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Is God Responsible for Sin?

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Thesis

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Imagine being pulled over for speeding (legitimate speeding). Now continue to imagine that the penalty for speeding is not a simple fine, but an execution. No one would disagree that speeding is a violation of the law. However, most would state that execution is far too extreme for such a minor infraction. The establishment of a legal speed limit is intended to keep people safe. However, speed limits are imposed with the understanding that people will inevitably violate that law, receive a citation and be required to pay a fine. If the government knew that the legal speed limits would be broken, then why establish a speed limit at all? Why not have speed recommendations instead? In this way, no one would be guilty and be forced to pay a fine. Is there some ulterior motive for creating laws?

Would a modern leader enact a law, knowing without any doubt that the law will be broken? How about establishing the death penalty for breaking the law? As for a minor infraction would death be an absurd punishment? Most would even contend that the death penalty for a rule that was foreknown to be broken would be far more than extreme. Such a policy would be immoral by human standards. The premise that a harsh penalty is due for the violation of a command that is foreknown to be broken is the basis for the problem that is being addressed by this paper.

### Statement of the Problem

Erik Weilenberg states that if God foreknew that man would violate His commandments, how is God not adding to the presence of evil?<sup>1</sup> The statement assigns God as the author of evil in the world, contradicting the belief held by Christianity that God is all-good. Weilenberg's

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<sup>1</sup> ReasonableFaithOrg, "William Lane Craig v Erik Wielenberg | 'God & Morality' | NC State - Feb 2018," *YouTube* (YouTube, August 17, 2018), 47:10, last modified August 17, 2018, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHhmuqBW6Dw>.

claim, although short, contains three major problems that must be addressed in order to refute the attack on God.

First, is the problem of sin. The topic of sin is one that is linked to the problem of evil and has been debated for hundreds of years. J. L. Mackie has demonstrated that the main point of the debate is rooted in the belief that there is an omnipotent and wholly good God.<sup>2</sup> In other words, how can a wholly good God allow such evils to exist within the world? However, this paper will not be discussing whether the various problems of evil cause a real difficulty for believing in the existence of an all-powerful, all-good God. The focus will be to address the issuance of commands to humanity based upon the foreknowledge that these commands will be broken.

The second issue presented within Weilenberg's claim is embedded within the purpose of the divine commands issued to humanity by God. The problem of the commands is related to the speed limit illustration with the harsh penalty that was discussed previously. Why impose a law foreknown to be broken? Some would claim that God only wants to further punish humanity, in doing so God develops rules that cannot be kept. Similarly, the penalty for violating the commands holds an eternal price. The book of Romans declares that "for the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23, ESV) Richard Dawkins has contended that God is an "unforgiving control-freak, vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser."<sup>3</sup> Even Luther claimed that the law did not create righteousness, but sin.<sup>4</sup> Though Luther and Dawkins are on two opposite ends of the

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<sup>2</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams, eds., *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 25.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2006), 51.

<sup>4</sup> Luther's Works, American Edition, Eds. Pelikan and Lehmann (Philadelphia, PA: Concordia and Fortress, 1955.): Theses 23 quoted in Nicholas Hopman, "The Heidelberg Disputation; April 26, 1518," *Lutheran Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 436.

spectrum regarding belief in God, the statements provide examples of how the world explains the laws that are issued by God.

The third issue presented by Weilenberg's claim is found in the realm of the human will and divine omniscience. Weilenberg states that God is issuing commands that He knows will be broken, which would make God responsible for sin. If God already knows the outcome of all choices that will be made, can humanity choose the opposite of what God knows will happen? Not only does Weilenberg's claim assert that God is responsible for sin, but that God is also bringing judgment on the world for a law one has no choice but to break. An additional problem surfaces, if there is no free-will amongst humans, why wouldn't God create humanity with perfect will?<sup>5</sup>

#### Statement of Purpose

The problem of evil and sin is centered on the concept that there is an all-powerful, and benevolent God who knows all things, and if God is all-powerful and loving then there should be no evil found within this world.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this paper is to refute the claim of Weilenberg regarding God's divine foreknowledge, the implementation of commands to humanity that will be violated, and the responsibility of sin. This will be accomplished similarly to John Feinberg's position on developing a theodicy rooted in the goodness of God.<sup>7</sup> Typically, the topic of the problem of evil remains focused on the presence of evil regarding the existence of God. However, this paper will be taking a different approach by addressing the purpose of the divine commands and demonstrating the compatibility of the human will and divine foreknowledge.

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<sup>5</sup> Paul W. Franks, "Divine Freedom and Free Will Defenses." *The Heythrop Journal* 56, no. 1 (January 2015): 111.

<sup>6</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams, eds., *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 2.

<sup>7</sup> John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problems of Evil*, rev. and expanded ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), 490.

### Statement of Importance of the Problem

Lifeway Research Study found that “approximately sixty-six percent of young men and women raised in the church walk away from faith completely while in college.”<sup>8</sup> The percentage that Lifeway presents is a substantial number of people who walk away from following Christianity. Perhaps the Lifeway poll has too narrow of a focus, limited to a young age demographic. The leading reason that was identified for the withdrawal from the Church was moving away from parents such as heading off to college. Yet, simply leaving the parents' house may not be the sole reason that one might walk away from the Church. Perhaps the active opposition of God within the world is a contributing factor, not to mention the many professors within academia vehemently opposing God. These academics have a built-in trust that is established via one's credentials within the collegiate realm. Credentials aside, many of the arguments made against God may seem to be logical especially if one is not prepared for the argument. No, leaving home cannot be the only reason for leaving the church; a closer look may reveal that many are walking away from God because the atheistic arguments appear strong. Recently, Aaron Rodgers professed in an interview that “God does not resonate with me.”<sup>9</sup> Rodgers claimed that the number of immoral events that occur within the world was evidence that there was not an all-powerful God.<sup>10</sup> Developing questions about why God would or would not allow events to happen is helpful to building one's Christian faith. However, often when a person has a hard question to work through, the challenging thoughts are met with inadequate responses, such as, “just have faith.”

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<sup>8</sup> Aaron Earls, “Most Teenagers Drop Out of Church as Young Adults,” *LifeWay Research*, (January 2019), accessed November 25, 2020. <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/01/15/most-teenagers-drop-out-of-church-as-young-adults/>.

