DOES GOD ALWAYS GET WHAT HE WANTS?
A THEOCENTRIC APPROACH TO DIVINE
PROVIDENCE AND HUMAN FREEDOM

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If God is entirely good (omnibenevolent) and all-powerful (omnipotent), why is there evil in the world that he created? Whereas some thinkers resolve this perceived dilemma by denying either God's omnipotence or omnibenevolence, many theologians who affirm both of these divine characteristics appeal to the free-will defense. This perspective claims that, although God is entirely good and possesses the power to exclude evil altogether, God allows evil because to do otherwise would negate creaturely free will. However, theologians continue to vigorously debate whether Scripture supports the freedom of humans to will otherwise than they do. Whereas the indeterminist appeals to passages that support the freedom of humans, the determinist responds by asserting that human "freedom" is compatible with unilateral divine determination of all events (compatibilism). With this impasse in mind, this essay addresses the issue of whether Scripture actually supports free will by appealing to the logically prior and theocentric question: Does God always get what he wants?

The Debate over Human Freedom in Scripture

Does Scripture support the freedom of humans? This heavily debated and age-old question over the relationship between divine providence and human freedom has eluded consensus throughout the ages of Christian theology. Over time, the argument has become increasingly complex, with competing conceptions of what "free will" means. The two most prominent conceptions of human free will stem from the mutually exclusive conceptions of determinism and indeterminism, which lie at the crux of this issue. Determinists contend that God unilaterally and arbitrarily determines every occurrence such that creatures cannot will otherwise than they do. Nevertheless, many determinists contend that humans do indeed possess free will. In this view of soft determinism, known as compatibilism, free will means that a creature is not externally compelled but is nevertheless controlled by God's unilaterally efficacious will. In other words, the compatibilist contends that humans are free to do what they want but what they want is itself unilaterally determined by God.[1] Indeterminists, on the other hand, believe that the human will is not

[1]There are many varieties of compatibilism, and this description refers to what is sometimes referred to as broad compatibilism—that is, the view that determinism is compatible with free will and moral responsibility. Some compatibilists favor a narrow compatibilism (e.g., semicompatibilism) wherein agents may be determined such that they lack free will but nevertheless possess moral responsibility. On the various forms and contemporary issues regarding compatibilism, see the essays in Robert Kane, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011),

(entirely) determined by divine or other causes. Accordingly, humans have the freedom to choose otherwise than they do.[2] That is, they possess libertarian and significant freedom.[3]

The crux of the debate between compatibilists and libertarians, then, depends on whether God unilaterally determines the outcome of all events. Can creatures will otherwise than they do, as many libertarians affirm, or does God arbitrarily and unilaterally determine all occurrences such that creatures only do what God has eternally determined? For many scholars, the outcome of this debate hinges upon Scriptural support. However, many determinists and indeterminists claim biblical support for their positions while denying that the opposite position does justice to the biblical data.[4]

153-242.

[2]Some libertarians define human free will in a way that does not require the freedom to do otherwise. On one such view (source incompatibilism), alternate possibility is not required for freedom but merely "the absence of external causal constraints determining one's action." William Lane Craig, "Response to Boyd," in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, ed. Dennis Jowers (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 226. This view that alternate possibility is not a necessary condition of genuine freedom accepts the upshot of Frankfurt-type examples that aim to demonstrate that the ability to do otherwise is not a necessary condition of moral responsibility. Since Harry Frankfurt's seminal article ("Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 66/23 [1969]: 829-839) such examples have been the subject of ongoing debate. See the various positions explained in David Widerker and Michael McKenna, eds., *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities: Essays on the Importance of Alternative Possibilities* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003); Robert Kane, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, 243-308. I am among those not convinced that Frankfurt-type examples successfully refute the principle of alternate possibility (PAP). See, for one example of the philosophical defense of PAP, Carl Ginet, "In Defense of the Principle of Alternative Possibilities: Why I Don't Find Frankfurt's Argument Convincing," in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities: Essays on the Importance of Alternative Possibilities*, ed. David Widerker and Michael McKenna (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 53-74. Nevertheless, the conclusion of this essay does not hinge upon the PAP version of libertarian free will. A slightly more modest definition of creaturely libertarian freedom is sufficient, flowing from the fact of divine unfulfilled desires in Scripture, which suggest that creatures possess (at least) the freedom to choose otherwise than God desires.

[3]Significant freedom affirms, yet goes beyond, libertarian freedom by explicitly framing human freedom as moral freedom. See Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 30, 47; Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 166-167.

[4]I firmly agree with John Piper that this decision should be made only "on the basis of what the Scriptures teach." John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), 130. Cf. Piper's expansion of this essay in his brief book, *Does God Desire All to Be Saved?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

The indeterminist who supports the significant freedom of humans might appeal to numerous passages that explicitly describe human choice. For example, in Deut 30:19, God proclaims, "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live."[5] Likewise, Joshua stated, "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve" whether YHWH or the false gods of Canaan (Josh 24:15; cf. 1 Kgs 18:21). Accordingly, God proclaims judgment against his people because they "chose [בחר] that in which" God "did not delight [חפץ]" (Is 65:12; cf. Ps 78:22).

Further, Scripture repeatedly points to the conditionality involved in the God-human relationship. For instance, in Deut 11:26–28, God states, "I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God . . . and the curse, if you do not listen" (cf. 2 Chron 15:2; Jer 18:7-10). Likewise, in Rom 10:9, Paul states, "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (cf. Acts 16:31; Heb 3:8, 12). Accordingly, Christ states, "I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev 3:20; cf. John 1:12; 3:16-18; 8:31-32).

