

PART ONE

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INTRODUCTORY  
CONCERNS

## CHAPTER TWO

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# WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

To fully appreciate the practical, everyday ramifications of divine determinism, one must first understand exactly what it asserts. And to fully understand what it asserts, one must grasp the arguments in its favor. So, the logical order would be to explore the practical ramifications of divine determinism only after a thorough discussion of its nature and basis as a theory. But another concern motivates me to reverse the order.

Some people will find the more complex and abstract arguments in subsequent chapters difficult, and even tedious. The reader who is not inclined to be patient with such philosophical argumentation will need a reason to persist in this investigation and not abandon it prematurely. He needs to understand what vitally practical and personally relevant issues are at stake. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight just those issues. Our interest is not merely academic. If divine determinism is true, it alters our entire outlook on everyday life.

It may be helpful to read this chapter twice. Now, and then again after finishing the book. Now, in order to understand why persevering in this study may be worth it; again later, because, having gained a thorough grasp of divine determinist theory, you will be better prepared to understand its practical ramifications.

Since my primary purpose in this chapter is to dramatize the vital practical import of divine determinism, this is not an exhaustive treatment. Significant ramifications are very likely omitted. I outline just three of its more important ramifications to illustrate this point: divine determinism is not just an abstract theory; it entails a way to live life. Whether it is the right way to live is a vitally relevant issue.

## **A Preliminary Concern: Is God Good?**

There is a question prior in importance to the question of divine determinism: the question of divine goodness. Nothing beneficial follows from God's control of reality if God is not good. If he is not kind, compassionate, and merciful, God's position as the ultimate determiner of all reality is a curse, not a comfort.

Among believers, the goodness of God is less controversial than the sovereignty of God. Belief in divine goodness is foundational to Christian faith itself. Even the most rudimentary trust in God presupposes that he is good. This is incontrovertibly the Bible's explicit teaching. God is "light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (I John 1:5). He is "the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, not even the slightest degree of deviation" (James 1:17). Therefore, throughout the discussions in this book, I shall presuppose the goodness of God. Accordingly, to uphold the absolute control of God over the whole of reality is to uphold the absolute control of a perfectly good and caring benefactor over the whole of reality. That is the divine determinism I defend.

To defend the biblical doctrine of divine goodness is not part of my purpose. But I cannot proceed without acknowledging the controversy that surrounds such a belief. Christian believers are often assailed for an allegedly unjustified commitment to this belief.

We must concede that experience does not always manifest God's goodness with distinct clarity. The extent and nature of the evil and tragedy in the world is truly perplexing—to the believer no less than to the unbeliever. And it does not obviously point to a good and benevolent governor of all creation; indeed it can be a cause for doubt. But the Christian theist's conviction that a good God exists is based on reasons independent of and undiminished by the inexplicable evils we confront. Through observation of and reflection upon the whole of life, reality, history, and personal experience, the Christian comes to believe in the existence of a perfectly good God because it is the only reasonable explanation for all that he has seen. So, when he confronts an evil that is not obviously consistent with the existence of a perfectly good creator, he does not immediately abandon his belief.

Does that mean he is being irrational? Is it irrational to affirm the goodness of God in the face of the evil that we see in the world? No. Admittedly, instances of evil occur in the world wherein it is not apparent that a greater good is being served. But neither is it apparent that a greater good is *not* being served. We have no direct knowledge either way; our perspective is too limited. To insist that we do know would be the height of presumption. The Christian theist refuses to engage in such presumption. For him, inexplicable evil and suffering are not clear evidence against God's goodness. The believer does not presume to know what they mean one way or the other. The one who presumes that he does know is the one who is being irrational—not to mention, arrogant.

The Christian's conviction that God is good is not based on an inductive sample of the joys and sufferings—the goods and evils—of human

experience. It is based on an entirely different foundation. Therefore, when a Christian refuses to let the so-called “evidence” of particular evils shake his confidence in the goodness of God, he is not being close-minded or irrational. He is being eminently reasonable. He has a solid rational basis for his conviction that God is pure and uncompromised in his goodness. Accordingly, he believes that God would never permit a senseless, meaningless evil. He may not be able to discern the good purpose underlying every evil, but he nevertheless believes that it is there, for he believes that he has truly come to know the nature of its creator.

At any rate, the goodness of God is not the point at issue in this book. While it is an extremely important matter that is fraught with controversy, my arguments will assume it, not defend it.