<sup>9</sup> Aaron Rodgers, interview by Danica Patrick, December 26, 2019, accessed November 10, 2020. <https://www.stitcher.com/show/pretty-intense>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



The problem that Weilenberg's claim poses through the assignment of responsibility of sin to God is important to dissect, because of the apparent contradictions within the Bible. Weilenberg's claim takes the accusations even further, asserting that humanity does not have free-will. The idea of free-will means that human beings are able to make choices to act or not act without external coercion.<sup>11</sup> The basis of the argument between philosophers and theologians is the debate that God's foreknowledge removes human free-agency.<sup>12</sup> Though arduous, Christians must be prepared to provide answers to such a difficult questions as well as a logical defense against new claims against God when one arises. N. T. Wright concluded that even postmodernists cannot escape the problem of evil; however, they struggle to assign responsibility to it.<sup>13</sup>

#### Statement of Position on the Problem

The position of this paper is in support of God's commands that were issued to mankind with the foreknowledge that they would be violated as the issuance does not impinge upon the goodness of God. Weilenberg's claim will be refuted by demonstrating that the commands issued to humanity with divine foreknowledge are not the source of sin. The divine commands will be demonstrated to be an aspect of objective morality that provide support of humanity to make decisions for themselves.

Objective morality regarding the divine commands given to humanity is important to understand. Wes Morriston asserted through the topic of divine command theory that if God is perfect, then His commands are morally good as well.<sup>14</sup> This paper will utilize the premise that

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<sup>11</sup> Peter van Inwagen. *Thinking about Free Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2017), 61.

<sup>12</sup> Nathan Rockwood, "Foreknowledge Without Determinism," *Sophia* 58, no. 2 (June 2019): 103.

<sup>13</sup> N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 31.

God issued commands are morally good because God is perfectly good. Additionally, the perfectly good nature of God's commands will be demonstrated to be part of the foundations of human morality, which would implicate humanity in performing morally wrong actions when a divine command is violated.

The problem of the human will and God's foreknowledge is found within the apparent incompatibility of the two concepts. Individual choices are not controlled by God, His level of knowledge is but an observation and not the cause of the choice being made.<sup>15</sup> Different avenues regarding the exercise of the will that will be discussed include, compatibilism (also known as soft determinism) and libertarianism; each will contribute unique concepts to resolve the problem. Compatibilism (also known as soft determinism) is a branch off of determinism. Determinism maintains that God directs the choices of humanity. Compatibilism is grounded in the desires of the hearts of humanity.<sup>16</sup> God is able to know the choices that humanity will make, because He knows the hearts of man. (1 Kings 8:39b, ESV) On the other side of the coin is libertarianism which preserves human's ability to choose uncoerced, and supports the divine foreknowledge of God. Libertarianism is able to support both free-will and divine foreknowledge because man is not obligated to perform what God already knows will happen. Libertarianism and determinism can be taken to the extreme as seen in hard determinism and open theism. Both hard determinism and open theism create many problems for theological truths, and the understanding of the ability for humanity to be able to make decisions.

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<sup>14</sup> Wes Morriston, "What If God Commanded Something Terrible? A Worry for Divine-Command Metaethics," *Religious Studies* 45, no. 3 (September 2009): 250.

<sup>15</sup> Robert F. Brown. "Divine Omniscience, Immutability, Aseity and Human Free Will," *Religious Studies* 27, no. 3 (September 1991): 287.

<sup>16</sup> Ciro De Florio and Aldo Frigerio, "God, Evil, and Alvin Plantinga on the Free-Will Defense," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 2013): 80.

### Limitations/Delimitations

The limitations and delimitations of this paper are confined to the single claim made by Weilenberg regarding the issuance of commands to humanity that God foreknew would be broken. Encompassed within the claim are three sub-topics. The first subtopic will address the foundations and the concerns with morality and sin. The second subtopic will examine problems that arise regarding the divine commands issued by God. The third and final subtopic will address foreknowledge and the adverse effects on the human will. Additionally, this paper will further deliberate on objective morality and the correlation to the commands issued by God as well as how the human will is connected to God's foreknowledge.

Limitations were established on the topic of free-will to ensure a narrow focus to the applicability on Weilenberg's claim. Free-will has an extensive range of thoughts on the connection to the divine; only determinism, libertarianism, and compatibilism are up for discussion within this thesis. Topics outside the scope of this paper that will not be deliberated will include such topics as the presence of moral and natural evils. This paper will not address the notion of divine *voluntarism*, where God's commanding some event (say rape or murder) would make these actions morally permissible.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the topic of free-will will only be discussed to the extent to adequately understand the connection to foreknowledge. A description of all of the different philosophies on free-will and the issues with each is not within the capacity of this paper. The purpose of this paper is not to dive into the details of multiple philosophical aspects of free-will but to concentrate on and refute a single claim.

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<sup>17</sup> Stephen C. Evans. *God and Moral Obligation*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 92.

## Method

### **Research Methods**

The problem of evil has been thoroughly discussed for centuries by theologians in far more detail than the scope of this thesis. This thesis refutes the atheistic claim of God's contribution to sin, a well-discussed topic with plenty of resources. The research method that will be employed is rooted in a descriptive study comparing and analyzing the data of subsequent papers of experts within the outlined fields of study. This paper will not simply be restating theistic claims from previous theologians, but synthesizing multiple data sources to build a case to refute Weilenberg's claim. The defense will incorporate both theistic and atheistic claims to refute the claim of Weilenberg, while preserving the attributes of God.

### **Tests or Questionnaires**

Tests or questionnaires will not be utilized for this thesis topic.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for the thesis will be through on-line databases, as well as on-hand theological books applicable to the topics of objective morality, free-will, and divine commands. The main database search will include books, dissertations, journal articles, interviews, and lectures. There is no specified date limitation that will be imposed due to many great theologians having contributed to the topic for centuries.

### **Data Analysis**

The data will be synthesized by the topical method. Each source will be screened for applicability to the topic while maintaining a diverse selection of articles. After identifying a collection of relevant sources, the data will then be employed to support the position within each

sub-topic. Each section will correlate to another to create a proper theodicy against the claim that God is responsible for sin by creating commands that will be violated.

