

## DIVINE DETERMINISM AND THE PROBLEM OF HELL

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**ABSTRACT.** Divine determinism, though affirmed by many Calvinists, implicates God in the decisions people make that ultimately damn them to the terrible destiny of hell. In this paper, the authors argue that this scenario is a problem for divine determinism. The article contends that determinism is inconsistent with God's love and the Scriptures that explicitly state that God does not 'desire' anyone to go to hell. Even human love for others strongly suggests that God, who is 'love', will not determine anyone to hell. On the other extreme, those who argue for universalism, though appealing to Scripture, often do so with questionable exegesis.

**KEY WORDS:** Molinism, determinism, Calvinism, the problem of hell, love

### **Introduction**

Suppose that Jones is a good man who tries to live a moral life. He is an honest person who respects others and loves his family. He, however, does not believe in God. Suppose further that—because God determines the actions, thoughts, and will of every human person—the reason Jones lives a moral life is that God shapes him that way. Further, he is an atheist because God causally determined his unbelief. When Jones finally passes away, as a consequence of his rejection of Christ, God damns him to hell, a terrible state of eternal punishment. [The arguments in this chapter were inspired by Tim Stratton's doctoral research that is still in progress. He plans to use the arguments in this chapter (among others) in his PhD dissertation.]

Does God actually do this? If so, does it not seem grossly unfair? Can God be just in sending Jones to hell when his unbelief was ultimately determined by God? Indeed, why does God *make* anyone's destiny hell? Couldn't God simply predetermine that all persons go to heaven? These questions circumscribe the so-called *problem of hell* for the divine determinist. The basic problem is this: if divine determinism is true and God con-

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demns some people to hell, then is not God unjust and also not all-loving? Because this is a blunt way to state the serious problem and conclusion the divine determinist faces, it merits careful exegetical, theological and philosophical examination, beginning with a definition of ‘determinism’.

### What is Divine Determinism?

Divine determinism is usually defined as the view that God determines all things. This includes every event that happens, including the thoughts and actions of creatures. This accords with John Calvin’s words in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: ‘By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are pre-ordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation’ (Calvin 1845: 2206). Though Calvin does not use the words ‘divine determinism’ (he uses ‘predestination’), his view is that whatever a person does in life, that person does because God predestined the person to do it. One might extend Calvin’s definition as follows: Let  $P$  be any human person apart from Christ; let  $A$  be any action (including mental actions or thoughts), and let  $T$  be any time. Accordingly, divine determinism states that the following two propositions are true:

- (A1) Necessarily, if  $P$  performs  $A$  at  $T$ , then God predestined  $P$  to perform  $A$  at  $T$ .
- (A2) Necessarily, if God predestined  $P$  to perform  $A$  at  $T$ , then, if  $P$  has not yet performed  $A$  at  $T$ ,  $P$  will perform  $A$  at  $T$ .

The conclusion of this hypothetical syllogism highlights the fact that—according to divine determinism—every action that a creature has performed had to be performed. (A1) implies that every action performed was predestined by God or is part of God’s divine decree. (A2) implies, for example, that, if God has predestined a person to eat eggs for breakfast tomorrow, then it is impossible for him *not to* eat eggs for breakfast tomorrow. Importantly, since God predestines things according to his will, the phrase ‘God predestined  $P$  to perform  $A$  at  $T$ ’ implies both that God places  $P$  in circumstances in which  $P$  can perform  $A$  at  $T$ , and that God wants  $P$  to perform  $A$  at  $T$ . Thus, divine determinism entails the following proposition:

- (A3) Necessarily, if God places  $P$  in circumstances in which  $P$  can perform  $A$  at  $T$ , and if God wants  $P$  to perform  $A$  at  $T$ , then, if  $P$  has not yet performed  $A$  at  $T$ ,  $P$  will perform  $A$  at  $T$ .

The word ‘necessarily’ is important here. To say that a proposition  $p$  is necessary is to say that  $p$  is true in every possible world. In this context, a *possi-*

*ble world* is the way reality could have been. So, for example, *the number 1 is less than the number 2* is a necessary proposition because it is true in every possible world, while *Obama is the forty-fourth President of the United States of America* is not a necessary proposition (i.e., it is contingent) because it is false in at least one possible world.

