

Is Determinism Scriptural?

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I write in my book, *Why Does God Allow Evil?: Compelling Answers for Life's Toughest Questions*, that the theodicy I present in it is compatible with both Calvinist election and Arminian prevenient grace. However, the theodicy I present isn't compatible with divine determinism. Divine determinism is the belief that God so arranges the affairs of the universe that everything and anything that ever happens is efficaciously orchestrated by God so that it *must* have happened exactly as it did. Augustus Toplady put it in perspective, "*Not a dust flies in a beaten road but God raiseth it, conducts its uncertain motion, and by His particular care, conveys it to the certain place He had before appointed for it.*"¹ This determinism extends to every thought and every deed of every person. As determinist John Frame put it, "God controls all things: inanimate creatures, the detailed course of nature, events of history, human lives, free human decisions, and *even human sins.*"² In other words, if determinism is true, then you can never do other than what you do—ever. Also, every decision you have ever made was such that you couldn't have decided—whether good or bad—otherwise.

¹ Augustus Toplady, foreword, Jerom Zanchius, *The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination* (London: Sovereign Grace Union, 1930), 14. This is part of a quotation from Bishop Hopkins' "Sermon upon Providence, from Matt. x. 29, 30," as quoted by Jack W. Cottrell, "The Nature of Divine Sovereignty," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989). Emphasis his.

² John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship*, (Kindle Locations 3419-3420). Kindle Edition. Emphasis mine. Later Frame explains, "Now let's assume, for example, that God makes a golf ball go into a hole, using a golfer as the secondary cause. But what about the golfer's swing? Scripture tells us that God brings that about, too, for he controls everything. But there are secondary causes of the golfer's swing, also: movements in the golfer's muscles, neurons, brain, and so on. The verses we have studied imply that God causes those also. We can press this analysis into the world of molecules, atoms, and subatomic particles. Are any of their movements independent of God? Certainly not." Ibid., Kindle location 3588-3591.

If this is the case, then it is incredibly difficult for determinists to explain how God can hold people accountable for their sin and rebellion against God.

But I hold that Scripture teaches libertarian (or incompatibilist) free will as a primary answer to why God allows evil.³ Libertarians believe that God has not determined your every thought and every deed so that you can never do other than you do. In short, libertarians believe that you can do otherwise.

There are two logically possible extremes. One logically possible extreme is that God determines nothing. The other logically possible extreme is that God determines everything. There are no libertarians who believe that God determines nothing. Not even one. The number of libertarians who believe that God determines *nothing* is zero. Nada. Zip. Zilch. On the contrary, *all* libertarians believe that God determines *many* things. For instance, all libertarians believe that God determined who would be an apostle. All libertarians believe that God determined that Paul would encounter Christ on the Damascus Road, and that Judas (who was never a sincere disciple—John 12:6) would betray Jesus.

All libertarians believe that God determined that Jesus would die on the cross. All libertarians believe that God determined that the sun would rise, that water runs downhill, that healthy humans would have brains that work, and so on and on. In fact, I, as a

³ These terms take some getting used to. Most determinists are compatibilists, which is someone who believes that the concept that people have free will is *compatible* with the belief that God determines their every thought or deed so that they could not have done other than they did. Compatibilist theologian Steven Cowan writes that compatibilism “holds that freedom requires simply the ability to act without restraint in accordance with one’s desires and values.” [Steven Cowan, “Does 1 Corinthians 10:13 Imply Libertarian Freedom? A Reply to Paul A. Himes” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 55/2 (2012), 793.] In other words, a compatibilist believes that even though you can never do other than you do, that a person is free as long as they are doing what they *want* to do. That God so arranged the world that a person could not want other than he or she wants doesn’t mean, for the compatibilist, that that individual isn’t free. An incompatibilist, also known as a libertarian, however, is someone who says that free will is *incompatible* with the belief that no one can *ever* do. In other words, the incompatibilist contends that if God determines my every desire so that I can never desire other than I do, then that isn’t real freedom.

libertarian, believe that God determines the *large majority* of the things that happen on planet Earth. This is important because those new to the libertarian/determinist discussion often think that libertarianism means that God determines nothing. That's not correct. Again, libertarians believe that God determines many, if not most of the things that happen in the universe. Libertarians just don't believe that God determines absolutely everything so that no human can ever do other than they do.