### Chapter Division and Summary

The chapters within the paper are positioned to refute Weilenberg's claim. There are three problems that will be addressed to adequately refute the claim in its entirety. Each problem is formed into a chapter that adequately explains the problem and provides a solution. Lastly, the conclusion will connect each problem and support the final defense against the claim.

### Chapter 1 – Foundations of Sin and Morality

The first chapter will address the foundations of both sin and morality, the problems presented by Weilenberg's claim. Weilenberg is an atheist, who has presented a complex question to work through. However, Weilenberg accepts universal morals found within a godless environment.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, this chapter will address the attempt to re-assign the responsibility of sin to God instead of mankind. Chapter one is the branch off of the conversation of the problem of evil. The claim that God is responsible for sin by giving commands that are known to be violated attempts to link God as the source of evil and is rooted in the issuance of commands and foreknowledge.<sup>19</sup> To respond to such claims, the refute will demonstrate that God is the foundation of morality not evil.<sup>20</sup> The secular world would attempt to claim that people are the source of morality as humans understand it.<sup>21</sup> Since God will be demonstrated to be the source of

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<sup>18</sup> Marek Pepliński, "Erik J. Wielenberg, Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe by Marek Pepliński," *Forum Philosophicum* 12, no. 1 (January 2007): 197.

<sup>19</sup> James W. Felt, "God's Choice: Reflections on Evil in a Created World," *Faith and Philosophy* 1, no. 4 (October 1984): 375.

<sup>20</sup> David Baggett, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 143.

<sup>21</sup> Sondra L. Hausner, "Society, Morality, Embodiment," *Durkheimian Studies* 23, no. 1 (January 2017): 4.

morality, all commands that are issued to humanity are the establishment of right from wrong.<sup>22</sup> This chapter will conclude with establishing how God is the only source of moral obligations.<sup>23</sup>

## **Chapter 2 – Commands: Problem and Purpose**

Chapter two will be the central basis for the subsequent chapters. The problems and the purpose of divine commands are vital and therefore will be acknowledged. The purpose of the divine commands is closely linked to morality and the ability for humans to exercise their will. If the commands issued by God are not brought to the conversation, this essentially would be similar to building a table with three legs, as the theodicy would not be able to stand on its own.

Baggett and Walls discussed the potential of divine commands being arbitrary, depend on the whims of a divine being.<sup>24</sup> Condemnation and fear are byproducts of such a deity. God is angered by sin and therefore punishes those who violate His commands.<sup>25</sup> Other allegations view power and control as the purpose, meaning the commands are being utilized to keep the population under control.

Upon review of the accusations assigned to the commands, the Christian perspective on the purpose of the commands will be presented. The purpose of the commands that were issued by God will be shown to serve multiple purposes. First, the law provided a means of getting to the righteousness of God.<sup>26</sup> Second, “the law provided means of atonement for transgressions

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<sup>22</sup> Dennis Plaisted, “On Justifying One’s Acceptance of Divine Command Theory,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 81, no. 3 (June 2017): 325.

<sup>23</sup> Christian B. Miller, “In Defense of a Supernatural Foundation to Morality: Reply to Shermer,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1384, no. 1 (2016): 91.

<sup>24</sup> David Baggett and Jerry Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 32.

<sup>25</sup> Yingling Liu and Paul Froese, “Faith and Agency: The Relationships Between Sense of Control, Socioeconomic Status, and Beliefs About God,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 59, no. 2 (June 2020): 313.

<sup>26</sup> Georges Massinelli, “Christ and the Law in Romans 10: 4,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (2015): 710.

through expiatory sacrifices.”<sup>27</sup> Lastly, the commands demonstrate their applicability to building the foundation for objective morality, as well as show the fallen nature of mankind concerning God and each other.

### **Chapter 3 - Foreknowledge, and the Connection to Human Will**

Building upon the previous constructed foundation, chapter three will be important as foreknowledge was specifically addressed in Weilenbergs claim. Free-will is a difficult topic to bridge, especially when attempting to link it to objective morality and the source of sin. Free-will is to be understood as the ability for humanity to make decisions uncoerced.<sup>28</sup> The conversation of the will is important to build up the theodicy; if the free-will of humanity fails, then other theological aspects of God may be brought into question. If humans are not free moral agents then the ownership of sin is on God.<sup>29</sup> The perspective of morally right and wrong choices has a deeper sense of meaning when one can choose.<sup>30</sup> There would be no morally wrong choice if there was never freedom to choose.

The chapter will address the nature of the human will regarding its connection to foreknowledge. If God is known to be omniscient any choice that was made is not really a choice. Furthermore, if a choice is influenced by God, then it would appear the freedom of the will has been violated.<sup>31</sup> Two major aspects of free-will must be introduced including the positions of both compatibilism and libertarians. Through the free-will defense, structured by

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<sup>27</sup> James P. Ware, “Law, Christ, and Covenant: Paul’s Theology of the Law in Romans 3:19-20.” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 62, no. 2 (2011): 514.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Van Inwagen. *Thinking about Free Will*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2017), 61.

<sup>29</sup> Seth Pryor, “Trinity, Freedom, & Evil: The Importance of the Triune Nature of God in the Problem of Evil.” Order No. 10842500, Liberty University (December 2017): 46.

<sup>30</sup> Sean Meslar, “Transworld Depravity and Divine Omniscience,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 77, no. 3 (June 2015): 207.

<sup>31</sup> Andy Reynolds and Nicholas Placido, “A Comparison of Free Will, Human Agency, and the Transtheoretical Model,” *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 39, no. 1 (2020): 63.

Plantinga, the argument will demonstrate that humans are free to choose and act.<sup>32</sup> Whether the choice is corrupt or pure, one will become aware that free-will is involved. The freedom of the will remains critical to God's creation. There is no contention, God could make a human choose as He would want them to. However, being able to choose, and fail from time to time is more beneficial, than a race of created robots.<sup>33</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion of this paper and will connect each of the preceding chapters together, demonstrating how each chapter has contributed to the refutation of Weilenber's claim against God. The end result of this paper will be to effectively refute the claim of Weilenberg. Research performed on both the theist and atheist aspects of the topic will provide a comprehensive approach where all available information has been taken into account before arriving at a conclusion. God will be shown to be the founder of morality, with the responsibility of sin resting on humanity because of the freedom to choose evil. Additionally, the divine commands issued by God are provided to show humanity their fallen nature and need for a savior.