Therefore, according to (A3), once (i) God has placed a person in circumstances in which he can eat eggs for breakfast on 1 December 2017 and (ii) God wants him to eat eggs for breakfast on 1 December 2017, then it becomes impossible for him not to eat eggs for breakfast on 1 December 2017. Notice, then, that according to (A3) his actions are not ultimately up to him; instead, they are entirely under God's control. Thus, (A3) is incompatible with libertarian free will, which requires that (at least some of) a person's actions are not necessitated by external factors. If libertarian free will is true, then even if God places *P* in circumstances in which *P* can perform *A* at *T*, and God wants *P* to perform *A* at *T*, it is possible that *P* could refrain from performing *A* at *T*.

In the remainder of this article, divine determinism will be understood as the view that (A1), (A2), and (A3) are true.

### The Problem of Hell

A problem for the determinist is hell, the final, eternal, and *terrible* state of the unrighteous (Matthew 13:41-42, 50; 18:8; Revelation 19:20; 20:14-15). Although it is a state of punishment, the essential quality of hell is eternal separation from God's presence, that is to say, it is not being in a loving, saving relationship with God (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Matthew 7:21-23; Daniel 12:2). The important fact here is that Scripture is clear that God does not want any human being to go to hell but wants all to spend eternity in a loving relationship with him. The apostle Peter put it this way: 'The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance' (2 Peter 3:9). [All translations of Scripture, unless otherwise indicated, come from the ESV.]

Difficult questions, then, naturally arise for the divine determinist: If God *wishes/desires* all people to be saved from hell, then why does God predetermine some people to reject Christ and then eternally punish them for rejecting him when this 'decision' was not theirs to make? Why does God not simply predetermine all persons to accept Christ and make it so? Those affirming divine determinism lack a satisfactory answer to these questions. More precisely, the divine determinist must deny God's omnibenevolence. One might set up the argument this way: Let *P* mean 'divine determinism is true'; let *Q* mean 'God wants all people to go to heaven'; let *R* mean 'all

people go to heaven'; and let  $S$  mean 'God is all-loving'. Accordingly, the argument would run as follows:

(B1) If divine determinism is true, then, if God wants all people to go to heaven, then all people go to heaven.

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|----|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. | $P \rightarrow (Q \rightarrow R)$ | Premise        |
| 2. | $(P \wedge Q) \rightarrow R$      | 1, Exportation |

(B2) Not all people go to heaven.

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|----|----------|---------|
| 3. | $\neg R$ | Premise |
|----|----------|---------|

(B3) Therefore, if God wants all people to go to heaven, then divine determinism is false.

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|----|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 4. | $\neg(P \wedge Q)$     | 2, 3, <i>Modus Tollens</i> |
| 5. | $\neg P \vee \neg Q$   | 4, De Morgan's Laws        |
| 6. | $Q \rightarrow \neg P$ | 5, Material Implication    |

(B4) If God is all-loving, then God wants all people to go to heaven.

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|----|-------------------|---------|
| 7. | $S \rightarrow Q$ | Premise |
|----|-------------------|---------|

(B5) God is all-loving.

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|----|-----|---------|
| 8. | $S$ | Premise |
|----|-----|---------|

(B6) Therefore, God wants all people to go to heaven.

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|----|-----|---------------------------|
| 9. | $Q$ | 7, 8, <i>Modus Ponens</i> |
|----|-----|---------------------------|

(B7) Therefore, divine determinism is false.

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|-----|----------|---------------------------|
| 10. | $\neg P$ | 6, 9, <i>Modus Ponens</i> |
|-----|----------|---------------------------|

The key premises in this argument are (B1), (B2), (B4), and (B5). As noted above, divine determinism is the view that God determines all things according to his will, and this includes every person's thoughts and actions. This implies (B1) because, if God desires all people to go to heaven (or to be saved), then God will causally determine that they repent, turn from their sins, and place their faith in Christ, a conversion process that guarantees their salvation (Acts 3:19; 16:31). Hence, according to divine determinism, if it is God's desire that all people turn to him, then all people must turn to him. Moreover, premise (B5) is uncontroversial among Christians; the vast

majority of determinists and non-determinists agree that God is all-loving. This leaves the two controversial premises—B2 and B4—to be defended.