## **Important Practical Implications of Divine Determinism**

Divine determinism, you will remember, is the belief that literally everything transpires by the will of God. Not only the impersonal universe, but also the whole realm of personal creatures is totally subject to God’s sovereign control. Even free choice is caused and determined by him. Limited determinism is any theory that posits boundaries to the extent of God’s determinative control. At the very least, it will exclude freewill choice from being divinely controlled.

The question is: what difference does it make? If divine determinism is true, what difference will that have on the way we live and think about our lives? Does it ultimately matter whether we embrace divine determinism rather than some form of limited determinism?

### **THE FIRST IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE: A SENSE OF THE PURPOSIVENESS OF EXISTENCE**

A burglar breaks into my house, kills my wife and children, and takes ten dollars in cash. A man goes to the top of a tall tower, pulls out a rifle, and shoots to kill anyone in sight. My daughter is there. She dies. A terrorist bombs a plane and kills three hundred innocent people, my son among them. In times like these a question always surfaces, “Why?” It seems so senseless, so absurd, so pointless. Why did it have to happen? And why did it happen to me?

Our questioning is not really from a desire to know the particular meaning of the particular event. More importantly, it is from a desire to be assured that it has any meaning at all. Is it just pointless, without meaning? Is it merely a random occurrence that didn't have to happen? Or does it fit some purpose? Is there some end in view that gives meaning to the event, allowing us to understand and accept it?

The human heart burns with a desire for life to have meaning. If human experience is nothing but a string of random events, then what value does it have? Non-existence would be just as meaningful as existence. Indeed, it would be better, for then there would be no suffering. (Is this not the rationale behind many suicides?) In any case, we simply cannot accept the verdict: my existence is absurd. As some existentialist philosophers point out, to consider human existence meaningless is nauseating.

This nausea is particularly acute when we confront tragedy and suffering. If life is random and pointless, without any rational order—a chaos filled with chance events—then I would look at the brutally bludgeoned corpse of my daughter with a profound sense of regret—a regret so deep that it literally makes me sick, or crazy. *“It did not have to be!!”* And this perspective that it did not have to be can only lead to bitter regret—*“If only... , if only..., if only...!”*

The only antidote to this nauseating regret is the conviction that human experience does have a point. What happened did so precisely because it *did have to be*. It had to happen to accomplish what had to be accomplished. From a brutal murder down to the inconvenience of a crying child at 3:00 a.m., all that happens is necessary and essential, because nothing occurs but what is purposed and purposeful.

Every Christian theology worthy of the name would grant that most of life experience is purposive. It is completely under God's control as he works to accomplish his purposes. But limited determinism places significant limits on God's control. By doing so, it introduces the possibility of randomness and chaos in human experience. Granting the possibility of autonomous choice (including sinful choice), limited determinists must concede that some choices do not advance the purposes of God. These choices threaten to destroy the very thing God wants to do.

God has instructed us to refrain from sexual intimacy outside of marriage. Out of the rebelliousness of sin, a young woman does it anyway. She gets pregnant. How is she to understand her situation? Is there any point to her pregnancy? Is it in accord with the plan and purposes of

God? Or is it a foolish, stupid, random disruption of God's plan—a complication brought on solely by her own autonomous choice? Is it a choice that God willed, or a choice that God would rather she have avoided?

Perhaps it is an ugly, pointless stain on the canvas of her life—one that God must now somehow incorporate into a revised, but inferior plan. This is the perspective that limited determinism is logically required to take. As human beings act, there can be no guarantee that their autonomous choices will serve the purposes of God. They can just as easily subvert them. Autonomous choices must often lead to nauseatingly purposeless results, leading only to regret.

Only divine determinism provides an antidote to regret. It alone affirms God's total control of the whole of my existence, including my own choices. It alone implies that nothing I do and nothing that happens will be pointless, that everything that occurs was willed by God to accomplish his good purposes, that literally everything *had to be*. And that being so, regret is banished, for how could one regret God's will being done? No agonizing cries of "what if" can result, if divine determinism is true. For if things had been different, the perfect will of God would not have been done, and that would be truly regrettable!

This is the first important difference between divine determinism and limited determinism: If divine determinism is true, then existence is purposive and profoundly meaningful. If limited determinism is true, I am left with a profound sense of sadness and regret. Taken to its logical conclusion, limited determinism must inevitably result in a heavy sense of futility and absurdity. It leads to the horrifying knowledge that human existence, meaningful as it could be, will always be infected with the meaningless chaos of human foolishness. As a net result, it will always be regrettably absurd.