In my view, the verses above and many others do refer to the freedom of human agents to will otherwise than they do. However, the compatibilist responds to these passages by claiming that human freedom does not exclude determinism, and does so by defining freedom as merely the absence of external compulsion, not the freedom to choose otherwise than one does. That is, human free will and divine determinism are compatible if free will means that one's will is not externally compelled but is nevertheless determined by the unilaterally efficacious divine will. Compatibilists frequently appeal to passages such as Gen 50:20, where Joseph states of his brothers' evil in selling him into slavery, "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." Likewise, compatibilists point to Phil 2:12-13, which states, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure." In these texts (and others like them), the compatibilist claims that the free will of humans (secondary causation) acts in subordination to God's overarching determinism (primary causation). Conversely, the indeterminist maintains that these texts (and others like them) do not support compatibilism but merely assert that God's providential actions, which do not preclude the libertarian freedom of humans, can bring good out of evil (Gen 50:20) and work out the salvation of those who respond positively to his free gift (Phil 2:12-13).[6]

[5]Biblical citations are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

[6]Indeed, the compatibilist perspective on Gen 50:20 raises the question as to why God doesn't just directly overrule the famine. Why take the circuitous route of determining that Joseph be sold into slavery to meet the problem of the famine when God could simply remove the famine unilaterally? It appears that some other factor or factors were operative.

This brings the debate between the compatibilist and the advocate of significant freedom to an apparent impasse. Both claim that their arguments are based on Scriptural passages that negate the perspective of the other. However, it seems to me that the discussion might remain on the basis of a canonical approach to theological method and yet be advanced by approaching the issue from a theocentric perspective.[7] That is, rather than focusing on human freedom *qua* human freedom, the discussion might be advanced by focusing on the logically prior question, is God's will always efficacious? That is, does God always get what he wants?[8]

God Does Not Always Get What He Wants

An abundance of biblical evidence suggests that God does not always get what he wants. That is, there are some things that God wills that do not come to fruition. Scripture displays a number of instances where God's will is unfulfilled because creatures reject or resist that which God desires.[9] For instance, Isaiah speaks of God's desire to save his people, saying that he "longs [חכה] to be gracious" to them and "waits on high to have compassion," but they were "not willing" (אבה; Isa 30:15, 18).[10] Likewise, God "called, but no one answer[ed]," and he "spoke, but they did not listen. And they did evil in [his] sight and chose that in which [he] did not delight" (Isa 66:4; cf. 65:12; Jer 19:5). In these instances, God desires to redeem his people but they themselves reject his will for them. The rejection of God's will by humans is also explicit in Luke 7:30, which states that "the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose [βουλή] for themselves" (cf. Mark 7:24).[11] Further,

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[7]The canonical approach I have in mind here gives methodological priority to the canonical data. See John C. Peckham, "The Analogy of Scripture Revisited: A Final Form Canonical Approach to Systematic Theology," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 22 (2011), 41-53.

[8]Here and throughout the article, to "want" refers to the desire or wish for some outcome (without connoting need), and that which God wants (or desires) is defined as that which God would bring about if he were to unilaterally and causally determine the outcome.

[9]Of course, a full discussion of the divine will is far beyond the scope of this essay. For further information on the canonical data regarding the divine will, particularly with regard to divine unfulfilled desires and human freedom, see the extensive survey in John C. Peckham, *The Concept of Divine Love in the Context of the God-World Relationship* (New York: Peter Lang), forthcoming. See also the discussion in John C. Peckham, "Providence and God's Unfulfilled Desires," *Philosophia Christi* 15/2 (2013), 453-462.

[10]That God "waits" (חכה) on the people suggests that God makes his action(s) dependent upon contingencies.

[11]As Joseph Fitzmyer comments, "the Pharisees and lawyers thwarted God's design on their behalf." *Luke I-IX*, vol. 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981). 670. Cf. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 301; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 678. H. J. Ritz adds that this assumes "that the βουλη of God can be hindered." "βουλη," in

Jesus frequently refers to those who do "the will" [θέλημα] of the Father with the implication that God's will is not always done (Matt 7:21; 12:50; 18:14; Mark 3:35; John 6:40; cf. Matt 6:10; John 7:17; 9:31).[12]

Various Christological examples parallel the wider examples of God's unfulfilled desires.[13] For example, Jesus's will is explicitly thwarted or rejected when Jesus wanted (θέλω) no one to know of his location but "he could not escape notice" (Mark 7:24; cf. Luke 12:49).[14] Further, Jesus poignantly laments, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted [θέλω] to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling [θέλω]" (Matt 23:37; cf. Luke 13:34; John 5:40).[15] Notice that, by the same verb (θέλω), Christ's will is directly opposed by the will of humans.

In many other instances, God's will is unfulfilled. God does not desire or have "pleasure" [חפץ] in the death of the wicked but desires repentance (Ezek 18:23, 32; 33:11). However, many reject him.[16] Therefore, God's will

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Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 224. Piper, however, claims that "themselves" does not modify "God's purpose" but modifies "rejected" such that "Luke would be saying that the plan of salvation preached by John the Baptist was accepted by some and rejected by others 'for themselves.'" Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" 119, no. 26. However, this interpretation is not convincing.

[12]See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 246. Cf. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 288. Cf. Matt 21:31; Luke 12:47; 1 John 3:22. Marshall comments, "It is as we freely yield ourselves to God that he is able to accomplish his will through us and our prayers. In a very real sense, therefore, the accomplishment of God's will in the world does depend on our prayers." I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 245.