### *Not All People Go to Heaven*

(B2) states that not all people go to heaven; some people reject Christ and go to hell. Is (B2) true? Clearly, many people do not convert to Christianity *in this life*. Not only is this fact evident by the numerous non-Christians in the world, but it is also implied by Jesus' remark that many people will not enter by the narrow gate of salvation (Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:22-30). This has led some to adopt *universalism* as a solution. They suggest that, although many do not accept Christ in this life, God's love will continue to draw those people in hell to him until they all repent and go to heaven. This is not the position of the authors, but, even if universalism were consistent with Scripture, affirming universalism does not help the divine determinist because it would still be inexplicable as to why God does not simply determine that everyone turn to Christ *in this life*. But the common arguments from Scripture for universalism break down when more carefully analyzed. One passage used to support universalism is Ephesians 1:9-10: '[God made] known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.' Universalists have interpreted the phrase 'to unite all things in him' as meaning that even those people in hell will be united with Christ and eventually go to heaven. The problem with this interpretation, however, is that the Greek word for 'unite' (*anakephalaioō*) means 'to bring together under one head'. This is why the NLT more precisely translates this phrase as follows: 'At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ.' While one could argue that the word could be translated as meaning that all will be saved—though that is denied by and is not harmonious with the rest of Scripture—the more likely interpretation is that even those condemned to hell are by their judgment 'under the authority of Christ'.

The second passage commonly used to support universalism is Philippians 2:10-11: 'At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' The universalist interprets this passage as meaning that every person will eventually repent and turn to Christ. Again, while the phrases 'to bow' and 'to confess' may mean 'to worship' or 'to repent', they more likely (consistent with the rest of Scripture) mean 'to acknowledge'. Consequently, a more plausible interpretation of this passage is that the unrighteous will resentfully acknowledge that Christ is Lord, similar to how James 2:19 speaks of the demons fearfully acknowledging God. Commenting on these two passages, Millard Erickson declares:

The reconciliation, the uniting of all things [in Ephesians 1:9-10], is not a restoration of fallen humanity to fellowship with God, but a restoration of harmony within the creation by, among other actions, putting sin into subjection to the Lord. It is not a matter of humans' accepting God, but of his quelling their rebellion. And while it is indeed true that every knee will bow and every tongue confess Christ as Lord, we must picture the wicked not as eagerly joining forces with the Lord, but as surrendering to a conquering army, so to speak. There will be an acquiescence in defeat, not a joyful commitment (Erickson 2013: 1134-1135).

Therefore—despite universalist arguments to the contrary—there are good grounds to believe, with the majority of scholars, that not all people will go to heaven.

*An All-Loving God Wants Everyone to Go to Heaven*

What about premise (B4)? Does God desire all people to go to heaven? In addition to the biblical passages noted earlier, there are several other texts which plainly teach this divine desire. The prophet Ezekiel, quoting God himself, says: 'As I live', declares the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?' (Ezekiel 33:11). The phrase 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked' makes a sweeping claim that applies to all wicked people, and it thereby rules out the possibility that this passage is only, per Calvin, meant 'to give the hope of pardon to them who repent' (Calvin 1845: 2254). The meaning of the passage is clear: God desires no person to be wicked and face spiritual death; God desires all people to be saved.

The very familiar verse—John 3:16—is another supportive text: 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.' It is difficult to see how the word 'world' (*kosmos*) could mean anything other than 'the inhabitants of earth' or 'all people'. There is simply no hint in John 3 that 'world' could mean 'only the elect'. Further, John uses the same term (*kosmos*) in the subsequent verse to refer to humanity: 'For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him' (John 3:17). The first occurrence of the word 'world' in this verse refers to the planet, and the second refers to the people who populate the planet. If one restricts 'world' to 'the elect' in John 3:16, one must do the same in John 3:17 and interpret the latter as claiming that God sent his Son into 'the society of the elect', which would be twisting the natural sense of the text. John 3:16, then, implies that God *desires* everyone to be saved.

One additional passage supportive of (B4) is 1 Timothy 2:1-6:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, *who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time (emphasis added).