The personal relevance of this should be clear. To know that one's existence is not pointless—neither in total nor in part—is a profoundly significant reassurance. As I face into adversity, I long to know that I am not just the hapless victim of random chance. As I trudge along week after week in mundane drudgery, I have to know that the excruciating tedium is for a purpose. If I could not know these things, I would surely come unhinged—if I did not drug myself into a stupor to keep myself from thinking about it. The issue is too close, too personal, too important for me to ignore. If divine determinism is true, it answers a very profound need.

## THE SECOND IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE: A SENSE OF SECURITY

Limited determinism logically leads to fear, anxiety, and a sense of vulnerability. Alternatively, divine determinism logically leads to a sense of security, a profound sense that my well-being is protected.

### ANXIETY OR SECURITY?

Should we approach life with confidence, or with anxiety? It depends on who God is and on the sort of control he has over our lives. If God is good, if he has my best interests in mind, and if he is in total control, then feeling totally secure is logical and appropriate. But if God is lacking in any of these respects, anxiety is the logically appropriate response. Feeling secure in such a case would be irrational, the result of mere wishful thinking.

As a concrete example, consider the possibility of assault. What if God is not good? Would an evil God be interested in protecting me from assault? Not necessarily. Indeed, if it suited his purposes, an evil God might even promote it. So if God is evil, I do well to fear being assaulted. To tell myself that God would never let that happen to me would be naive and foolish. But if God is good the picture changes. Arguably, violent assault would be repugnant to a good God. He would do everything within his power to prevent it—so long as doing so did not preclude a greater good.

But if God—morally perfect though he is—is interested in the larger cosmic good with no particular concern for what is of most benefit to me personally, can I rest in the security of knowing that he is morally good? No! If God's goodness is not directed toward benefiting me specifically, then it bears no practical relevance to me. Knowing that all things are moving toward the ultimate good for the cosmos does not provide a foundation for my personal security and confidence. Logically, I can only live in fear. I must anxiously anticipate the possibility that he will sacrifice my well-being for the greater good of the universe. It would be naive to try to take comfort in the fact that my sacrifice is serving some larger cosmic good. That would be futile self-deception, for this perspective offers no guarantee that whatever happens is in *my* best interests. On the contrary, if the ultimate good of the cosmos could be served by my being violently assaulted, then a good God unconcerned for my personal well-being would readily allow or even promote such an assault. Evil would come to

*me* in order that good might come to the cosmos. To think otherwise would be mistaken. So, if God has no interest in my personal well-being, there is no reason to feel secure.

Finally, if God is perfectly good and if his good intentions are directed specifically toward securing what is good for me, there still remains the question of God's control. Are God's power and authority adequate to control all that happens in reality? Or are they limited to the extent that God may be unable to actualize his good intentions for me? If it is so limited, anxiety and fear are logically appropriate.

All believers agree that God is a perfectly good God.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, all believers agree that God is committed to bringing good to us individually.<sup>12</sup> The point where Christians disagree is this last one: the extent to which God exercises determinative control over reality.

### **IF MAN BE BEYOND GOD'S CONTROL: ANXIETY**

Limited determinists place significant boundaries on the extent of God's control over the events of our lives. God is powerful, they admit. He controls most of what occurs in reality. But his power is limited. Specifically—according to the most popular version of limited determinism—he cannot control the freewill choices of men, Satan, or angels. Whatever portion of reality is shaped by the actions of free-willed creatures is not under God's control. While relatively few would dispute that

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11. All Christians agree in theory that God is good, but not necessarily in practice. It is commonplace to affirm the goodness of God. On the other hand, our attitudes and actions often betray the fact that we do not believe that God is good—not as a working conviction. In fact, a true working acceptance of the goodness of God is a mark of a profound spiritual maturity—

a level of maturity that relatively few believers have attained. If we were utterly convinced of God's goodness, we would eagerly obey all of God's commands, knowing that his purpose in giving the command is good. But we disobey, showing implicitly our suspicion of God's character, purposes, and motives. But our weak conviction and disobedience do not negate my point here. At the level of doctrinal beliefs, God's goodness is not a matter of serious dispute among believers. While we may not have the maturity to fully believe it in practice, we do not really dispute it either.