[13]The relevance of such instances from the life of Christ to the present study depends upon the Christological perspective that one takes regarding the nature of the will of the person of Christ, an adequate treatment of which is far beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say here that I consider the texts referenced here to be relevant examples on the affirmation of the full divinity and full humanity of the single person of Christ, on the basis of which I resist the tendency to assign particular actions of Christ to *either* his divine or human nature. Yet, those who question whether these might be properly taken as examples of the divine will might nevertheless see them as (minimally) relevant in that they parallel the earlier and later examples of divine unfulfilled desires.

[14]See Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 364. Cf. C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 137, 87; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 546.

[15]Human wills explicitly rejected the will of Jesus. See France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 883; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 951.

[16]Although God has no pleasure in anyone's death, "Yahweh will not impose his

is not unilaterally efficacious; some factor or factors bring about states of affairs contrary to God's will that cause him grief and bring him to judgment, though he "does not afflict willingly" (Lam 3:33; cf. 2 Chron 36:16). Indeed, God is profoundly troubled at the thought of bringing judgment against his people. Thus, he declares over his wayward people, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned over within Me, All My compassions are kindled" (Hos 11:8). However, finally God gives people over to their own choices (cf. Rom 1:24). God states that he called his people, "but My people did not listen to My voice, And Israel did not obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart to walk in their own devices. Oh that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! I would quickly subdue their enemies and turn My hand against their adversaries" (Ps 81:11-14). If God unilaterally determines the wills of all creatures, how can one make sense of such statements? Why would God lament and long for his people to "listen" to him when he is the one who has unilaterally determined that they would not listen to him?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, numerous biblical texts assert God's desire that every person be saved. For example, God "desires [θέλω] all men to be saved" (1 Tim 2:4).[17] Yet, the NT elsewhere demonstrates that the divine desire that all be saved is not actualized (cf. 1 John 2:17; Heb 10:36). Likewise, God "is patient [μακροθυμέω] . . . not wishing [βούλομαι] for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). However, not all repent (cf. Rev 2:21; 9:20-21; 16:9, 11) and divine patience itself presumes the possibility of unfulfilled desire (cf. 2 Pet 3:15). It is sometimes argued that the terms *anyone* and *all* in such passages may be referring to all kinds of people rather than every single individual or that such terms may simply be referring to the specific addressees of the letter.[18] However, such interpretations seem strained, especially in light of other texts that do not leave room for that kind of interpretation, such as Ezek 18:32, where God states, "I have no pleasure in the death of *anyone* who dies. . . . Therefore, repent and live" (emphasis

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grace on a rebellious people. They must accept responsibility for both the course of their lives and their destiny. Without repentance God cannot forgive and the death sentence remains inevitable." Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 589.

[17]Anton Vögtle contends that this verse excludes the Calvinist/Determinist perspective. *Der Judasbrief, der 2. Petrusbrief*, EKK (Düsseldorf: Benziger Verlag, 1994), 231-232. Cf. D. Müller, "θελω," *NIDNTT 3*: 1020. Further, a number of exhortations to prove, understand, and do the will of God imply that humans may will otherwise than they do (Rom 12:2; Eph 5:17; Eph 6:6; cf. Col 1:9; 4:12; 1 Thess 4:3; 5:18; cf. Phlm 14). While such exhortations are not positive examples of God's unfulfilled will, such exhortations would be superfluous if God's will were always carried out.

[18]Cf. Richard J. Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 2002), 313; Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, NIV application commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 188.

mine).[19] God does indeed desire the salvation of every individual, yet some are lost.

The biblical data thus demonstrate that God's will is sometimes unfulfilled. The question, then, is *why* God's desires sometimes go unfulfilled. That is, why does God sometimes not get what he wants? As explained below, an appeal to compatibilism does not adequately explain these texts, because if God unilaterally determines all events, he should be able to bring to fruition everything that he desires without anything that he does not desire. The existence of unfulfilled divine desires does not make sense from a determinist perspective but is perfectly coherent from an indeterminist perspective.

God's Ideal and Effective Wills

Because God is omnipotent, that some of his desires do not come to pass suggests a distinction between two kinds of divine wills: ideal and effective.[20] God's ideal will refers to that which would take place if all agents acted in perfect accordance with God's desires, whereas God's effective will refers to God's will that has already taken into account all factors, including the wills

[19]Many indeterminist interpreters agree. Thus, Davids states that God wants "'everyone'/'all' to come to repentance. . . . God's will may not be done, but it will not be for lack of trying on his part." Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 281. Similarly, Eric Fuchs and Pierre Reymond believe this text argues against determinism. *La deuxième Épitre de Saint Pierre. L'épitre de Saint Jude*, Commentaire du Nouveau Testament (Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1980), 115-116. Likewise, some of the foremost determinist interpreters believe 1 Tim 2:4 and others describe God's genuine desire for the salvation of all. See Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" 108; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 382.

[20]Many others have also recognized some distinction in the will or wills of God. For example, I. Howard Marshall states, "We must certainly distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what he actually does will to happen, and both of these things can be spoken of as God's will." I. Howard Marshall, "Universal Grace and Atonement in the Pastoral Epistles," in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1995), 56. Consider also Kenneth Keathley's summary of the four primary positions on God's will, specifically as it relates to God's desire to save all or the lack thereof. Two major perspectives—universalism and decretal theology—view God's will as simple. The former view contends that God desires to save all and does so, whereas the latter contends that God desires to save only some. The other two major perspectives— the hidden/revealed wills paradigm and the antecedent/consequent wills paradigm— view God's will as complex. The former is represented by Schreiner and Piper in this essay, whereas my view corresponds more closely to the latter paradigm. Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 44-62.

of significantly free creatures.[21] As such, it includes not only the active divine will but also that which God merely allows (his permissive will).

