercy and grace to a greater degree.
- #2: The Bible reveals that God governs all things, and this in no way dependent upon or limited by human choices.

- #3: The Bible reveals God has a different relation to good than he does to evil. He causes the former and permits the latter, and both in such a way he is not limited by or dependent upon free human choices.
- #4: The Bible reveals a person is free with respect to a choice if he truly wants to perform that choice. Such a view of freedom leaves room for choices to be determined and, at the same time, remain free.
- #5: The Bible reveals though the unregenerate person is able to ignore and reject Jesus Christ as Savior, he is morally unable to trust in him and so, faith in Jesus Christ as Savior will take place only after the previous, decisive and divine act of regeneration.
- #6: The Bible reveals based upon God's absolute sovereignty, free grace, the unchangeable nature of the decree of divine election, and the efficacy of the cross and intercession of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God causatively renews the saint throughout his whole person, after the image of God, enabling him more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness, and so the saint will certainly persevere to the end, and be eternally saved.
- #7: The Bible reveals in the age-to-come redeemed mankind will be fully restored as those who glorify God completely. This future glorification of the Christian is not only the result of God's saving work, it results in ethical perfection for all eternity future.

The picture gleaned from Philippians in particular and all of Scripture in general is that these truths are part of the very fabric of Scripture's view of God, view of human freedom, view of God's providence, and view of God's redemptive work.

Finally, the book of Philippians has provided for us a summary of these seven theological truths that have emerged from all parts of Scripture and in all eras of redemptive history. They provide very strong evidence in favor of the model of soft deterministic Calvinism and against the model of Molinism.

As I affirmed in the beginning of the book, I have great respect for Molinists as brothers and sisters in Christ with whom I can lock arms in fellowship and ministry. I have great respect for their attempt to produce a model that is true to the teaching of Scripture, preserves a strong view

of divine sovereignty and also of human freedom. Nevertheless, I do not believe they have succeeded.

What is more, if we are willing to look in more detail at the biblical evidence and also at what soft deterministic Calvinism truly affirms about God's sovereignty and human freedom, we will not do away with all mystery, but we will discover a model that provides great comfort for the believer and strength for faith.

Oh, Lord, may you beautify your Church and strengthen her faith through the view of you and your work encapsulated in the seven truths in this book and, at the same time, may you be magnified!