12. Two things should be noted here: (1) The same disclaimer needs to be made here that I made with respect to believers' agreement on the goodness of God. While we can agree in theory that God is committed to our individual welfare, too seldom do we believe it in practice. (See the note immediately preceding this one.) (2) The believer's conviction that God is concerned for his own personal well-being does not flow from a conviction that God is committed to the personal well-being of every human individual; rather it flows from a conviction that he is committed to the personal well-being of every human being who is marked by belief in the gospel of



God controls the impersonal created order, many deny that he controls the actions of free moral agents. Accordingly, much that is directly relevant to my welfare is beyond God's control. Within this paradigm, God will not<sup>13</sup> and does not control the actions of the man wanting to do me harm. The man who would insult me, slander me, steal from me, attack me, or kill me is beyond God's determinative control.

To whatever extent reality is beyond God's control, I am at risk, and personal optimism is unfounded. Christian doctrine affirming God's goodness and compassionate concern for my welfare is irrelevant if God does not control what happens to me. In that case a sense of security has no logical basis.

Consider a specific example. If God does not control the freewill choices of the man who would assault me, I am foolish to think I cannot be harmed. The criminal's actions—like so much random, uncontrolled, unpredictable, and incomprehensible noise in God's otherwise meaningful universe—could sabotage God's well-laid and well-intentioned plans for me. If, beyond God's control, I am chosen by some assailant to be his victim, what can God do? Even if he can bring some semblance of good out of the tragic event, he cannot restore to me the blessings he had originally planned for me before the wicked, free-will assailant sabotaged his plans and stole his intended blessings from me.

Anxiety is the eminently logical result. Fear is virtually required by this view of life and God. Granted, God can be trusted implicitly. But we cannot trust reality, not the part that is out of his control. God is good. But what about the out-of-control randomness? Can I trust the chaos that lies outside his control? I have no reason to think so. It follows that I must live with a profound and inescapable sense of dread, always wondering what purposeless evil might befall me and test God's ability to salvage some sort of good out of tragedy.

In practice, contrary to what logically follows from their theory, limited determinists teach a basically optimistic outlook. Their theory explicitly interprets the evil choices of free moral agents as tragic intrusions into God's plan—intrusions that could potentially sabotage his purposes and destroy the good he has willed—yet they remain optimistic. Their optimism is grounded in God's ability to bring good out of evil. According to their view, God will work all things together for good in the end. God is

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Jesus—to that select group Paul calls “the chosen.”

13. Rarely would a limited determinist say that God is *unable* to control the choices of a man. The typical position is that while God has the power to control the actions of free moral agents, he chooses not to do so. For the sake of maintaining the dignity and autonomy of humans (and

continually waging war against the forces of evil and sin, seeking to bring good and meaning out of the chaos they produce. He loses some battles, but he will win the war. Perhaps he will have to sew up some wounds. Perhaps he will have to patch up some holes that have been punched in the fabric of his initial purposes. But in the end he will have repaired whatever went wrong. He will have brought a good and wonderful result out of all the bad. Admittedly, it must certainly fall short of what it could have been—what it would have been had there been no sin at all. But good (even if second-best) is much better than bad. And that is what it will be.

Such optimism has a hollow center. A life ripped apart by the evil choices of other people must fall bitterly short of the rewarding experience God initially intended. Who wins, really? God, who has managed to fix reality and make it more-or-less good? Or the vandal, sin, who has managed to permanently scar and deface the smooth, unmarred surface of God's original will? Under such a view, we can proclaim God the victor, but the voice of triumph is somewhat muted.

The implications of such a victory for my own personal existence are somewhat disturbing. I cannot escape ambivalence. I am grateful that God has worked evil for good in my life; but, at the same time, I deeply regret that evil has permanently robbed me of what could have been. My heart cannot help but cry, "*If only it hadn't happened...!*" Such a victory provides no basis for a sense of real protection and security. At best, I can know that whatever happens will result in some sort of good. At the same time, I must live in fear that something beyond God's control will destroy the possibility of my enjoying God's wise and perfect plan for my life—the one he intended for me from the beginning. If this possibility exists—if the voluntary actions of a wayward man could at any moment rob me of the reward God willed for me—how can I avoid anxiety? Fearful insecurity results.

### **IF GOD BE IN CONTROL: SECURITY**

Divine determinism maintains that God controls all that happens to me. Ultimately, all the actions of other people as well as all that transpires within the impersonal created order are determined by him. No tree can fall on me unless God has purposed it. No murderer can murder me if God does not will it. No thief can steal from me if God does not permit. No harm can befall me except as God directs.