For example, although God's ideal desire was that Adam and Eve not disobey him and eat the forbidden fruit, God also desired the kind of reciprocal divine-human love relationship that is predicated on the significant freedom of both parties. Therefore, God permitted Adam and Eve to depart from his ideal will in favor of allowing significant freedom. To take another example, God did not sadistically delight in, or ideally desire, the crucifixion of Christ (cf. Lam 3:32–33). Rather, it was his "pleasure" only in the wider context of the plan of salvation. That is, because of his love for his creatures, and because the death of his Son was the means of their redemption, God was "pleased to crush Him" (cf. Isa 53:10). Ideally, however, there would have never been sin and thus no occasion for such suffering and sacrifice. As such, when God is said to pleasure in things that are themselves distasteful to him, God's pleasure is in the wider result rather than the things themselves (cf. Isa 53:10; Matt 11:25–26; Luke 10:21).[22] In this manner, such passages do not contradict the clear meaning of passages that state that God has no pleasure in the death of anyone (cf. Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11).

This distinction between that which God ideally desires (ideal will) and that which often actually takes place (effective will) is supported by the primary word groups of God's will in both the OT (חפץ) and NT (θέλω and βούλομαι). In some instances these terms refer to God's unfulfilled will

[21]In other words, it is that which God wills in accordance with the wider matrix of creaturely freedom. This distinction is similar to the Arminian distinction between antecedent and consequent wills. I have elected not to use these terms, to avoid any unintended connotations of ontology, especially with regard to the operation of the divine will as it relates to providence (specifically the theoretical order of the divine decrees). For a discussion of Arminius' view of the antecedent and consequent wills of God and their implications for divine sovereignty, see Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 23. See also Alvin Plantinga's distinction between strong and weak actualization in his argument for the significant freedom of creatures *and* divine omnipotence and omnibenevolence. Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 172-173. Cf. Peckham, "Providence and God's Unfulfilled Desires."

[22]God's permissive will (as a subset of God's effective will) thus may function in accordance with wide principles of the extent of freedom afforded to creaturely agents. However, it is well beyond the scope of this work to delve more deeply into this issue of divine providence. Consider, for a brief overview of these issues of divine providence, Fernando Canale, "Doctrine of God," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 118-120; Thomas P. Flint, "Divine Providence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 262-285. Cf. Francesca Aran Murphy and Philip Gordon Ziegler, eds., *Providence of God* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009); Dennis Jowers, ed. *Four Views on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011); Peckham, "Providence and God's Unfulfilled Desires."

and/or desires (Ezek 18:23, 32; 33:11; Isa 65:12; 66:4; Prov 21:3; Matt 22:37; Mark 7:24; Luke 7:30; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9), whereas elsewhere the terms may refer to God's effective will rather than his ideal will (cf. Isa 46:10; 53:10; Acts 2:23; 1 Cor 4:19; James 4:15).[23] Thus, whereas theologians continue to debate the operation of the divine will, the biblical data demonstrate that there is nothing inherent in the terminology of will that requires or suggests unilateral efficaciousness.[24] In fact, as seen above, the biblical data show that, since many things occur that God does not want to occur, the divine will may be unfulfilled. The distinction between God's ideal and effective wills, then, corresponds to the data of Scripture and provides a compelling and internally coherent explanation for the texts that depict God's unfulfilled wishes, especially regarding God's actual desire to save everyone, which does not come to fruition despite God's genuine efforts (e.g., Isa 5:1-7).

The Determinist Conception of God's Two Wills

If God does not always get what he wants, it appears that one must reject determinism. However, some determinists have proposed a nuanced explanation that deserves careful consideration. John Piper and Tom Schreiner—two of the most influential determinist thinkers today—both agree that texts such as 1 Tim 2:4 (God "desires [θέλω] all men to be saved")

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[23]In the OT, the term חפץ may refer to God's desire and/or will, at times fulfilled and at times unfulfilled, but also may denote God's delight and/or pleasure. See G. Johannes Botterweck, "חפץ" *TDOT* 13:92; Leon J. Wood, "חפץ" *TLOT* 1:310; David Talley, "חפץ," *NIDOTTE* 2:232. In the NT, the θέλω word group relates to that which is willed, desired, wanted, taken pleasure in, or even liked. See Müller, *NIDNTT* 3:1018; M. Limbeck, "θελω" in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 138; "θέλω" in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, ed. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 287, 300. The βουλομαι word group similarly relates to that which is wanted, desired, willed, intended, and/or planned, whether of volition or inclination, often with the connotation of deliberation. See D. Müller, "βουλομαι," *NIDNTT* 3: 1015-1017; Gottlob Schrenk, "βουλομαι, βουλη, βουλημα," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 632. Even בחר, the primary term of election in the OT, may refer to God's unfulfilled desire (Prov 21:3 cf. Isa 58:5-6; Matt 9:13; Heb 10:5, 8; 13:21). See the extended discussion of these various terms and the import of their canonical usage in Peckham, *The Concept of Divine Love in the Context of the God-World Relationship.*

[24]I. Howard Marshall thus correctly comments that assuming that God's will is always done in "deterministic terms is inconsistent with the freedom which the Bible itself assigns to God's children." Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 245. This is contra the sometimes misleading statements regarding these terms such as the contention that the use of the βουλομαι word-group "is always a case of an irrefragable determination." Müller, *NIDNTT* 3:1017. Cf. Gottlob Schrenk, "θελω, θελημα, θελησις," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, Mich, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 3:47. Cf. Luke 7:30.