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<sup>32</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977, 1974), 29.

<sup>33</sup> Douglas R. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 632.



## CHAPTER ONE: FOUNDATIONS OF SIN AND MORALITY

### Introduction

Is God the foundation of sin or morality? God established the commands to be followed by humanity, and emplaced the rules with the knowledge that humanity would not obey His rules. Any action against God's divine character or a violation of His law is sin. Is God the founder of sin since He has established the rules? James Felt describes God's role in the development of sin through the analogy of a modern playwright. "A divine playwright would be the direct author of every act, including morally evil acts."<sup>34</sup> Weilenberg asserts that God is responsible for sin by issuing commands that He knew would be broken by humanity.

Christianity is the opposing party who suggests that God is the foundation of human morality. Clearly God cannot be both the author of sin and the originator of morality as the concepts are contradictory to one another. God is depicted through the Bible as being all that is good and right; God's righteous character is the fabric of morality. The notion that God is responsible for the creation of sin would negate God's goodness. Furthermore, if God is the creator of sin, then God cannot be exclusively good having willingly produced the seed that leads to eternal condemnation. The accusation that God is the creator of sin, similar to the problem of evil, presumes that God is responsible since He is all-powerful and allows sin to happen; a contradiction to God's omniscience, omnipotence, and moral goodness.<sup>35</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to effectively demonstrate that God is not the founder of sin, but that He is in fact the basis of morality.

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<sup>34</sup> James W. Felt, "God's Choice: Reflections on Evil in a Created World," *Faith and Philosophy* 1, no. 4 (October 1984): 370.

<sup>35</sup> Ciro De Florio and Aldo Frigerio, "God, Evil, and Alvin Plantinga on the Free-Will Defense," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 2013): 76.

## Foundations of Sin

The word *sin*, thought to be exclusively connected with Christianity, often evokes an adverse reaction. Elmer Towns has stated that “some would consider the concept of sin as an illusion or archaic dogma, or as weakness in human ability.”<sup>36</sup> However, sin is not a weakness or dogma, and sin is not a word that is limited to Christianity; sin applies to all of humanity on earth. Sin is a part of every human and infects and corrupts all aspects of human character.<sup>37</sup> The Greek word for sin is *hamartano* which translates to “missing the mark, err, or offend.”<sup>38</sup> The mark that is referenced is the holy standard of God, as set forth through God’s commands. The inability to uphold God’s holy standard is known as sin. Towns give an explanation that expresses the depth of sin in connection with the commands of God. “But sin is more than breaking the law, for that only involves an act against a standard. Since the law is an extension of God, and sin is in juxtaposition to it, then sin is anything that is opposed to or it is not in keeping with the nature or will of God.”<sup>39</sup> The direct opposition to God’s standard warrants divine punishment, and the book of Romans illustrates that “for the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23, ESV) Sin creates a compounding effect on the human to God relationship since one sin leads to other sins, and there is nothing to reconcile the offense toward God, except the help of God Himself.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *Theology for Today* (Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2008), 485.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 485.

<sup>38</sup> James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: with Greek and Hebrew Dictionary* (Nashville: Manna Publishers, n.d.), 264.

<sup>39</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *Theology for Today* (Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2008), 485.

<sup>40</sup> Angelika Berlejung, “Sin and Punishment: The Ethics of Divine Justice and Retribution in Ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament Texts,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 69, no. 3 (October 2015): 273.

## Is God the Source of Sin?

Perhaps tracing the source of sin back to the origin can help determine who is responsible for the cause? Some believe that sin can be easily traced back to God. The proposal submits that sin would be non-existent if God had not imposed rules and elaborate tests. By enacting the rules and tests, God has set a moral trap for humanity. If God had not built a trap for mankind, then people would not have fallen victim to sin. Weilenberg elaborates on the hypothesis by claiming that divine foreknowledge and issued commands shift the responsibility of sin to God. The characteristic of divine foreknowledge seems to provide more evidence that God is responsible for sin. The accusation contradicts the character of God. “A being who would not prevent suffering when it was within his power to do so would not qualify as perfectly good.”<sup>41</sup> The inconsistency calls into question the validity of the Bible and Christianity. If the shifting of responsibility of sin to God is successful, then what other damage would be done to Christianity? The entire faith will begin to crumble from the number of contradictions that will have been created between the divine attributes of God and His implementation of commands that became the vehicle for the condemnation of humanity.

The transferal of the responsibility of sin to God appears to be a fatal blow to Christianity, by demonstrating that God wanted to condemn people by implementing rules that would lead to humanity’s judgment. However, the attempt to shift the responsibility of sin to God signifies a surrender of free-will that most people may not consider. Claiming divine foreknowledge as the means of determining the responsibility of sin jeopardizes all human free-will. If God had not issued the commands, then humanity could not choose between God or sin. Additionally, if divine foreknowledge affected free-moral agency, then it would impact non-

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<sup>41</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams, *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 40.

moral actions as well. Knowledge of all actions would cover both moral and non-moral as well (no matter how small the choice may seem). Consider the entire human experience redefined without choice. One's life is made up of choices, and to relinquish free-will would be an inconceivable notion. Yet, one cannot cleave to free-will while assigning the responsibility of sin to God. Mankind must take ownership for the actions that have been chosen and subsequent repercussions.

### **Man is the Source of Sin**

Freedom of choice is a major attribute that defines the human experience and is vitally important to determine the source of sin on earth. Sin is a violation of the character and will of God, and the laws and commands of God are an extension of who God is.<sup>42</sup> Sin is terrible and stands in violation of God, but sin has a significance. Accepting the imperative is difficult to concede. One should never strive for sin, but without the presence of sin, humanity would not know love. Baggett and Walls made the statement concerning evil "beginning with the Garden of Eden, if not in the primordial fall of Satan, evil has played a vital, if not central role in the drama of sin and redemption."<sup>43</sup> The last word of Baggett and Walls's statement is perhaps the most impactful, "redemption." God's perfect love is demonstrated through the fallen state of humanity and the need for redemption from sin.