The other logical extreme is to believe that God determines absolutely everything: every twitch of a caterpillar's leg, where every speck of dust will land, and, as Dallas Willard put it to me one day, "all the snot in all the sheep on a thousand hills."⁴ This also means that God determines *every* person's *every* thought, *every* deed, and *every* desire so that no person ever can do (or desire) other than they do. If this is true, then God determined *every* pornographic word that was *ever* written, *every* torture that was *ever* devised and employed, and *every* hideous murder that *ever* occurred so that the person who thought up and perpetrated those evil deeds could not have not wanted to do those things and could not have not done them. In other words—getting rid of the double negatives—the perpetrator had to desire to do them and he then had to do them.

All this being said, although it is atypical, one can be a libertarian and hold to Calvinist election.⁵ After all, as I said above, libertarians do believe that God determines

⁴ A personal conversation with Dallas Willard in June 2001.

⁵ John Feinberg points out that "Calvinists are *usually* deterministic" and, of course that means that some Calvinists are not determinists. John Feinberg, "God Ordains All Things" in *Predestination and Free Will*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1986), 20. Emphasis mine. J. P. Moreland points out the same thing: "Indeed, throughout history there have been Calvinists who have accepted libertarian freedom for non-moral or non-salvific decisions." J. P. Moreland, "Miracles, Agency, and Theistic Science: A Reply to Steven B. Cowan," *Philosophia Christi*, 4, No. 1, (2001), 155. I've often been asked how it might be possible to hold to Calvinist election and still be a libertarian. My answer is that if it is true that since Adam's fall that none of Adam's descendants freely (in a libertarian sense) want God, then God, if He wants to save any of Adam's descendants, must break through that sinful unwillingness by choosing some to be saved. It is interesting that even those who hold to middle-knowledge hold to a type of election because from even the middle-knowledge standpoint God

many things, and that could include who will be saved, but not everything (such as *every* evil desire and *every* evil thought that *every* being *ever* had in the history of creation).

It is important to note that determinists also think that humans have a free will but they define freedom differently than libertarians. As determinist philosophy professor Steven Cowan put it, “freedom requires simply the ability to act without restraint in accordance with one’s desires and values.”⁶ In other words, for the determinist, free will only means that you are doing what you desire to do. But again, the problem is that God efficaciously determines what every individual desires and values even if those desires and values lead them to torture little girls.⁷

Determinism’s Emotional Appeal

Over the years I’ve learned that for some Christians, determinism has strong emotional appeal. For example, one determinist wrote to me that if determinism wasn’t true, then “that would mean you’re better than me.” In other words, this person considered determinism the great equalizer. After all, if determinism is true, then any lack of success in any area—family, business, ministry, or whatever, whether real or imagined—was all the

actualizes the world where the greatest number of people freely choose him. The trouble is that if God were to choose a different world then different people might be saved than were saved in another world. And this is a type of election! If God actualizes one world instead of another, under Molinism, then God is choosing some people to be saved rather than others.

⁶It is important to note that determinists also believe in free will, but that they define free will differently. They believe that a person acted freely as long as they acted in accord with their own desires. In other words, to the determinist a person acted freely by eating chocolate cake last Friday because they wanted to eat chocolate cake last Friday, even though God determined in advance that they would want to eat chocolate cake and have the opportunity to do so. They were free because they did what they wanted to do even though God had so arranged the universe that they could not have done otherwise. A determinist says that in this context the person still acted freely and that this kind of freedom is compatible with the idea that God determines everything. Certainly I grant that God could have arranged the universe this way, but I contend that this is not what Scripture teaches.

⁷ Of course there are also logical arguments that have been debated for centuries. For those who wish to delve into them more fully I recommend William Lane Craig’s *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999). For a solid secular treatment of the logical issues from an indeterminist perspective see Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (New York: Oxford, 1996).

work of God controlling everything for His ultimate glory. But if determinism isn't true, then family, business, or ministry failures could be seen as an individual person's fault.