On this view of the extent of God's control, the Christian consensus

that God is good and has my best interests in mind becomes a powerfully relevant conviction. It becomes the basis for complete and unqualified security. God is perfectly good. In his goodness, he wants only what is in my best interests. And he is totally in control of everything that happens to me. Accordingly, I have absolutely nothing to fear from the world around me!

Whatever happens—no matter how tragic it may appear on the surface—is for my best. It will promote my ultimate happiness and fulfillment. Fear and anxiety, therefore, are banished. They are inappropriate. How can I fear what life will bring when it can bring nothing but the perfect blessing God has destined for me? If God is for me, what evil, of any consequence, can be against me? (See Romans 8:31)

The extent of this confidence is boundless. I need fear nothing. No physical harm, no emotional harm, and no spiritual harm is capable of posing a threat to my ultimate fulfillment.

Do I face poverty? A good and loving God controls the mind and will of every person. He could cause thousands of people to choose simultaneously to give to me. Or God could cause one wealthy person to extend extraordinary generosity toward me. If my income is dependent upon the weather, God controls the weather. If it depends on people buying my product or employing my service, God controls the wills of those people. If God wants my financial needs met, nothing can stop him.

Do I face a life without the fulfillment of marriage? A good and loving God controls the emotions and decisions of the person he wants me to marry. Is it too hard a thing for him to draw that person to me and plant in him (or her) the desire to be committed to me? Then how can I be anxious? If and when God wants me married, I will be married. If God does not want me married, does he not know what will lead to my ultimate fulfillment?

Do I face pain or ill health? Will suffering prevent me from finding fulfillment? No! How can it? The good God who loves me and has my best interests in mind controls my health and everything that happens to me physically. Would he allow any pain or ill health that was not purposed to produce an even greater reward—one that would make all the pain worthwhile? No, of course not.

Granted, pain may threaten my present comfort. Ill health (and indeed any of these “evils” we are discussing) may preclude my short-term happiness. But this does not preclude courage and a sense of security. Inconsolable fear is only appropriate in the face of purposeless suffering. If things are out of control—if I might fall victim to pointless suffering

or evil—then I have reason to fear and refuse to be comforted. But purposive “evil” is different. I need not fear it. I can face it with courage and confidence. It is purposed to produce some ultimately good effect; it is conducive to my ultimate happiness.

Of course I do not desire purposive suffering. I would just as soon avoid suffering of any kind. But neither do I fear it, for I welcome the good and rewarding end to which it leads. Indeed, my desire to gain the fruit of such suffering is greater than my desire to avoid its pain. If I must feel its sting in order to receive its benefit, then so be it. At least, to think otherwise would make me a fool. For what God has purposed through that pain and suffering is what is perfect and best for me. So I can welcome the suffering when it comes. Not because I like it, but because I know what will result from it. It is a tool in the hand of my creator to create for me his perfect blessing. I can, therefore, “count it as joy.” (See James 1:2)

Divine determinism asserts that a perfectly good and loving God with my very best interests in mind is the one who causes everything that happens to me. This logically results in confidence, courage, fearlessness, contentment, and a sense of security and protection. This is in sharp contrast to the fear and anxiety that logically follow from most forms of limited determinism. Clearly, then, whether divine determinism is true is vitally relevant. Can I live a life of security and contentment? Or must I live a life of fear, regret, and anxious dread? Ultimately the answer lies in whether divine determinism is true.

## **THE THIRD IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE: HOPE**

The third is perhaps the most important difference of all: divine determinism provides a basis for hope; limited determinism leads to despair. Not that limited determinists cannot and do not live in hope. They can and do. But they do so without warrant. Their worldview provides no basis for it. The hope of the divine determinist is solid, because it is valid; the hope of the limited determinist is empty—a groundless optimism.

### **HOPE OR DESPAIR?**

According to the Bible, human existence is fundamentally flawed. We have profoundly self-destructive tendencies. We are so incurably foolish

that, left to ourselves, we would ultimately destroy ourselves and everything around us. That is the tragic consequence of human sinfulness. So what does the future hold? Will I ever escape my own self-destruction? Can I ever be rescued from myself? Is there any hope? Or is despair all that remains?

Only a very shallow and unbiblical understanding of the human predicament thinks salvation can result from a change of circumstances—even being transferred to “heaven.” Heaven, the place of eternal life, is not a place where *things* will be different. It is a place where *I* will be different. Nothing short of a complete transformation of my very own nature can solve my problem.