The meaning of the emphasized phrase is apparent and needs no defense. However, Calvin argued that the words ‘all people’ do not mean ‘every individual person’ but, rather ‘all orders or types of people’, since Paul restricts the phrase in 1 Timothy 2:1-2 to ‘kings and all who are in high positions’ (Calvin 1845: 2255). To these authors this appears to be an example of one’s theological position shaping his exegesis. Is it not more natural to think that Paul is using the phrase ‘kings and all who are in high positions’ as an *emphasis*, that is to say, to stress to his readers that they should not neglect those in high positions? Indeed, it is obvious that the phrase ‘kings and all who are in high positions’ is *not* synonymous with the phrase ‘all types of people’, since there are many other types of people than kings and the elite. Furthermore, if one thinks that Paul makes this restriction to ‘all people’ in 1 Timothy 2:1, then one must interpret Paul in 1 Timothy 2:4 to mean that God only wants kings and all who are in high positions to be saved. Such an interpretation is clearly unintelligible. Therefore, the best interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:4 is that God *desires* everyone to go to heaven.

Apart from Scripture, the authors believe there is another reason to affirm (B4): it is intuitively obvious. Though we are not perfectly good and do not always love others as we ought, nevertheless we have enough love in our hearts to honestly say that we sincerely desire all people to go to heaven. If this is how two imperfect people feel about humanity, it seems intuitive that a perfect, morally good, all-loving being (i.e., God) would at least desire the same thing. Perhaps a more concrete way to put the issue is to take a moment to think about the loved ones in our lives, people whom we love so much that we are willing to die for them. With these people in mind, consider the following questions: Do we not want what’s best for them? Do we not want them to experience eternal paradise in heaven? If our answer is ‘no’, can we truly say we love them? Certainly not. However, if imperfect humans desire heaven for those they love—yes, for those whom they do not even know, and even for those who hate them—it seems obvious that an all-loving being—who is the ground of love (1 John 4:8)—would at the least desire that every human created in his image goes to heaven.

Is it without significance that doubting God’s great love has its roots in the very beginning? The original sin was not eating of a forbidden fruit, but

rather, doubting the omnibenevolence of God. This was the trap Satan lured Eve into in the Garden of Eden: ‘Did God really say’ (Genesis 3:1)? Satan convinced Eve to consider the idea that God was not really interested in her ultimate flourishing. The fact of the matter, however, is that God does desire the ultimate flourishing for each and every human being, and that would include his desire that they come to repentance and be with him in heaven.

The Genesis creation narrative provides reason to think that God’s great love extends to all people. Consider this supporting counterfactual: If Adam and Eve would have kept God’s commands (and all of their offspring followed suit), then every single human would experience ultimate flourishing and not experience any suffering. Thus, God created a world in which it was logically possible for all people to flourish. However, Eve doubted that God was omnibenevolent and desired the best for her. This doubt led to the fall of humanity, and terrible suffering has followed in its wake.

At this point, one might object that, although God loves everyone, he does not desire the ultimate best for everyone. One might contend—on the basis of Matthew 5:45—that, although God demonstrates some degree of love to everyone (common grace), God need not desire heaven for everyone. The problem with this thinking, however, is that, even if God only loved certain people to some extent, God would still want them to be saved. One must not forget about the nature of hell, which is an eternal separation from God. Since God is the ground of all that is good, hell is a separation from God and all that is good for all eternity. There is nothing good about hell, and this lack of goodness is a state of affairs which is infinite into the future; there is no end to suffering. Indeed, hell makes Hitler’s holocaust look like a summer picnic! At least in the Nazi concentration camps there were occasionally a few ‘goods’. There were some friendships, while others received some limited food and water. Some survived and eventually were set free. No one was forced to stay in Hitler’s concentration camps *forever*—in fact, these camps lasted from 1933–1945, and everyone in them eventually died or was set free. Hell, however, is far worse than Hitler’s concentration camps because hell is an eternal holocaust with no good and no escape. Why would God want anyone to end up there—especially those who had no ability to make a choice to follow or not follow him? Surely, as Scripture makes clear, God really does desire all people to be saved.

So, why aren’t all people saved? The Molinist’s answer is that humans have libertarian free will. In contrast, many divine determinists affirm that God desires the salvation of all people (as the Bible teaches), but that God also desires (chooses) some to be damned for eternity. In other words, one might say God has ‘competing desires’. That is a startling concept. Even as limited, weak, and finite humans, people know what it means to have ‘com-

peting desires'. For example, one can have a desire to be in shape and also have a desire to eat pizza daily. The desire to stay physically fit may be greater than the desire to eat pizza daily, influencing one to choose not to eat pizza often. So one shudders to think of God's having 'competing desires' regarding the salvation or denial of salvation to human beings. How can such thinking be harmonious with 1 Timothy 2:4 ('God desires all people to be saved') and John 3:16 ('God so loved the world that whoever believes'), as has been already noted above? Even more vexing to such a position are the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15: Christ 'died for all'. How can it be consistent, on the one hand, to affirm with Scripture that Christ died for *all* but at the same time say that some of the 'all' were causally determined by God to spend eternity in hell? Does not 'providing salvation for all', though also affirming that 'only those who accept it are saved' (Earle 1978: 358), imply that God not only *desires* all but offers to all his free gift of forgiveness?