Can one conclude that without sin there would be no need for redemption? Perhaps, yet one must consider that without sin humanity would never know the depths of the love of God. Additionally, without sin, the presence of free choice would not be a reality. Without a choice to make, how can one understand the concepts of love and the depths of God's love for humanity?

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<sup>42</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *Theology for Today* (Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2008), 485.

<sup>43</sup> David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 81

Having the option to experience God's best for human life exists through free choice. The attempt to shift the responsibility and assign blame to another is a common human reaction when found to be guilty of violating a law or command, this can be seen in the book of Genesis. Adam had eaten the apple that God had instructed Adam not to eat. When God confronted Adam about the sin, Adam tried to shift the responsibility first to Eve, then back to God. (Genesis 3:12, ESV) The problem is that humanity wants to believe that there is no divine standard in which they are being judged. However, mankind is guilty and freely chooses to violate the divine commands of God, which in turn must bear the weight of responsibility.

### Foundations of Morality

The word *moral* is defined by *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* as “an informal public system applying to all rational persons, governing behavior that affects others, having the lessening of evil or harm as its main goal, and including what are commonly known as the moral rules, moral ideals, and moral virtues.”<sup>44</sup> John Turri further breaks morality into five categories of moral responsibility which are “responsibilities of actions; outcome; blame of outcome; deserving blame of outcome; deserving suffering.”<sup>45</sup> Most people may not consciously think about Turri's five categories because the concept of right and wrong may seem to be a simple one to understand and is even taught to children at a young age. The notion appears to be so easy to understand that people perceive morality as an automatic function wherein people inherently know what is right or wrong. The automatic function can be easily thought of as moral compass. An actual compass under normal circumstances will always point to the North, and the moral compass is said to respond in the same manner by pointing towards morally right actions.

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<sup>44</sup> Bernard Gert, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy 3<sup>rd</sup> ed*, ed. Robert Audi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): *Divine Attributes*.

<sup>45</sup> John Turri, “Compatibilism can be Natural,” *Consciousness and Cognition* 51 (May 2017): 69.

Without much calibration the moral compass will always point to the right actions. However, the understanding of the differences between right and wrong is a transcendental belief that connects homo sapiens together. Some atheists would agree and accept that there is a presence of morals, just not to the same level as Christians.<sup>46</sup> If morality is thought to be automatic, then why spend so much time on the teaching of right from wrong from one generation to the next? Is there a universal set of moral values that can be seen across the world? With many diverse cultures there are minor differences of right and wrong, but there is still a presence of the same universal moral standards, that appears to be written into the nature of humanity.<sup>47</sup> The presence of universal moral values indicates a possibility of a universal foundation of morality. Some atheists and naturalists would not agree, proposing that there is no universal foundation for morality but that right and wrong are subjective from one person to the next. Even if morality is viewed as subjective to the opinions and choice of each individual one can conclude the secular perspective conceives that actions can be classified as morally right or wrong.

### **Secular Perspective on Morality**

Each society maintains some standard of the difference between right and wrong. The main argument against the atheistic perspective on morality is that without a divine God there is no foundation for moral values.<sup>48</sup> However, Weilenberg hypothesizes that morality and ethical behavior can have foundations within a godless universe.<sup>49</sup> The non-theistic foundation for morality is subjective and based upon the idea that what is considered to be good conduct is

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<sup>46</sup> Paul Bloom, "Religion, Morality, Evolution." *Annual review of psychology* 63, no. 1 (2012): 185.

<sup>47</sup> Arthur F. Holmes, *Ethics Approaching Moral Decisions* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 64.

<sup>48</sup> ReasonableFaithOrg, "William Lane Craig v Erik Wielenberg | 'God & Morality' | NC State - Feb 2018," *YouTube* (YouTube, August 17, 2018), 11:00, last modified August 17, 2018, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHhmuqBW6Dw>.

<sup>49</sup> Marek Pepliński, "Erik J. Wielenberg, Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe by Marek Pepliński," *Forum Philosophicum* 12, no. 1 (January 2007): 197.

founded by the premise of what is beneficial for society. The determination of what conduct is considered to be good and bad is found through the collection of the group, based upon learned experiences.<sup>50</sup> If the governing society does not address every possible morally unacceptable action, then the individual would have the freedom to determine what is morally acceptable or not. Some societies will claim that universal moralities exist from one culture to the next, yet they cannot identify where the universal truth would come from.

The problem present when morality is grounded within any given society is that the ethical actions of people are governed by a subjective standard. In other words, the people who make the guidelines are using personal perspective and experience as the basis. The impression that morality is rooted in the model of what is beneficial to the community may appear valid, but with no transcendental foundation of morality, human corruption is inevitable. Hitler is a textbook illustration of the principle. The Nazis normalized the atrocities that were occurring even accepting some within the culture. Some within the German society disagreed with the behavior of the German government, but without a basis of morality who could tell the Germans of World War II that the actions were morally wrong? Without a classification system to establish the framework of morality, actions are neither right nor wrong. Some deeds may be horrendous such as the rape and murder of a child yet cannot be labeled as such since the standard of judgment is based upon subjective opinions that may even change over time. The only way to establish conduct as morally right or wrong is to institute a pure and unchanging foundation for the actions to be grounded on.

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<sup>50</sup> Sondra L. Hausner, "Society, Morality, Embodiment," *Durkheimian Studies* 23, no. 1 (January 2017): 4.

## Divine Perspective on Morality

Within the Christian perspective on morality, all morally significant actions (actions such as combing one's hair is neither right nor wrong) can be classified as right or wrong and are rooted within the holy character of God. "His holy and loving nature supplies the absolute standard against which all actions are measured."<sup>51</sup> Anselm concluded that God is the greatest conceivable being and that it is impossible to imagine anything greater.<sup>52</sup> God is the standard of morality because He is perfect in every way, which concludes that His morality is perfect. Morality is not merely a by-product created by God; it is a part of who He is. Wes Morriston stated moral values could be identified to God's moral attributes like water is identified as H<sub>2</sub>O.<sup>53</sup>

The framework of human morality is built upon the commands that God issues to humanity. The morality that God established through His commands extends beyond interactions between humans but includes man's interactions toward God. Etienne De Villiers concluded that the second tablet of the commandments is different from the religious commands. The first set of commands deal with the relationship between humanity and God, while the second part is the foundation for human interactions.<sup>54</sup> Christian morality is more profound than the perspective of the atheistic position. Atheists remain focused on the relationship only to other humans, as were Christians are focused on the relationships with man and God.