refer to God's genuine desire that all will be saved, while both nevertheless maintain the idea of double predestination.[25] To coherently maintain God's genuine desire that all be saved *and* double predestination, both Piper and Schreiner recognize a distinction between two divine wills. Schreiner distinguishes between God's "decretive will" and his "desired will," such that "God genuinely desires in one sense that all will be saved" and yet "he has not ultimately decreed that all will be saved."[26] As Piper puts it, "God chooses for behavior to come about that he commands not to happen" such that God's desires are "complex" and one may distinguish between God's "will of command" and his "will of decree."[27]

Piper points to a number of examples to support the complexity of the divine will. For instance, he claims that in the Exodus account, "there is a sense in which God does will that Pharaoh go on refusing to let the people go" (will of decree) and "there is a sense in which he does will that

[25]As Thomas Schreiner (himself a determinist) puts it, "By extension we should understand 2 Pet 3:9 in the same way as Ezek 18:32. It refers to God's desire that everyone without exception be saved." Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 382. He adds that, in Ezek 18:32, "God's regret over the perishing of anyone is clear." Ibid., 381. Piper notes that it is possible that 1 Tim 2:4 does not refer to God's desire to save all but personally believes that it is the most likely interpretation, especially in light of Ezek 18:23, 18:32, and 33:11, and thus states that "as a hearty believer in unconditional, individual election I rejoice to affirm that God does not delight in the perishing of the impenitent, and that he has compassion on all people. My aim is to show that this is not double talk." Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" 108. He further states, "I affirm with John 3:16 and 1 Timothy 2:4 that God loves the world with a deep compassion and desires the salvation of all men. Yet I also affirm that God has chosen from the foundation of the world whom he will save from sin" (ibid., 130). However, Piper contends of 1 Tim 2:4, "When free will is found in this verse, it is philosophical, metaphysical assumption, not an exegetical conclusion" (ibid., 124).

[26]Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 381-382. Elsewhere, he states, "God desires the salvation of all in one sense, but he does not ultimately ordain that all will be saved." Ibid., 381. In his view, "the Scriptures, if accepted as a harmonious whole, compel us to make such distinctions." Ibid., 382. This solution complements the traditional Reformed distinction between God's hidden and revealed wills, but with considerable nuance. See John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 419-420; Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. O.R. Johnston (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 101. See also, in this regard, Paul Kjoss Helseth's treatment in "God Causes All Things," in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, ed. Dennis Jowers (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 25-52, 165-169.

[27]Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" 114, 118. As Piper describes, "When God looks at a painful or wicked event through his narrow lens, he sees the tragedy or the sin for what it is in itself and he is angered and grieved" (ibid., 126). Cf. Ezek 18:32. "But when God looks at a painful or wicked event through his wide-angle lens, he sees the tragedy or the sin in relation to all the connections and effect that form a pattern or mosaic stretching into eternity. This mosaic, with all its (good and evil) parts he does delight in (Ps. 115:3)" (ibid).

Pharaoh release his people" as he commands (will of command).[28] Likewise, Piper explains that while Judas's betrayal of Jesus was "inspired immediately by Satan (Luke 22:3)" the Bible also declares that "Jesus [was] delivered up according to the definite plan (*boule*) and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23).[29] For Piper, this is the "most compelling example of God's willing for sin to come to pass while at the same time disapproving the sin."[30] Yet, Piper explains, "in ordering all things, including sinful acts, God is not sinning," because "God can will that a sinful act come to pass without willing it as an act of sin himself."[31] Finally, Piper contrasts God's "desire" (חָפֵץ) to kill Eli's sons (1 Sam 2:25; cf. Deut 28:63) with the statements that God takes no pleasure in (חָפֵץ) the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:23, 32; 33:11).[32] Thus, "in one sense God may desire the death of the wicked and in another sense he may not."[33] Thus, both Piper and Schreiner agree that God's desires are complex and some do not come to fruition, especially with regard to his desire to save all. However, all of this evokes the question, Why would God's will be complex?[34]

[28]Ibid., 114. As Piper puts it, "The good thing that God commands he prevents. And the thing he brings about involves sin" (ibid). Significantly, however, according to the ordering of the texts in Exodus, Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exod 8:15, 32) *before* God hardened it. Piper, to his credit, recognizes that the text does not explicitly say that God hardened Pharaoh's heart until the sixth plague (Exod 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4). However, he contends that even if "God was not willing for Pharaoh's heart to be hardened during the first five plagues . . . for the last five plagues God does will this" and that God's action in this regard amounts to his willing of Pharaoh's self-proclaimed "sin" (Exod 10:17). Ibid. Cf. Deut 2:26-27, 30; Josh 11:19-20; Rom 11:25-26, 31-32.

[29]Likewise, Piper points to examples in Mark where Christ wills that sinners "turn and be forgiven (Mark 1:15), but he acts in a way to restrict the fulfillment of that will" by speaking in parables such that they may see but not perceive and hear but not understand (cf. Mark 4:11-12). Ibid., 115. Further, he contends, God "wills a condition (hardness of heart)" in Rom 11:25-26 "that he commands people to strive against ('Do not harden your heart' [Heb 3:8, 15; 4:7])." Ibid., 116.

[30]Ibid., 111.

[31]Ibid., 122-123. Cf. Jas 1:13.

[32]In fact, he emphasizes that God is said to act the way he does "because" of his desire to put them to death. Ibid., 117.