Furthermore, a philosophical analysis of the nature of a *maximally great being* would reach this same conclusion. A maximally good and loving being would (at the least) desire all people to 'flourish' (Walls 2011: 95) and avoid *eternal* hell. Thus, there is good reason to believe that God desires all people to go to heaven.

In order to address the issue as to *why* God's desire for universal salvation is not achieved, some advocates of determinism argue that God has a *greater desire* than his desire for universal salvation. What do these determinists mean by a 'greater, competing desire'? The answer, according to determinists, is God's own glory, a desire that dwarfs God's lesser desire for universal salvation. More precisely, the full range of God's glory can only be displayed through his wrath and mercy, which requires that God send some people to hell while saving others.

This view, however, faces two difficulties. First, it does not address the crucial issue of why God would even have a desire for something (such as universal salvation) that would detract from or negate his glory. Anything that does not bring glory to God is evil. It seems those holding this 'competing desires' view inadvertently contend that God has a desire (albeit a lesser one) for evil.

Second, if God cannot have both of his desires, then it seems that he is not omnipotent, unless God's glory and universal salvation are logically incompatible. This is like stating that God's glory and his desire for all to be saved are on the same logically fallacious level as triangles with four corners and married bachelors. However, the idea that God's glory and universal salvation are logically contradictory is far from obvious. Surely God can be glorified if universal salvation is attained. After all, it seems that God would receive more glory if all humanity praised, worshiped, and loved him as

opposed to only a few. Indeed, even if God can only be glorified through his wrath by sending someone to hell, God could have created unconscious, soulless ‘persons’ and sent them to hell instead of sending conscious persons to hell. In the latter case, God’s wrath is demonstrated on the soulless person. However, if for some unknown reason, God can be glorified only by damning a conscious person to hell, then there is still no need for God to condemn all *human* persons, as he could simply condemn Satan alone to hell. Again, in this case God’s desire for glory and his desire for human universal salvation are both attained. Therefore, since these two desires are not logically incompatible, the divine determinist inadvertently dethrones God from the status of being omnipotent.

To some this may sound like a frivolous discussion for a very important subject. But consider the reasoning of the well-known determinist John Piper. He contends that God has competing desires between (i) all persons going to heaven and (ii) the *greater desire* of ‘the manifestation of the full range of God’s glory in wrath and mercy and the humbling of man so that he enjoys giving all credit to God for his salvation’ (Piper 2015). Perhaps the most serious theological problem with this view is the following: If it is logically impossible for God to have *both* his desire of glory *and* his desire of universal salvation, then the atonement of Christ was simply not enough. Piper’s position entails that Jesus merely picked up part of the check and left the *unconditionally hated* ‘non-elect’ to pick up the rest of the tab and suffer the holocaust of hell into the infinite future. In other words, the cross of Christ—together with the damned in hell—is what it takes to secure salvation for a few. Accordingly, Jesus’ atonement is only a *necessary* condition but not a *sufficient* condition to make salvation possible for the elect.

To the above discussion, Piper adds: ‘The difference between Calvinists and Arminians lies not in whether there are two wills in God, but in what they say this higher commitment is’ (Piper 2015). In other words, Piper argues that the Arminian (notice that he does not deal with Molinism) claims that for humans to *freely* choose to love God is more valuable to God than universal salvation. Unfortunately, he fails to recognize that the former is exactly what salvation is. There are no competing desires here but, rather, one desire, namely, for all people to freely choose to love God. That is to say, salvation is found in a true love relationship with God. True love is attained when two people freely enter into a covenant. If a person is kidnapped against her will and forced into a relationship, then true love is not a part of that relationship. One is left with something akin to what Patrick Carnes called the ‘Stockholm Syndrome’ (Carnes 1978: 34). This would be psychological trauma, not true love. Since it is logically impossible to *force* someone to *freely* do something, God cannot do this, as God cannot do the logically impossible (e.g., creating something that is not contingent

upon him). Thus, God cannot force someone to freely love him in a real and genuine sense. However, when one freely chooses to love God (since God loved them first), they are saved. This is the ultimate good a human can experience, and it brings God ultimate glory—much more than a ‘puppet show’.