Similarly, as Frame put it, if God is in control of "even human sins," if a Christian spends a lust-filled night looking at pornography, then that Christian couldn't have not looked at porn on that occasion. Why not? Because God so arranged the universe that his or her looking at porn was literally inevitable. Obviously, then, a Christian determinist's sense of guilt over personal sins may be *mitigated* since he or she believes that God arranged the universe so that he or she couldn't have not sinned.⁸

You see, then, how determinism might have emotional appeal. But Scripture always treats our sins as completely our fault and calls us to own up to what we've done wrong, confess it, and repent (make plans not to do it again). The grace of God is there in abundance for those who come to Jesus just as they are, without one plea.

Determinism Undermines Rationality

Although determinism may be comforting in some regards, there are also serious problems with the view. The first problem is that the very affirmation of determinism undermines its rationality. As William Lane Craig put it:

Universal causal determinism cannot be rationally affirmed. There is a sort of dizzying, self-defeating character to determinism. For if one comes to believe that determinism is true, one has to believe that the reason he has come to believe it is simply that he was determined to do so. One has not, in fact, been able to weigh the arguments pro and con and freely make up one's mind on that basis. The difference between the person who weighs the arguments for determinism and rejects them, and the person who weighs them and accepts them, is wholly that one was determined by causal factors outside himself to believe, and the other not to believe.

⁸ I write "mitigated" because although the porn user couldn't have not looked at porn on any occasion when he or she did look at porn, Christian determinists still hold that the porn user *is* responsible for his or her sin. This points to one of determinism's biggest problems: how can God hold someone responsible for sins that a Christian couldn't have not done?

When you come to realize that your decision to believe in determinism was itself determined and that even your present realization of that fact right now is likewise determined, a sort of vertigo sets in, for everything that you think, even this very thought itself, is outside your control. Determinism could be true, but it is very hard to see how it could ever be rationally affirmed, since its affirmation undermines the rationality of its affirmation.⁹

And it isn't just that determinism decapitates rational thought. It has a grave implication.

Determinism Makes God the Author of Evil

If determinism is true—and God has determined every creature's every thought and deed so that they could never do otherwise—then the man who fantasized about how he would rape and torture to death the little girl next door, and then actually carried out his wicked scheme, was not able to do otherwise. This means that every exquisite torture, every penetration, burn, cut, crush, *ad infinitum*, *ad nauseam*, was indeed efficaciously arranged by God so that this torturer could not have done other than he did. Thus those who hold this view not only struggle to explain why God allows evil, most determinists find it impossible.¹⁰ For example, R. C. Sproul concludes, "I do not know the solution to the problem of evil. Nor do I know of anyone who does."¹¹

⁹ Dennis Jowers, William Lane Craig, Ron Highfield, Gregory A Boyd; Paul Kjos Helseth *Four Views on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), Kindle Locations 898-905.

¹⁰ As determinist John Frame put it: "The doctrine that God controls all things, including human decisions, typically raises for us the question, 'How, then, can we be responsible for our actions?' Answering this question has been a major preoccupation of theologians who write about the doctrine of God." John M. Frame. *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Kindle Locations 1469-1471). Kindle Edition.

¹¹ R. C. Sproul, *The Invisible Hand: Do All Things Really Work for Good?* (Dallas: Word, 1996), 167. Even J. I. Packer when faced with explaining how God can determine absolutely everything and yet not be the author of evil makes a similar appeal but calls it an antinomy: "The whole point of an antinomy—in theology, at any rate—is that it is not a real contradiction, though it looks like one. It is an apparent incompatibility between two apparent truths. An antinomy exists when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable, yet both undeniable. There are cogent reasons for believing each of them; each rests on clear and solid evidence; but it is a mystery to you how they can be squared with each other. You see that each must be true on its own, but you do not see how they can be true together." J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 18-19. In other words, Packer must appeal to mystery as he cannot explain it. The trouble for Packer and Sproul and other determinists is to explain how we know when a contradiction between two theologies is only an apparent contradiction and not a real contradiction. Obviously, if it were a real contradiction then one of the views would necessarily be false. Consider, my brothers and sisters in Christ, what, by the way, we would say to a

Indeed, if determinism is true, it seems unlikely that a logical explanation for why God allows evil is forthcoming.¹² Nonetheless, many Christians hold to determinism because they believe that Scripture teaches it. But does it? No. In this paper I'm going to argue that Scripture does not teach determinism.¹³

Determinism Not Taught by Scripture

Consider 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."¹⁴ After all, if God has determined every Christian's every sin so that no Christian could do otherwise, what is their way of escape from every sin? No one can escape what God has determined. How can the verse say that you will never be tempted "beyond what you are able" if you could never do otherwise? How can any Christian *ever* resist *any* sin if God has previously determined that he or she could *never* do other than he or she does? Does not this verse run contrary to determinism? Paul in 1 Cor. 10:13 tells us that no cause

cultist who, when we pointed out the contradiction in his or her theology, replied, "it is only an apparent contradiction, not a real one"? Even determinist Paul Helm writes that "appealing to an antinomy could be a license for accepting nonsense." Paul Helm, *The Providence of God: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 66.