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<sup>51</sup> William Lane Craig, and Paul Kurtz, et al. *The debate: is goodness without God good enough?* and *The Most Gruesome of Guests*, (2001), quoted in Robert K. Garcia & Nathan L. King (eds). *Is Goodness Without God Enough: A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics* (Plymouth UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 30.

<sup>52</sup> William Edgar, and K Scott Oliphint. *Christian Apologetics Past and Present: A Primary Source Reader, Vol 1 to 1500*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 374.

<sup>53</sup> Wes Morriston, "God and the Ontological Foundation of Morality," *Religious Studies* 48, no. 1 (2011): 17.

<sup>54</sup> D. Etienne De Villiers, "The Distinctiveness of Christian Morality Reflections after 30 Years," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 33, no. 2 (June 2012), 4.



Since God is the foundation for morality, there is no room for humanity to create or remove rules governing actions that one may view as moral or immoral. A moral framework firmly rooted within the immutable nature of God prevents subjective ethical decision-making. Morality which is established by the creator of the universe also accounts for the presence of a universal morality across the spectrum of different cultures throughout the world. Richard Norman questioned whether religious beliefs are defensible because of “built in” human moral responses.<sup>55</sup> Norman’s conclusion determined that the religious aspect is a part of the discussion of the human moral experience.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, the book of Romans asserts that the foundations of morality have been written in the hearts of man, so no one is blameless. (Romans 2:15, ESV) Most people throughout the world would agree that atrocities such as murder and rape are wrong. Christian Miller states that God is the only sufficient explanation for the reality of objectively true moral obligation.<sup>57</sup> The only logical means of being able to account for the universal acceptance of a collective wrong is that a foundation of morality was established and given to humans.

### Summary

A thorough discussion on both the responsibility of sin and the foundations of morality is important to understand and adequately refute the claim. Weilenberg’s claim attempts to shift the responsibility of sin from man to God which undermines the nature of God. The example of the speed limit violation from the beginning of this paper gives a clear example of how humanity is responsible for its actions. When a person is guilty of violating the legally posted speed limit, it

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<sup>55</sup> Richard Norman, “Ethics and the Sacred: Can Secular Morality Dispense with Religious Values?” *Analyse & Kritik* 39, no. 1 (2017): 19.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 23.

<sup>57</sup> Christian B. Miller, “In Defense of a Supernatural Foundation to Morality: Reply to Shermer,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1384, no. 1 (2016): 91.

is not the government's fault that the person broke the law. The responsibility remains with the driver of the vehicle because the person chose to break the law. The sins that humanity commits against God are similar to the speed limit illustration. Humanity is aware of the commands but chooses to disobey.

Sin was explained as not measuring up to God's divine standards, and all of humanity is guilty of missing the mark. The assignment of sin's responsibility has been debated by non-theist's contending that God created sin by implementing commands He knew would be broken. By claiming that God created sin by implementing divine commands that would be violated shifts the responsibility of sin from man to God. However, Weilenberg's claim that God is responsible for sin interferes with human free-will. The argument against God held that if had God never created the commands, then humanity would not be able to choose between obeying God or choosing to sin. However, demonstrating that the shift in responsibility of sin affects human free-will essentially shows that one cannot sin and also be held blameless for the wrong committed. After the shift in responsibility was shown to create a major contradiction, the analysis awarded the responsibility of sin to humanity. Additionally, the presence of sin was shown to be necessary to truly preserve the freedom of choice. Along with the ability to make choices, creation can see the depth of God's love and His willingness to forgive.

Next addressed was the topic of morality, and how the concept fits into the conversation regarding the claim that God is responsible for sin. The divine commands issued by God are part of the foundations of human morality. Morality is the concept of right and wrong and applies to all humans on earth. The difference, however, is found within the established moral values ingrained within humanity. The secular perspective proposed that morality is subjective to the group of people or the individual. Secular morality focused on the quality of life and the fair and

good treatment of all people. The secular standard of morality is based upon previous human experiences and opinions of those who are filling leadership roles within a community. However, the secular perspective was shown to have a flaw through the subjective nature of the claim. When the foundation of secular morality was found to be subjective, all actions became justifiable. Additionally, the subjective nature of the secular version of morality provides no sound basis for the explanation of the presence of universal moral truths that remain the same within different cultures from around the world.

The Christian perspective asserts that the foundations of right and wrong are rooted within the divine nature, and out of the divine nature flows the particular commandments that God reveals. God gave humanity the framework for morality through His divine commands which are found within the Bible. Clearly the commands that God has issued to humanity are not merely a set of rules or guidelines that affect the fair treatment of others, God's commands also shape the relationship between God and humanity. Since rooted in a divine being, morality is not left to human interpretation, the standard is set by God. Not only does the perspective make sense logically that the only perfect one should be the author of such standards as right and wrong, but clearly His idea of morality serves a superior purpose in illuminating humanity's imperfections and need for redemption.

## CHAPTER TWO: COMMANDS: PROBLEM AND PURPOSE

### Introduction

Who likes being told what to do? Who disagrees with a law but enjoys supporting the practice of abiding by the law? There are few that contest laws that govern behavior such as murder or even rape. However, what about laws that seem futile, or only to benefit the local government or political figures? Imagine that the rules that govern society within the western culture are meaningless, or that the laws are created for personal gain by those that have been granted the authority to create laws. Is creating laws that benefit the local government or political figures fair to the people within a society?

Questioning rules and laws imposed by authoritative figures is not a novel concept to humanity. In fact, the questioning of authority is not exclusive to the secular world. The commands issued by God have long been called into question throughout time. Weilenberg's claim is founded on the questioning of the commands God issues. Weilenberg claims that if God issues commands to humanity that God foreknew would be violated, God must be responsible for sin by humanity. The predicament with God's divine commands arises when one considers where the commands are coming from and the characteristics of the issuing authority. Part of the knowledge included in God's omniscience is knowledge of all proposition's past, present and future. However, the divine foreknowledge of God poses a quandary when considering the commands that God issues to humanity.