[33]Ibid. He claims that again "we are faced with the inescapable biblical fact that in some sense God does not delight in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18), and in some sense he does (Deut 28:63; 2 Sam 2:25)." Ibid., 118-119. On the other hand, the question is not whether God finally desired the death of Eli's sons but why he desired it. From an indeterminist perspective, God's "desire" to put Eli's sons to death was a result of their freely willed and persistent wickedness.

[34]It is important to note that each of the examples that Piper surveys in his arguments in favor of his conception of two wills (above) can be accounted for by the distinction between God's ideal and effective wills.

Why Are God's Desires Sometimes Unfulfilled?

As Piper puts it, "what are we to say of the fact that God wills something that in fact does not happen?"[35] For instance, if God is omnipotent and God wants everyone to be saved, as Piper and I agree that he is and does, why isn't everyone saved?[36] In the determinist views of Piper and Schreiner (among others), God in some sense desires that all be saved but nevertheless decrees, solely on the basis of his unilaterally efficacious will, that some will be damned. However, this raises an impenetrable difficulty: if God's will is unilaterally efficacious *and* God wants to save everyone, why does he not do so? As Jerry Walls states, "If freedom and determinism are compatible, God could have created a world in which all persons freely did only the good at all times."[37] If—as the compatibilist view presumes—God unilaterally effects his will, then God should determine "all to freely accept his love and be saved."[38]

Piper answers that "God wills not to save all, even though he is willing to save all, because there is something else that he wills more, which would be lost if he exerted his sovereign power to save all."[39] That is, "God is committed to something even more valuable than saving all," a "higher commitment."[40] Thus, "God's will to save all people is restrained by his commitment to the glorification of his sovereign grace (Eph 1:6, 12, 14; Rom 9:22-23)."[41] I agree with Piper's appeal to God's higher commitment. However, the crucial question is what that higher commitment is.

[35]Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" 123.

[36]The omnipotence of God rules out the view that some power greater than God is overruling what he wills: "Neither Calvinist nor Arminian affirms this." Ibid.

[37]Jerry L. Walls, "Why No Classical Theist, Let Alone Orthodox Christian, Should Ever Be a Compatibilist," *Philosophia Christi* 13, no. 1 (2011): 82.

[38]Ibid., 96. "To put the point most bluntly, if compatibilism is true, it is all but impossible, in the actual world, to maintain the perfect goodness of God, and altogether impossible to do so if orthodox Christianity is true." Ibid., 80. Walls and David Baggett contend that the compatibilistic account relies on euphemistic and evasive language, stating "it's only the elect who can actually receive salvation, so no offer of salvation to the non-elect is a genuine offer. . . . To describe such an empty offer as a genuine one is worse than euphemistic." See the discussion in *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 72. Cf. the discussion in ibid., 67-73. David Bentley Hart adds, in this regard, that "freedom lies not in an action's logical conditions, but in the action itself; and if an action is causally necessitated or infallibly predetermined, its indeterminacy with regard to its proximate cause in no way makes it free." "Impassibility as Transcendence: On the Infinite Innocence of God," in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, ed. James Keating and Thomas Joseph White (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 309.

[39]Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" 123.

[40]Ibid., 124, 130.

[41]Ibid., 130.

In my view, God's highest value is love, which is itself essential to his character and requires justice.[42] Since freedom is a prerequisite of love, God cannot unilaterally determine that creatures love him or one another.[43] Thus, though he never desires evil to occur, God allows humans the freedom to choose evil, including the human decision to reject salvation, because to exclude freedom would be to exclude love, which would run counter to God's own character, since "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16).[44] Notice that, in this view, God's higher commitment to love is one that he cannot bring about without allowing freedom and, thus, the possibility of evil. God, in accordance with his universal love, wanted to save those who are finally lost but they are not willing (cf. Isa 66:4; Ezek 3:7; Matt 23:37; Luke 13:34).

For Piper's Calvinistic determinism, on the other hand, "the greater value is the manifestation of the full range of God's glory in wrath and mercy (Rom 9:22-23) and the humbling of man so that he enjoys giving all credit to God for his salvation (1 Cor 1:29)."[45] However, according to the logical conclusions of Piper's determinism, couldn't God accomplish this without the possibility, or reality, of evil? Could not God simply determine that all creatures recognize his glory to the utmost? If God unilaterally determines everything, as Piper and others suppose, then he could have willed the recognition "of the full range" of his glory and grace immediately.

One wonders, in this regard, why God would want to manifest his "glory in wrath," especially when the Bible contends that he does not afflict willingly nor desire that any perish (Lam 3:32-33; Ezek 18:32; 33:11; 2 Pet 3:9). Further, I see no rationale, from a determinist perspective, for viewing God's will as

[42]I categorically reject the way Piper frames the indeterminist view of this higher commitment. He states, "The answer given by Arminians is that human self-determination and the possible resulting love relationship with God are more valuable than saving all people by sovereign, efficacious grace." Ibid., 124. I am not concerned about "human self-determination" in and of itself, but I do care about the character of God as described by Scripture, and the significant freedom of humans provides the key to understanding God's character in light of the questions of theodicy.

[43]Many theologians, like Vincent Brümmer, believe that "love is necessarily free." *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 177. Likewise numerous exegetes contend that "coerced love is not love." See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (Dallas: Word, 2002), 481. Thus, "God never imposes His love by overriding human will." Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 350. Of course, many question whether "love" actually requires freedom since the nature of love is itself debated. This question far exceeds the scope of this essay. See, in this regard, Peckham, *The Concept of Divine Love in the Context of the God-World Relationship*.