¹² A few determinists, such as Gordon H. Clark, admit that their view leads to God being the cause of evil, "I wish very frankly and pointedly to assert that if a man gets drunk and shoots his family, it was the will of God that he should do it." Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961), 221. Later Clark wrote, "It may seem strange at first that God would decree an immoral act, but the Bible shows that he did." Ibid., 222. And this leads Clark to the conclusion: "Let it be unequivocally said that this view certainly makes God the cause of sin. God is the sole ultimate cause of everything. There is absolutely nothing independent of him. He alone is the eternal being. He alone is omnipotent. He alone is sovereign." Ibid., 237-238. Thankfully, most other determinists find Clark's view appalling but, as I mentioned, are frustrated to explain how God could determine absolutely everything and still hold humans (and angels) accountable.

¹³ It is outside the scope of this paper to examine philosophical arguments for and against determinism.

¹⁴ NASU.

or set of causes that encourage a Christian to sin is so strong that the Christian could not do otherwise, and yet Christians sometimes sin.¹⁵ William Lane Craig:

Imagine a situation in which one succumbs to temptation. Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 10:13 implies that in such a situation, God had provided a way of escape that one could have taken but failed to do so. In other words, in precisely that situation, one had the power either to succumb or to take the way out—that is to say, one had libertarian freedom. It is precisely because one failed to take the divinely provided way of escape that one is held accountable.¹⁶

And it isn't just 1 Corinthians 10:13—doesn't the most unforced reading of *every* New Testament command to the Christian lead us to believe that Christians can or could actually do other than sin?

One of my determinist students could not answer 1 Corinthians 10:13 but retorted, "but you can't build a doctrine on just one verse!" So I immediately gave him another.

Romans 6:12-14:

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

I then asked him that if we were commanded not to yield our members to sin, which we were told would have "no dominion over" us, then how could we not sin, on any particular occasion, if God had determined that we would commit a sin on that particular occasion? If a man yields his eyes (his "members") to look at porn for four hours, and God had determined that he would do so, then he wasn't free from the dominion of sin on that

¹⁵ For a compatibilist response to 1 Cor. 10:13 see Steven Cowan, "Does 1 Corinthians 10:13 Imply Libertarian Freedom? A Reply to Paul A. Himes" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 55/2 (2012), 793-800. In the same there is a libertarian response to Cowan: Paul Himes, "First Corinthians 10:13: A Rejoinder to Steven Cowan," 801-806.

¹⁶ William Lane Craig, "A Middle-Knowledge Response" in James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 202.

occasion. I'm thankful to report that at that point he was finished. He no longer pursued arguing for determinism.

Determinists appeal to two types of Scripture to support their view. In the first type are the many verses that tell us that God determines particular events. One such example is Acts 2:23: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."¹⁷ But this verse and many others like it are not helpful in support of determinism because even every libertarian Christian already agrees that God determines some, if not many, things. This verse doesn't teach that God determined their wicked desires so that they *had to desire to* kill Jesus. The Lord didn't need to do that because people naturally hate God.¹⁸

The question is whether God determines absolutely *everything* as the determinist believes. To quote multiple verses that tell us God determines some things, and from there to reason that God must then determine everything, is committing the-hole-in-the-bottom-of-the-bucket reasoning: it is akin to someone hoping to finally have the equivalent of a full bucket of water by filling ten buckets with water that have holes in the bottom.

But there's another significant reason that the determinist can't use these types of verses to prove that determinism is Scriptural. Namely, these verses are easy to explain from a middle-knowledge perspective. Consider Craig's middle knowledge account of this verse:

If we take the biblical word "foreknowledge" to encompass 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;

¹⁷ NIV.