The purpose of this chapter will be to address some of the major concerns with the issuance of commands to humanity and to demonstrate humanity's need for salvation. There are several issues that arise concerning divine commands that must be addressed prior to refuting the claim that God is responsible for sin. First, an understanding of the definition of divine

commands is necessary. Next the complications attributed to the misunderstanding of God's character must be addressed. Dilemmas such as the idea that commands are arbitrary, instituted for further condemnation, or a means to maintain power and control over creation need to be discussed. Lastly, after the problems have been addressed and a resolution provided, the purpose of the divine commands will be reviewed.

### **What are Divine Commands?**

What exactly is a command? Some might suggest commands are simply a set of rules that are in place to ensure the well-being of those within a given society. However, this definition does not fully capture all that a command is. A law is slightly different from a command. Gerald Postema claims "The conduct to which we are bound is not merely good, proper, reasonable, wise, advisable, right, recommended, or even something one ought or is required to do, it is commanded."<sup>58</sup> Postema's definition suggests that commands are much more than a set of rules. The commands of God are not simply laws to be followed, the commands are the foundation of morality. Conversely, laws developed by man do not suggest any type of moral framework, nor do human laws distinguish between right or wrong. Yes, there is a legal ramification if the laws are broken. However, laws are meant to serve as a behavioral guide built from a common foundation ensuring favorable treatment toward other people. Laws are not commands.

### **Problems with Divine Commands**

#### **Arbitrary Rules**

The initial obstacle that arises from the perspective of issued commands is found within the characteristics of the one who issues the commands. Civil laws that govern societies are issued by people who have been put into a place of authority over society. The people who have

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<sup>58</sup> Gerald J. Postema, "Law as Command: The Model of Command in Modern Jurisprudence," *Philosophical Issues* 11, no. 1 (2001): 474.

been put into a place of authority have the same flawed characteristics as any other human being. The temptation to do something unethical or immoral is the same for those in power if not greater than the average person. The notion that a person can take advantage of a position of authority is not implausible; the idea has been demonstrated throughout history. King David was seen within the Bible having an affair with another man's wife. (2 Samuel 11, ESV). David used the position that he held to then move the husband of his mistress to the front lines of the war in hopes for the worst. A human figure of authority can have a corrupted heart like anyone else, seeking self-gain through the abuse of power. Socrates proposed a difficulty regarding the issuance of divine commands rooted within human characteristics which include selfishness, and emotional reactions to events. Baggett and Walls stated that actions that are good because God commands them (Euthyphro dilemma) poses the problem that commands would be subject to divine whim.<sup>59</sup> The Greek society and the many gods that were worshipped provide a relevant example of divine commands being issued by a deity whose characteristics are similar to a human being. The Greek gods were depicted as emotional, corrupt, and interested in self-gain, much like the human race. What about God? Richard Dawkins has claimed that the God of the Old Testament is petty, unjust, and a bully.<sup>60</sup> Dawkins supports the claim with the following verse: "The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and vents his wrath against his enemies." (Nahum 1:2, NIV) When taken out of context the emotions of jealousy and anger appear to be directed towards sinful humans, in this case the Israelites. God seems to be depicted as being angry with sinners, beginning with Adam and Eve and continuing through the generations. If God's

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<sup>59</sup> David Baggett and Jerry Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 34.

<sup>60</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Black Swan, 2016), 51.

commands are issued as an emotional response, can His commands be considered objective?

Commands that are issued in anger are subjective to one's state of emotions, ever changing from day to day. If the commands of a divine being are based upon emotional decisions, then why should the commands be followed at all? Arbitrary rules cannot be foundational to morality. The foundation of morality must be based upon an unchanging set of commands.

### **Further Condemnation**

The second issue is that God establishes commands because He wants to further condemn humanity. God's omniscience allows Him to know what choices will be made by His creation. Divine commands are issued with the foreknowledge that commands will not be obeyed ensuring that God's divine justice is carried out on everyone. The impression that God wants to issue condemnation emerges from the proposition that God is angry and vengeful towards sinners, and He wants to ensure punishment is given. Weilenberg's claim supports the hypothesis that commands are only in place to further punish an already fallen group of people. If the commands that are issued by God in place to ensure an eternal punishment in hell, then that would indicate that there is no moral value to the commands. The only function of the divine commands issued to humanity would be to provide sentencing. The assumption is in stark contrast to the grace advertised by Christianity. Christians view God as merciful and loving. John 3:16 demonstrates that through God's love a means of atonement was provided for the sins of the world. The contradiction between the view of God as loving and forgiving and the interpretation of God as vengeful and merciless must be reconciled. If a divine command is created with the knowledge that the command will be broken, does this mean that God wants to provide punishment for His creation? If so, the punishments are not reactionary in nature but are in fact pre-planned.

## Power and Control

The third crisis that arises regarding divine commands asserts that the commands are issued to humanity as a means of power and control over God's subjects. In order to maintain control over the population, God issues a set of rules that if broken have grave consequences, in the case of God the punishment is hell. What consequence could be more serious than an eternal punishment of torment in hell? What better way to maintain control over the choices of individuals than to threaten eternal punishment for violating the commands of a divine being? Shariff and Norenzayan determined that societies that have a concept of a personal god, produce less egocentric social interactions between the people within their society.<sup>61</sup> The assertion credits the shifting of human behavior to the presence of an almighty being, watching and judging the lives of the people within society. Do the rules that are implemented seem to keep people in line? Perhaps not rules themselves, but the consequences are more of the driving force? In addition to the divine commands being issued, consequences must be implemented for the violation of the directives. The Biblical books of the law are filled with laws and punishments for violations, which range from inability to worship at the temple, to death. Retaining power and control is the strategic, the heavier the consequences, the stronger the control over the people. Examples can be seen throughout history with the monarchy-style government in which the ruling leader becomes more of a dictator. When a dictator desires to restrict citizens, laws and punishments are enacted to prevent the populace from rising against the ruling authority. The model of a dictator can be applied to the God of Christianity. Consider just a few of the Old Testament laws that God has issued to humanity, rules regarding what types of clothes to wear and women's menstrual cycles. The laws were all linked to being considered

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<sup>61</sup> Azim F. Shariff and Ara Norenzayan, "God Is Watching You," *Psychological Science* 18, no. 9 (September 2007): 807.



clean or unclean before God. (Isaiah 64:6, ESV) Are such laws the aim of a dictator, thriving on power and control, or that of a loving father filled with grace?