[44]Accordingly, the "fact that all are not saved can be attributed to the stubbornness of the human will rather than to the weakness of the divine intent." Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus* (NAC 34; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 89. So Jerry L. Walls and Joseph Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*; idem, "Why No Classical Theist," 98.

[45]Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" 124.

"restrained." It seems to me that in Piper's view there should be no such restraint. God could bring it about that all recognize the fullness of his glory without demonstrating it historically, since, for Piper, God can unilaterally determine anything and no one can question his will.

Indeed, Piper's view fails to account for why a sovereign God would have complex desires at all, whereas the significant-freedom perspective faces no difficulty in this regard. The problem with Piper's view does not lie with the concept of God's commitment to a higher purpose, which results in complex desires. I agree that God "wills" some things that he does not ideally desire because of a greater purpose that he desires more (without ever actually wanting any evil to occur). However, Piper's view falters because it maintains that God's higher commitment *requires* all of the suffering and evil in the world. Taking Piper's view to its logical conclusion, it appears that God willed and unilaterally determined all evil and suffering, even the sexual abuse of children and the burning alive of infants to pagan gods, along with every other single event of evil, *because* God wanted to demonstrate his glory, grace, *and* wrath.[46] Although God did not want children to suffer such abuse, he wanted to demonstrate his glory, grace, and wrath more. However, why would such things bring glory to God in the first place, even indirectly?[47]

In this regard, Thomas McCall presents an analogy wherein a father who is able to fully control every desire and act of his seven children, commands them not to play with matches, yet determines that they do so and thereby set their playroom ablaze. He then bursts into the room and carries three of them to safety. When asked why he does not also save the other four, the father replies that "this tragic occurrence had been determined by him" and "worked out in exact accordance with his plan." He further reminds them that he had told them not to play with matches and thus the other four get what they deserve. He claims that he has compassion on their siblings but that "this has happened so that everyone could see how smart he is" and "how merciful he is" and "how just he is." McCall concludes, "Surely the fact that such a man is a monster is beyond dispute."[48]

[46]See Thomas McCall's criticism of Piper in this regard that, on determinism, every evil (such as a father's murder of his 5-year old daughter) happens because "God determines that they will occur exactly as they do." "I Believe in Divine Sovereignty," *Trinity Journal* 29NS (2008): 209. On the other hand, Piper should be commended for his pastoral concern in stating by way of response that "if my affirmation that God wills that sin come to pass . . . or that God wills that people die of starvation (Jer 11:22), requires of someone that they believe in their hearts that God sins or that God is evil, then I say to them, 'Do not yet believe what I say. Your conscience forbids it.'" John Piper, "I Believe in God's Self-Sufficiency: A Response to Thomas McCall," *Trinity Journal* 29NS (2008): 234.

[47]McCall further asks where the supposition that God must display his glory comes from. It is not "demanded by any passage of Scripture." "I Believe in Divine Sovereignty," 223.

[48]Thomas H. McCall, "We Believe in Divine Sovereignty: A Rejoinder to John Piper," *Trinity Journal* 29NS(2008): 241-242. As William Lane Craig comments, "the

Even if such a powerful analogy can be effectively answered, Piper's account faces further difficulty. Specifically, if God unilaterally determined everything, he would not need evil things to occur to bring him glory in the first place. He could will the full recognition of his glory immediately. Moreover, even if one could provide a rationale for why a God who unilaterally determines everything could not efficaciously will the full manifestation of his glory immediately, if God needed to will evil to arrive at the manifestation of his glory, then we must say that God needed all of the evil that has occurred in order to glorify his goodness. As David Bentley Hart puts it, "If God needs the supplement of evil to accomplish any good he intends" then "he is dependent upon evil in an absolute sense."[49] This presents a massive problem for the moral character of God and appears to contradict the deterministic understanding of God's sovereign, efficacious will.[50]

The free-will defense, on the other hand, agrees that God's overarching desire for the universal harmony of all beings in loving relationship trumps his desire, in the short-term, to exclude all suffering and evil. However, this

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deterministic view holds that even the movement of the human will is caused by God. God moves people to choose evil, and they cannot do otherwise. God determines their choices and makes them do wrong. If it is evil to make another person do wrong, then in this view God not only is the cause of sin and evil, but he becomes evil himself, which is absurd." William Lane Craig, "Response to Helseth," in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, ed. Dennis Jowers (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 61. Moreover, "[i]t 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." Ibid., 62. Cf. Jerry L. Walls, "Why No Classical Theist," 98; Stephen T. Davis, "Universalism, Hell, and the Fate of the Ignorant," *Modern Theology* 6/2 (1990): 190.

[49]"Providence and Causality: On Divine Innocence," in *Providence of God*, ed. Francesca Murphy and Philip Ziegler (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 49. See also McCall's similar criticism in "I Believe in Divine Sovereignty," 216-219. McCall argues that if evil is necessary for God's maximal glory, then God "would be imperfect without such evil," and this "pretty clearly violates robust accounts of both divine holiness and divine aseity" and, taken to its logical conclusions, makes God's existent contingent upon the actualization of this world. Ibid., 219-220. Further, Piper's account leaves one "wondering just why we should see sin and suffering as finally reprehensible." If evil is "that important for God" and his maximal glory, then "why should we detest sin, death, and the devil?" Ibid., 217. See Piper's response wherein he affirms divine aseity, saying that "God was fully God with no deficiencies before he created the world" and qualifies his earlier statements to say that God's "'maximal glorification' is essential to God" only "as he is acting in creation" such that "it does not contradict God's aseity to say that in the act of creation and redemption and judgment it is God's nature and glory and name to act freely in the display of grace and wrath." Piper, "I Believe in God's Self-Sufficiency," 229-230. Cf. Walter Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards's End of Creation: An Exposition and Defense," *JETS* 49/2 (2006): 269.