¹⁸ John 3:19; John 7:7.

what Herod, if king, would freely do in reaction to Jesus and to Pilate's plea to judge him; and what Pilate himself, if holding the prefecture of Palestine in AD 30, would freely do under the pressure of the Jewish leaders and the crowd. Knowing all the possible circumstances, persons, and permutations of these, God decreed to create just those circumstances and just those people who would freely do what God willed to happen. Thus, the whole scenario, as Luke insists, unfolded according to God's plan.¹⁹

Although I do think that middle-knowledge has great explanatory scope and power, the reason I quoted this middle-knowledge explanation wasn't to argue for middle-knowledge but to point out that there are non-determinist ways of interpreting these types of verses.

So Scriptural examples of God determining some things doesn't tell us that God determines absolutely everything. To come to that conclusion there would need to be some verses that do tell us that God determines everything. We'll look at those next.

Determinists argue that some verses tell us that God does determine our every thought and deed, including every evil thought and evil deed. Theologian John Feinberg provides five examples: Daniel 4:34-35; Proverbs 16:9, 33; Psalms 115:3; and Ephesians 1:11.²⁰ Let us examine each in turn. In the Daniel passage Nebuchadnezzar praises God as one whose "dominion is eternal" and who "does what he pleases," but I don't know *any* Christians who disagree with that. Thus that verse, by itself, doesn't teach determinism.

The Proverbs passages don't teach determinism for two reasons. The first is that the use of the Proverbs in this manner misunderstands the genre. The Proverbs are general principles and do not establish hard and fast rules without exception.²¹ If they were hard

¹⁹ Dennis Jowers, William Lane Craig, Ron Highfield, Gregory A. Boyd, Paul Kjoss Helseth, *Four Views on Divine Providence: Counterpoints: Bible and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Kindle locations 1626-1631.

²⁰ These five verses are quoted in John Feinberg, "God Ordains All Things" in *Predestination and Free Will*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1986), 29.

²¹ D. A. Carson commented that the Proverbs "are pithy summaries of how things work in God's universe that do not put in all the footnotes of other instances" and that they are not to be taken as "case law" or "universal promises" but are "epigrammatic utterances." Carson said to do otherwise was a confusion of the genre. From doctor

and fast rules then Jesus's enemies would have been at peace with him (Prov. 16:7) and Paul would never have known hunger (Prov. 10:3; 13:5 cf. 2 Cor 11:27). But even if they were hard rules, these proverbs still don't teach determinism. Prov. 16:9 does tell us that "the mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps" (NASU), but one would already have to hold to determinism to hold that this verse tells us that every time a man puts down his foot, say in disco-dancing, that the Lord determines exactly where his foot will land rather than taking this verse as a metaphor teaching that God directs the general affairs of humans. Also, this proverb tells us that it is the mind of man who plans his way, and one of the central problems with determinism is the belief that even every thought is determined by God.

Similarly, Proverbs 16:33 tells us "the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is of the Lord."²² But this is talking about the practice in Israel where they were trying to divine the will of God. This was done over things from the division of the land (Josh. 14:2; 18:6; and 1 Chron. 6:54ff) to seeking the Lord over who would succeed Judas as apostle (Acts 1:26). It is certainly not telling us telling us that God absolutely determines in advance every throw in a game of Yahtzee or Parcheesi.

It is true that Psalm 115:3 tells us that, "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him,"²³ but what Christian disagrees with that?

Finally, we come to Ephesians 1:11, which Feinberg calls "perhaps the clearest expression of the notion [of divine determinism]"²⁴: "also we have obtained an inheritance,

of ministry class notes from a lecture delivered by D. A. Carson in DMN 930A, Hermeneutics and Homiletics, held at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School the week of 28 February 2002.

²² NASU.