Therefore, divine determinism implies that we should not be angry at the damned but, rather, we ought to be extremely grateful that they would suffer eternal hell for our benefit and in our place. In fact, when determinists praise Jesus for all he has done, they should probably take a moment to thank the damned in hell as well. Obviously, this is utterly preposterous, but it highlights the point that the cross was both necessary and sufficient to secure the possibility of salvation for all humanity. The cross was enough. God does not need anyone to suffer hell into the infinite future to receive his glory.

If one remains committed to determinism, then, as Walls has said, it is better for the determinist to simply ‘bite the bullet’ (as Arthur Pink has done) and be honest and admit that, according to his philosophy, God does not love all people (Walls 2013). Therefore, if one believes that God really does love all people, then one ought to reject any view stating that God causally determines the eternal destinies of all humans. We ought to affirm that humans are genuinely responsible for their choices.

Perhaps a clarification is in order. The authors believe that heaven and hell are real states of affairs; however, it might be better to first think of heaven and hell not so much as places but, rather, as statuses of relationship. Heaven, then, is an eternal love relationship with our creator, and hell is eternal divorce or separation from God. ‘Since God first loved us’ (1 John 4:19), then it seems rational to think that God desires all humans made in his image to love him in return. However, since God is a ‘gentleman’, he will not force anyone into this relationship (that is not love, and it is logically impossible to force a person to freely love). Consequently, God so loved the world (every person), and the atonement of Christ made salvation possible for everyone, but each person has a choice to resist God’s grace or not. Each person can either say ‘Yes’ to God’s spiritual marriage proposal or reject it and say ‘No thanks’.

The Bible is clear: ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:16). Thus, God’s nature is loving. As Erickson explains: ‘God’s love is an unselfish interest in us for our sake... Jesus laid down his life not only for his friends... but also for his enemies, who despised and rejected him... He is concerned with our good for our own sake, not for what he can get from us’ (Erickson 2013: 263). This is the epitome of a perfect Father. God will not force anyone to be in a relationship with him; one must make the choice to enter that heavenly love relationship or not. As noted above, that is what a saving relationship is:

when a human freely chooses to love God in return, then a true covenant of love obtains. Consider, for example, Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Here the father loves his son similar to the way God loves humanity (cp. John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Jesus' purpose is that his listeners will begin to understand the way God loves all people. The father's love was always available to his son. Although the son left and turned his back on his father, the father's love never departed. The father never stopped loving his son with all of his heart. However, the son made choices—free choices—which separated him from the perfect love of his father. It was not until the son made the choice to come back to his father's love and to love his father in return, that their relationship was restored. Here is a counterfactual to consider: If the son would have never made the free choice to return to his father, then their relationship would have never been restored.

Coming back to the original question: Is (B4) true? Is it true that if God were all-loving, then he would desire all people to be in heaven? The authors believe the answer is 'Yes'. If God genuinely loves each and every human, then God desires each and every human to freely choose to love him in return for all eternity. This makes perfect sense of all the biblical and philosophical data.

### **Conclusion**

If it is true that God loves all humans and that he desires all humanity to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4)—as argued above—then this state of affairs is ultimately inconsistent with divine determinism. But the Bible is clear that God exhaustively predestines all things (Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:5, 11). Unfortunately, many Christians wrongly assume that, if God predestines all things, then God causally determines all things. However, we have shown that this is an incoherent conflation that Christians ought to reject.

With this in mind, we can add the following steps to our argument:

- (B8) God is completely sovereign and predestines all things.
- (B9) Therefore, divine predestination and divine determinism are not to be conflated.
- (B10) The best explanation of the data is Molinism.

So, why think the final abductive conclusion is true? Well, Molinism is the inference to the best explanation because it affirms two essential ingredients, namely, (1) human libertarian free will (God does not causally determine all things), and (2) God's possession of eternal middle knowledge. If God has eternal middle knowledge, then God can create a world in which he knows logically prior to his creative decree how every human could,

would, and will *freely* choose. Thus, God can predestine all that will occur without causally determining all that will occur. We will address this further in the next article.

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