[50]On the moral goodness of God, see Baggett and Walls, *Good God*.

perspective claims that this is the case only because there is no other way to bring about his overarching purpose, and no other way exists precisely because his overarching purpose of love requires significant creaturely freedom.[51] That is, God could not have brought his ultimate purpose to fruition without at least the possibility of such suffering and evil, because doing so would have required eliminating significant creaturely freedom, which would itself remove the possibility of genuine love that was the higher commitment in the first place.[52] However, the free-will defense does not require that any evil and suffering actually take place in order to bring about God's purpose. That is, evil did not need to occur but occurred only because creatures exercised their freedom negatively. It would have been better had Satan never fallen, had Adam and Eve never sinned. Although God did not need evil to arise in order to manifest his character, God is manifesting his character of perfect love in dealing with evil once and for all, so that sin will never arise again and his ultimate purpose of eternal, universal harmony of love will ultimately come to fruition.

In all this, God calls for creatures to "judge" between himself and his people: What more could God have done that he has not done? (Isa 5:3-4). The indeterminist perspective answers unequivocally that God has done everything he could. He did not desire evil and he does not desire the destruction of anyone. This brings us back to perhaps the most crucial point regarding the validity of divine determinism: that God's desires are not always fulfilled is apparent in that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (cf. Ezek 18:23, 32; 33:11) and desires that none would perish (2 Pet 3:9; cf. 1 Tim 2:4–6). However, not all people will be saved, because God eventually gives people over to their desires (cf. John 3:18; Rom 1:24, 26, 28; 2:4–12; 1 John 2:17).[53] While God truly desires the salvation of each individual and works toward saving each one, some are lost because they reject God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ (cf. John 3:18).

In contrast, the determinist view lacks a compelling answer to the question, If God possesses the power to save everyone and wants to save everyone, why does he not do so?[54] Indeed, why is there any evil at all? The

[51]As Gregory Boyd puts it, "God gave us the capacity freely to reject his loving will *because it was necessary for love*" (emphasis his). "God Limits His Control," in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, ed. Dennis Jowers (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 190. Cf. Brümmer, *The Model of Love,* 177.

[52]As William Lane Craig puts it, "It is logically impossible to make someone freely do something." "The Coherence of Theism: Introduction," in *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide*, ed. William Lane Craig (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 211.

[53]For a compelling biblical argument against universalism, see I. Howard Marshall, "The New Testament Does Not Teach Universal Salvation," in *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*, ed. Robin Parry and Christopher Partridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 55-76.

[54]If, as Calvinists say, God deems it wise and good to elect unconditionally some

appeal to God's two wills fails to answer these questions, because it raises another question; that is, why would a God who unilaterally determines everything have two conflicting wills? That is, a God whose will does not take into account the wills of others should not have complex desires because he could unilaterally will that only good occur, never evil. As such, the existence of unfulfilled divine desires throughout Scripture does not make sense from a determinist perspective but is perfectly coherent within an indeterminist perspective, based on the understanding of significant creaturely freedom.

Conclusion and Implications for the Free-Will Defense

In addressing the issue of whether a free-will defense can be adequately supported by a biblical doctrine of significant creaturely freedom, two central theocentric questions have been addressed. First, does God always get what he wants? As seen above, the biblical data demonstrate that God's will is sometimes unfulfilled, which answers this question in the affirmative but raises a second, equally important question, *Why* are God's desires sometimes unfulfilled? This article has demonstrated that determinism does not provide an adequate response to these questions. The appeal to compatibilism does not explain the biblical instances of God's unfulfilled desires, since, if God unilaterally determines all events, he possesses the ability to bring to fruition only that which he desires. The appeal to God's complex desires as a way to address this issue does not suffice, because there appears to be no sufficient, internally coherent reason for complex divine desires within a deterministic worldview. From the standpoint of determinism, God ought to be able to bring about his higher commitment *and* will only the good, never evil.

Determinism thus fails to provide an adequate explanation of the numerous biblical texts that directly assert that God's will is sometimes unfulfilled. The determinist appeal to God's two wills fails because it lacks a compelling and coherent rationale for why God would have complex desires. In the indeterminist view, on the other hand, the complexity of God's will arises because God has granted humans significant freedom that impacts the course of history such that God's ideal will may be unfulfilled and has done so because love, which requires such freedom, would be excluded otherwise. The indeterminist can thus present a coherent and biblically adequate explanation of God's unfulfilled desires, affirming that God never desires evil, while maintaining the final triumph of God's plan that will ultimately bring everlasting harmony to the universe.

In all this, the biblical data regarding God's unfulfilled desires point to the authenticity of significant human freedom, which itself undergirds the free-will defense. God never does evil or desires evil of any kind but has allowed creatures to have significant freedom because of his love. God's preservation of love exacted the highest price from God himself (John 3:16; 15:13). Christ

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to salvation and not others, one may legitimately ask whether the offer of salvation to all is genuine. Is it made with heart? Does it come from real compassion? Is the willing that none perish a bona fide willing of love?" Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" 127.

willingly took the sins of the world on himself and, in doing so, has preserved both his justice and his love (cf. Rom 3:23-26; Rom 5:8). To God alone be the glory (*soli deo gloria*), because God is love!