²³ NIV.

having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.”²⁵ As Feinberg writes, “According to this verse, then, believers are predestined to salvation in accord with the purpose of God, and God does all things, including predestining to salvation, according to the counsel of his will. The clause, then, broadens the scope of the verse to speak not only over election to salvation, but over all else.”²⁶ To Feinberg, and other determinists, “all things” means that there is no matter too small for God not to have determined it.²⁷

But, when Ephesians 1:11 tells us that God predestines “all things,” does “all” mean as much as the determinists say? I don’t think so because “all” could mean “without exception” or it could mean “without distinction.” For instance, if we went back in time to the reign of a particularly powerful king at the height of his power and asked him if he was in control of all things in his kingdom, might this king not say that he is sovereign and indeed in control of all things in his kingdom? And what would the king reply if we then pointed out that he does not control the twitch of every caterpillar’s legs or the flap of every butterfly’s wings or how many times his subjects chew their food, so therefore, he is not in control of all things? Wouldn’t this sovereign king reply (assuming he chose not to behead us for impudence), that that’s not what he meant by “all things” and that is surely not what he thought we meant.

²⁴ Feinberg, *God Ordains All Things*, 29. More recently Helseth in “Four View of Divine Providence” appeals to Eph. 1:11 twice to support determinism, Paul K. Helseth, “God Causes All Things,” in Dennis W. Jowers, ed., *For View on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 30, 45.

²⁵ NASU.

²⁶ Ibid., 29-30.

²⁷ To keep God from seeming the author of evil, divine determinists appeal to such things as antinomy, evil as privation, first and second causes, and God’s perfect versus permissive will. For a fuller discussion of these elements see Dennis W. Jowers, ed., *For View on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011). For a Calvinist perspective see Paul Helm, *The Providence of God: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), and from an Arminian perspective see Clark Pinnock, ed., *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989). Also helpful is the four-views book edited by David Basinger and Randall Basinger, *Predestination and Free Will* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986).

In other words, the phrase “all things” in everyday conversation often carries certain limiting and unstated assumptions. If a person volunteers at church saying, “I will do anything you want,” there is an unstated assumption that what is wanted will not be illegal or immoral. Accordingly, I doubt many Christians think that Colossians 1:16, “For by him all things were created,” means that pornography or Baal were created by Christ. Also, when Peter writes in 1 Peter 4:7, “The end of all things is near,” he doesn’t mean God, or the holy angels, or the redeemed are coming to an end even though he doesn’t specify their continued existence. Furthermore, even determinists interpret other verses such that “all” doesn’t mean without exception. For example, regarding 1 Timothy. 2:4, “God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved,” determinist John Piper writes that this verse “does not refer to every individual person in the world, but rather to all sorts of persons....”²⁸

Now certainly Ephesians 1:11 tells us that God is ultimately in control of the universe and that his will, will be done: “[God] works all things after the counsel of His will.” But Ephesians 1:11 is not a conclusive argument for determinism because the working of “all things” may include the working of the results of the actions of creatures who could do otherwise into his final plan. While determinism holds that God controls even the minutest of details, such as where and when each wave must fall, perhaps God has even given some freedom to the earth when He says of the sea, “I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place... I said ‘This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt’” (Job 38:10-11). It is entirely fitting with the Ephesians passage to see God as having created man with free will within fixed limits, saying to man as to the seas, “This far you may come and no farther.”

²⁸ John Piper, “Are there Two Wills of God,” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 108.

Some determinists point to Jesus's words that "not one sparrow falls without my Father's knowledge" and "the hairs of your head are all numbered" for support. But these verses don't accomplish as much as some might think. First, these verses do not tell us that every person's every thought or deed is determined, but only how great God's knowledge is. That they should not be construed to mean the former can be reasoned from Isaiah 55:8, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD."²⁹ Now if God determined every thought, which would include every wicked thought that anyone ever had in the history of the world, then God not only himself had those thoughts, but He designed those thoughts and determined and efficaciously ensured the existence of those thoughts in the minds of others. If that is the case, then although God may have had many thoughts we haven't had, we have never had a thought that He didn't have and also determine. Yet the Bible tells us that God was disgusted with the people's thoughts before the flood: "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart" (Gen. 6:5-6).³⁰

Based on this and other Scriptures, we find that God does not exhaustively determine humankind's thoughts especially in view of the Christian's typical pre-philosophical understanding of every New Testament command not to sin.³¹ Otherwise, Christians are in the awkward (at best) situation of concluding that any time they have ever lusted—whether after people, possessions, positions, or pleasures—that they couldn't have

²⁹ NASU.

³⁰ NASU.