This takes us to the very heart of the question: where are there grounds for hope? Who controls me? Do I control my choices and my future, or does God control them? My problem lies in the freewill choices I make. I do evil, foolish, venomous things that inject my environment, my relationships, and my very own soul with the poison of destruction. If these foolish choices are completely and only controlled by me—if they are utterly beyond God’s control—then hope for my future is without basis. The duck-billed platypus cannot change his snout. The leopard cannot remove his spots. Neither can the fool shed his foolishness, nor the born rebel cease his rebellion. The sinner cannot choose to be a saint—not if he is left to his own resources. If I, and only I, have control over the choices I make, then there can be no hope for me. I am hopelessly sinful, hopelessly self-destructive, hopelessly blind, and hopelessly lost.

But this is exactly the position to which limited determinism is theoretically committed. It insists that freewill choice is outside the province of God—that the very definition of a “free” will is one outside the scope of his control. He does not and will not control the choices I make. Limited determinism, therefore, is theoretically committed to despair. If no one outside of myself (God, in particular) will ever exert any control over the choices I make, then I am a prisoner of my own moral and spiritual weakness. I cannot free myself, and my autonomy condemns me to

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angels), God elects not to intervene in the choices of free moral agents.

14. It does no good to respond, “The resources of the Spirit of God that are at my disposal now that I am a believer.” This response misses the whole point. Limited determinism must view the power of the Spirit of God to be something that is put at my disposal to do with as I choose. I can ignore it or avail myself of it, whichever my autonomous will chooses. But what spiritual resources would move my autonomous will to avail myself of the Spirit’s power rather than ignore it? Limited determinism is committed to the proposition that the power to choose is our own, unaffected by the Spirit’s power. The Spirit of God does not determine the choices of free moral agents; we are left free to choose what we will. So the question still stands: “With what moral or spiritual resources will a sinner who has evidenced nothing but rebellious choices

be independent of any moral or spiritual resources beyond myself. So where are the moral or spiritual resources that could free me?<sup>14</sup> If everything within me has proved itself wicked, with what righteousness will I overcome the inclinations of my own being? The only logical outlook is despair—quiet, profound despair. I am damned to eternal self-destruction.

Nevertheless, many limited determinists do not live in despair. Why not? Here are three contributing reasons:

**1.** Frequently, limited determinists do not really believe what the Bible teaches regarding human sinfulness. For them, man is not hopelessly sinful—not to the core of his being. Rather, he is basically righteous; but, for a variety of reasons, he has not quite managed to manifest it yet. Accordingly, they are not despairing, for they see no insurmountable problem. Man is not a prisoner of evil. He can cease his sin and self-destruction whenever he chooses. And some, sooner or later, will. The real problem is our environment. We need a different situation—heaven. Put us in heaven and all will be well. We do not need to be changed. The world we live in needs to be changed. While God does not control me—my choices—he does control my environment. So there is every reason to be hopeful. The Bible promises that my world will be made new, and that is exactly what I need. If all this were true, hope—and not despair—would be warranted. But it is not true; it is not compatible with what the Bible teaches. Nevertheless, many Christians hold this odd, unbiblical view.

**2.** Sometimes limited determinists espouse hope blindly, dogmatically. The Bible teaches it; they believe it. Never mind that, in the context of their own theology, such a hope is completely unwarranted. Never mind that it totally contradicts everything else they believe. They go on in hope anyway, undisturbed by the logical contradiction it entails.

**3.** Sometimes people who espouse limited determinism are divine determinists in hiding. Intuitively they recognize the philosophical superiority of divine determinism, but—for a variety of reasons—they cannot bring themselves to consciously and explicitly acknowledge it. Their actions and attitudes are controlled by their divine-determinist intuitions, not by their limited-determinist theory. They see the hope that is really there and live in the light of it. But they consciously and explicitly espouse the opposing theory. So they embrace a false theory even while their inner hope is nourished by a true and valid intuition.

What they embrace intuitively, they denounce publicly. The inconsistency either goes unnoticed, or it doesn't bother them.

I cannot maintain, therefore, that limited determinists cannot be hopeful. My point is that they have no justification or support for it. If they took their explicit theology to its logical conclusions, their hope would be undermined and destroyed.

Divine determinism, on the other hand, provides a solid foundation for hope. If a good and loving God, who has my best interests in mind, ultimately controls my very choices, then what is to stop him from rescuing me? If God controls me, he can change me. My foolish choices can be changed into wise ones. My rebellious choices can be changed into submissive ones. Therein lies real hope. I can eagerly anticipate a future free from sin and death. The God who controls my will has promised it.