³¹ J. P. Moreland: "I believe that this burden of proof [for the determinist] is heightened when we add that many, I dare say, most philosophers of either persuasion who work in this area admit that the pre-philosophical commonsense view is a libertarian one." Moreland, "Miracles, Agency, and Theistic Science," 43.

not lusted. Surely the most unforced reading of many New Testament passages leads us to conclude that when we sin we could have not sinned, and that is the libertarian position.

I have heard divine determinists argue that the contention that God does not determine everything diminishes God's sovereignty. I disagree. First, I am not for a moment arguing that God couldn't determine everything. Of course He could. He determines many things and He could determine everything if He so desired. If anything, that God doesn't determine everything speaks to me of God's greatness in being patient with those whom He allows to thwart his commands. If determinism is false then God is, after all, doing his own will by allowing others not to obey him. Second, these same people who seek to guard God's glory (which I appreciate) by contending that He must determine everything to be totally sovereign also typically contend that God himself does not have a libertarian free will and so cannot do otherwise.³²

If God doesn't have libertarian free will, then that means that not even God can do other than he does. If this is the case, then that would mean that when a man tortures a child to death that God himself could not have done other than efficaciously arrange the affairs of the universe so that the torturer would have no choice but to enact even the minutest of tortures. Rather than upholding God's glory, determinism diminishes it.

Determinism has many problems and Craig is right in his response to determinist Paul K. Helseth:

Universal, divine determinism makes reality into a farce. The whole world becomes a vain and empty spectacle. There are no free agents in rebellion against God, whom God seeks to win through his love, and no one who freely responds to that love and freely gives his love and praise to God in return. The whole spectacle is a charade whose only real actor is God Himself. Far from glorifying God, Helseth's view, I am

³² For example, see Steven B. Cowan, "God, libertarian agency, and scientific explanations: problems for J. P. Moreland's strategy for avoiding God in the gaps," *Philosophia Christi* 4 (2002), 135.

convinced, denigrates God for engaging in such a farcical charade. It is deeply insulting to God to think that he would create beings that are in every respect causally determined by him and then treat them as though they were free agents, punishing them for the wrong actions he made them do or loving them as though they were freely responding agents. God would be like a child who sets up his toy soldiers and moves them about his play world, pretending that they are real persons whose every motion is not in fact of his own doing and pretending that they merit praise or blame. I am certain that Helseth will bristle at such a comparison. But why it is inapt for the doctrine of universal, divine, causal determinism remains for me inscrutable.³³

Appendix 1: Commentaries on 1 Corinthians 10:13

Of course, the question remains as to whether I'm correctly interpreting 1 Corinthians 10:13. Namely, is the passage really teaching whether when we sin we could have done otherwise? What follows are some commentators' opinions as to what this verse means.

Determinist **John MacArthur**: "After the strong warning about self-confidence and pride, Paul gives a strong word of encouragement about God's help when we are tempted (v. 13). First he assures us that none of us has temptations that are unique. Then he assures us that we can also resist and overcome every temptation if we rely on God." Now perhaps MacArthur might say that God doesn't always enable us to rely on Him but that doesn't help. It is akin to saying, yes, it is true that you can resist every temptation but it isn't true that you can rely on God in every temptation because God didn't enable you to rely on Him on those times that you do end up committing a sin.

Again, this doesn't help. After all, if the way to bear a temptation or to escape a temptation is to rely on God, but God has so arranged your influences at that moment so that you would *not* rely on God, then certainly the temptation will overcome you.

³³ Dennis Jowers, William Lane Craig, Ron Highfield, Gregory A. Boyd, Paul Kjoss Helseth, *Four Views on Divine Providence: Counterpoints: Bible and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Kindle locations 932-936.

Thankfully, however, MacArthur doesn't seem to be thinking that for he continues, "Paul's answer is that a Christian should recognize that victory is *always* available, because a believer can *never* get into temptation that he cannot get out of." But, is victory *always* available? After all, if God has determined that we will commit a particular sin on a particular occasion, how is victory available on that occasion? MacArthur clarifies that "No one, not even Satan, can make us sin. He cannot even make an unbeliever sin. No temptation is inherently stronger than our spiritual resources. People sin because they *willingly* sin." Well, again, if this is true, then when the believer does sin, could they have, on that occasion, done otherwise? Of course not! At least if one believes in determinism, because, for the determinist one can never do otherwise.³⁴

Determinist **Charles Hodge**, "What the apostle here says is, that when God thus tries his people it will not be beyond their strength, and that he will always make a way of escape *that they may be able to bear it*. This expresses the design of God in making a way of escape."³⁵

Determinist **John Calvin**:

Now God helps us in two ways, that we may not be overcome by the temptation; for he supplies us with strength, and he sets limits to the temptation. It is of the *second* of these ways that the Apostle here chiefly speaks. At the same time, he does not exclude the former—that God alleviates temptations, that they may not overpower us by their weight. For he knows the measure of our power, which he has himself conferred. According to that, he regulates our temptations. The term *temptation* I take here as denoting, in a general way, everything that allures us."³⁶

³⁴ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* [CD-ROM] (Austin, TX: WORDsearch, 2004). Emphasis mine.

³⁵ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 183.

³⁶ John Calvin *The Argument on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [CD-ROM] (Austin, TX: WORDsearch, 2005). Emphasis his.

Appendix 2: Difficult Verses for Determinists

Consider Jeremiah 7:31, 19:5, and 32:35 where the Lord says regarding Israel's sacrificing their children in the fire that it was "something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind." In responding to the open theists (I reject open theism as unbiblical), determinist Bruce Ware is correct to write that these verses cannot mean that God never knew in advance that this horror would occur as the Lord warns Israel not to do it in Deut. 12:31 and Lev. 18:21. Rather, writes Ware, "Apparently we are to understand by these phrases the extreme disapproval God has for his people in this vile activity, so wicked, so detestable that he does not want even to consider such a thing happening."³⁷

However, isn't the determinist in a bind to say God meticulously planned and efficaciously arranged the affairs of the universe so that those who burned their children couldn't do otherwise? Taking Ware's words, does it make sense for God to meticulously plan a "vile activity, so wicked, so detestable" that the actual perpetrators could not have done otherwise and then say, "it never entered my mind"? However we may interpret this passage, is it coherent to say that God planned something, in this case the sacrifice of children to a bull-headed idol, but that it never entered His mind? Ware calls it an anthropomorphism, but the question still remains, anthropomorphism for what? It is a strange anthropomorphism for God to say "it never entered my mind" if He knows full well that He choreographed it.

1 Samuel 2:30 (NIV): "Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: 'I promised that your house and your father's house would minister before me forever.' But now the LORD declares: 'Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise

³⁷ Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 79.

me will be disdained.” If the Lord had determined the future then why would he “promise” that their house would endure if He has already determined that it wouldn’t?

1 Samuel 13 is another awkward verse for determinists. In this passage Saul becomes impatient waiting for Samuel to arrive and so he sacrifices a burnt offering to the Lord.³⁸ Just as he does, Samuel arrives and rebukes Saul in v.13: “You acted foolishly,” Samuel said. ‘You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time.’” If God had so arranged the affairs of the universe that Saul couldn’t have acted differently, what sense does it make for Samuel to tell Saul that *if* he had acted differently (not sacrificed a heifer) that God would have acted differently (establishing his line as a great kingdom)? In other words, Saul could have done otherwise?

And consider how Jesus’s words would come out in Matthew 23:37 if the determinist position were inserted: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but [the Father has efficaciously determined the affairs of the universe so that] you were not willing.” Does Jesus long for what He knows the Father has made impossible?

In Genesis 4:7 the Lord tells Cain, “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” But since we know that Cain soon killed his brother, it’s interesting to ask if Cain could have done otherwise. In other words, could Cain have not killed Able? But if determinism is true then the answer to that is No. Cain had to kill Able because God had determined it. But,

³⁸ This could only be done by priests.

again, if God had determined that Cain would commit that sin, why would God tell Cain that “he must rule over it” if the Lord knew when He said it that He had made it impossible for Cain to do so?

Consider Ezekiel 18:24-32:

But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die.

Yet you say, “The way of the Lord is not just.” Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die. Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life. Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Yet the house of Israel says, “The way of the Lord is not just.” O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.

Here the Lord says that Israel was openly questioning His fairness—are the Lord’s ways just? Now, if it was true that the Lord determined that the righteous man who stopped being righteous and started doing evil could not have had any choice in the matter, in what sense could the Lord ask Israel if He, Himself, was acting justly? How could the Lord accuse Israel that its ways were “unjust” if He has so arranged the universe that Israel could do no other than act unjustly?