### **GLORIFICATION: THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE**

The "one hope" that Paul refers to in Ephesians 4:4 is—or, at least, includes—the hope of righteousness, the expectation that one day I will be morally perfect.<sup>15</sup> This is the paramount hope proclaimed by the gospel.

Virtually every Christian perspective acknowledges this hope, but not all value it as they should. All too often we take this hope for granted, or even consciously denigrate it. But, in fact, this hope answers the deepest longing of the believer's heart. The true believer is marked by a profound hunger for personal righteousness. For him, the good news of the gospel comes to this: "You who long for righteousness, rejoice! It is yours!" This is his hope. He lives in confident and eager anticipation of the day when the promise of glorious righteousness will finally be realized in his life.<sup>16</sup>

Will this promise actually be realized, as the believer expects it will? Or will something happen to thwart God's good intentions and prevent its realization? Perhaps the believer will ultimately be humiliated as he sees this hope dashed. Perhaps his confident expectation is nothing more than wishful thinking.

In Romans 5:1-11, Paul asserts categorically that the believer's hope for glorious righteousness will not fail.<sup>17</sup> Then he explains the basis for his

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all of his life put an end to his rebellion?"

15. Ephesians 4:4 (NIV) reads, "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called..."

16. The gospel is captured very succinctly in the fourth Beatitude, Matthew 5:6 (NIV): "Blessed

confidence. Our hope will not fail, he argues, because God loves us too much to allow it to fail. God has already demonstrated the extent of his love toward us by sending his Son to die on our behalf. If God's love for us extends so far that, in the midst of our damnable rebellion, God acted toward us with mercy, then how can it fail to extend far enough to transform our moral natures and grant us the glorious righteousness he promised? If while we were abhorrent enemies, God loved us enough to show us mercy, then certainly now—being no longer enemies, but friends—God loves us enough to grant us our inheritance, the “glory” of moral perfection.

But notice the implicit assumption in Paul's argument. Who does Paul consider responsible for my ultimately becoming a gloriously righteous being some day? Not me, but God. If my glorification lay in my hands, then the depth and extent of God's love for me would have no relevance to whether or not I shall achieve it. But it clearly is relevant for Paul. The very essence of his argument is that God's love for me is so demonstrably far-reaching that my hope of glorification is guaranteed. But this argument is ridiculous if my performance, and not God's, is what is relevant. In other words, God's love can guarantee my glorification only if my glorification is ultimately in his hands. If it were in my hands, God's inclination toward me would have no relevance.

Now what is this glorification Paul has in view? It is that event within the course of my existence wherein I am made pure—that point where I attain perfect righteousness. But what is perfect righteousness, except the point where my choices cease to be evil and begin to be infallibly good? Glorification, then, lies within the nature of my own freewill choices. I am glorious just to the extent that I choose to act gloriously. Now, according to limited determinism, my freewill choices are beyond God's control. I alone control my choices. If limited determinism is true, then, glorifica-

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are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

17. In Rom. 5:5 Paul says, “...and [this] hope will not bring us shame” (my translation). The hope he is referring to is the hope he mentioned in 5:2 when he stated, “...we boast in hope of the glory of God.” In my judgment, the hope of the glory of God is the eager expectation (hope) that one day my existence will be made glorious with the glory that God has promised me. What is the nature of the glorious existence that God has promised me? Putting together various clues from the teaching of the New Testament, one thing we can know is this: while my eternal existence will be glorious in many different respects, the most important respect in which it will be glorious is that I will enjoy the glory of perfect moral purity. So when Paul asserts that “this hope will not bring us shame,” he is asserting—among other things—that our confident expectation that we will one day be made morally perfect and infallibly righteous is



tion cannot be in God's hands; it would be impossible for God to guarantee it. Whether or not I can ever attain to perfect righteousness is squarely in my own hands. God has no say in the matter.

This creates an irreconcilable tension between the clear implications of limited determinism and Paul's teaching on the certainty of our hope. Paul grounds our hope on God's faithful, unfaithful love. He assumes throughout that God is the one who will and must bring about our glorification. Limited determinism, on the other hand, is theoretically opposed to viewing God as the author of our glorification. That role is reserved for man himself. Glorification is perfect righteousness, and perfect righteousness can only be achieved by man, as he freely (and autonomously) chooses it for himself. In limited determinism, therefore, the basis for hope asserted by Paul disappears. We cannot ground our hope on the love and faithfulness of God, for God has no control over the outcome.

Can we ground our hope on *our* faithfulness to God? Hardly! It is from our unfaithfulness that we require to be rescued. Can we ground our hope on our basic goodness? No. It is our wickedness from which we need to be saved. Can we base our hope on the power of the Holy Spirit within us? No. For again—as limited determinism sees it—the Holy Spirit cannot guarantee our glorification. Glory will be realized only to the extent that I, by my freewill choices, appropriate the power of the Holy Spirit now available to me. The extent of divine power available through the Spirit is irrelevant to the certainty of my hope. It becomes relevant only insofar as I choose to avail myself of it. But that I may never avail myself of it is entirely possible. My hope, therefore, is uncertain. My hope is only as certain as I am faithful to pursue my own glorification. Is that an adequate basis for hope? Can I, on that basis, say with Paul “and this hope does not disappoint”? No. Not unless I have a totally fallacious view of my own loyalty to the purposes of God. Anyone who understands the depths of his own rebellion could never base his hope on his own faithfulness.

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not a vain hope. It will indeed come to pass.

18. Glorification is the transformation of the moral nature of a person whereby that person becomes morally flawless and perfectly good at the very core of his moral nature. Sanctification is the transformation of the “heart” of a person whereby that person—while still unrighteous in nature—becomes disposed to love and obey God rather than hate and rebel against God. Sanctification is a process which proceeds here and now in this present age; glorification is an event which awaits us when we leave the present age and enter the age to come. The argument I have made in the preceding text has been made with regard to glorification. A parallel argument could be made with regard to sanctification. Sanctification is guaranteed to God's elect just as surely as glorification is. And sanctification, no less than glorification, involves the nature of a person's freewill choices. Hence, sanctification can be guaranteed by the New Testament only on the assumption that the choices of a sanctified man will ultimately be determined by the God

Limited determinism, therefore, provides no basis for hope. The logically appropriate outlook for limited determinism is despair. Wretched are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they must go eternally unsatisfied. Such is the real implication of limited determinism—if it remains both logically and biblically consistent.<sup>18</sup>

There is no greater practical import to the doctrine of divine determinism than the certainty of our hope. According to the Bible, nothing in all of human existence is more valuable than personal righteousness. It alone can truly fulfill our humanity and satisfy the longing of our hearts. Accordingly, the question of whether we can be certain of attaining this righteousness is the most personally vital question for all of human existence. Divine determinism provides a firm basis upon which we can have a certain hope. Limited determinism gives us no such basis. It leaves us with two unattractive options: quiet despair or dogmatic, irrational hope. A sound, justified hope is simply not available to the limited determinist. Only divine determinism can provide that.

## **Living with Meaning, Security, and Hope**

Logically, divine determinism results in hope, security, and a sense that the events of life have meaning. Do divine determinists live that way? Do they live confidently and without fear, hopefully and without despair, aware that every event has purpose? No! Not always. What we believe in theory we do not always believe in practice. Being persuaded of divine determinism as a theory does not automatically mean that it will serve as my working understanding of reality, determining my responses in real life situations.

Our inability to trust God implicitly—in the manner that divine determinism theoretically requires—is a function of our sinful imperfection. It is part of the foolishness and ignorance that marks us as sinners. Only by God's grace will we believe in practice what we believe in theory. But while the beneficial implications of divine determinism will only gradually be realized through the process of spiritual maturity, we must nevertheless begin by accepting it in theory. We must acknowledge that no other view provides an adequate intellectual foundation for the hope, security, and sense of meaning that God wants us to have.

## Summary

In the debate over the nature and extent of God's sovereign control, much is at stake. It is not merely of academic interest. My conclusions have far-reaching implications for the attitudes I have toward everyday experience. Will my life be anxious, fretful, and full of despair? Will I see life as futile? Or will I be secure and hopeful in the context of a life that is meaningful and purposive? It depends on how I view God and his relationship to created reality. Assuming God is good, the critical question is the extent of his control. Does God determine the whole of reality or not? That is the crucial question at issue in this book.

This chapter does not constitute an argument for divine determinism. The fact that divine determinism has happier and more desirable implications does not prove it true. If, in truth, our lives should be ruled by despair, fear, and futility, then that is how we should live. If divine determinism is not true, it would be irresponsible—mere wishful thinking—to feel secure and hopeful. There is no virtue in that. But if divine determinism is true, many happy implications follow; and those implications are of sufficient benefit to make our inquiry worth the effort. Is divine determinism true? It would be foolish not to care.