### Refuting the Claims

#### Consistent Rules

The allegation that God's commands are in place because of emotional rage that emerges out of nowhere like a change in weather is just simply not true. Thomas Aquinas held that "God could do all things that are possible and not those things that are impossible."<sup>62</sup> Commanding cruelty would be a contradiction of God's character, and therefore not possible. As Aquinas concluded God is all-powerful, but cannot and would not create a contradiction to His divine character.<sup>63</sup> The concept of God issuing commands to humanity as an emotional reaction is based upon carnal thoughts and understanding of how humans respond to stressors in life. People are known to react emotionally to stressors, sometimes irrationally. As a result, policies may emerge with the intent to prevent stressful events from happening again in the future. This is the way of men, but man is not a divine being. Mankind is created in the image of God, but God remains superior to humanity in all regards. God continues to be unchanging and the guidelines that He issues are rooted within His divine unchanging character. Another aspect that must be considered is that God is omniscient; yet, his omniscience actually collaborates with the issuance of commands to human kind. Since God foreknows all individuals' actions, then the rules that are implemented by God are set into position before a sinful act has even been thought of by a being. The reality indicates that the implementation of God's commands is in fact neither reactionary nor emotional. Additionally, the poignant descriptions of God are shown as a response to sin,

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<sup>62</sup> "Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed April 14, 2021, Divine Command Theory. <https://iep.utm.edu/>.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

even a vengeful reaction does not illicit the establishment of additional mandates. No, God does not create additional commandments as an answer to sin, effectively demonstrating that divine commands are not arbitrary but ultimately expose humanity's fallen nature.

### **Already Condemned**

Another contention regarding the purpose of the commands that are issued by God is the accusation that God wants to inflict additional judgement on humanity. The opinion of further condemnation is correlated with God's omniscience. Since God knows the outcome of all events that will happen, including what divine commands will be violated, the commands seem to serve no other function than to allow for added sentencing. The claim that the divine commands are intended for supplementary condemnation appears to be focused on shifting the blame to God for the sinful deeds that are done by humankind rather than refuting the reason for the commands. Is a sinner responsible for the choice to disobey? The Bible does suggest that individuals suffer repercussions for the sin. The Apostle Paul demonstrates that there is a punishment for the violations of divine commands in stating, "For the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23, ESV) Mankind remains in a fallen state since Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world through the choice was made to violate God's orders in the Garden of Eden. (Genesis 2:4-3:24, ESV) If humanity is already condemned due to imputed sin that began with Adam and Eve, then why did God implement auxiliary commands? The Apostle Paul provides a simple answer to the question. There is a reason God would issue divine commands even with the knowledge that the directives would be broken, "Since through the law comes knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20, ESV) The divine commands provide illumination to human beings that the entire race remains in a fallen state before God. Enlightenment of the sinful state of human lives shows the depravity of creation's condition and the need for redemption. Condemnation does not come from the

implementation of divine commands; humanity stands guilty before God because of the presence of sin.

### **God is in Control**

A negative connotation is often associated with the idea of power and control, rightfully so when one considers the people who are victims of the abuse of power. Throughout history, the position of kings (or equivalent) is seen as having both power and control over those who are under the ruling authority. However, the concept of an authority figure maintaining both power and a level of control over a society is not deficient unless the leader abuses the power. However, "God is a hater of oppression and exploitation, as lover and promoter of justice, and as liberator of the exploited and oppressed."<sup>64</sup> The level of power and control a ruler has over a subject is often a right of that position due to the responsibilities required. Therefore, the people being ruled must submit to the authority given to the leadership in power. God is the creator of the universe, and retains all authority over everything within His creation. When Job is seen questioning the events that God allowed, God rebukes Job and instructs that he (Job) was not there for the creation of the earth, and who was he to question God's ways. (Job 38:4, ESV) God will always retain power and control over His creation and the commands that He issues are within His rights to issue and have their purpose within His divine plan. God is all-powerful and Proverbs highlights that man has great plans, but the purposes of God will remain firm. (Proverbs 19:21, ESV)

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<sup>64</sup> John E. Elliott, "Oppression, Exploitation and Injustice in the Old Testament: The View from Liberation Theology." *International Journal of Social Economics* 19, no. 10-12 (1992): 16.

### Purpose of Divine Commands

Divine commands issued by God are not arbitrary, a justification for punishment, or even a means to gain power and control over humanity. Recognizing what some of the objections are helps to contribute to the ability to completely understand the purpose of the commands. The purpose of God's commands issued to humanity encompasses two aspects, each connected to mankind's eternal separation from God.

One purpose of the divine commands is to illuminate humanity's sinful and fallen nature, far-removed from God's required perfection. Before Jesus Christ, the law was meant to be a means of obtaining righteousness.<sup>65</sup> However, the righteousness required by God is impossible to achieve without the help of God Himself. Additionally, no matter how hard mankind tries to do what is right, sin creeps in and corrupts every aspect of mankind's efforts. As iniquity infiltrates, following the law becomes more about rule-following, and who can appear to be more holy than another.<sup>66</sup> No matter what humanity does, everyone is guilty of violating the commands issued to them by God. Salvation cannot be achieved by any human deeds. Yet, understanding one's fallen nature is not entirely grim; if not for the presence of God's commands, one's need for salvation and God would never be identified. (Ephesians 2:8, ESV)

Another purpose of the commands issued to humanity is to establish the foundation for morality in the world. There are many different views when it comes to understanding where morality comes from. Some claim that morality comes from within and is subjective; it is up to each individual to determine what is morally right or wrong. Humanists would claim that morality is a creation of man in order to establish a communal idea of what is good. Many

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<sup>65</sup> Georges Massinelli, "Christ and the Law in Romans 10: 4." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (2015): 710.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 710.

atheists will contend that there are atrocities that violate a sense of common morality such as the Nazis' actions in World War II or any other atrocities one could think of. Yet, other atheists and naturalists suggest that there is no foundation for morality so acts of human cruelty are not morally wrong.

Weilenberg believes that human morality has abstract properties that are recognized worldwide, such as the golden rule of treating others how one wishes to be treated.<sup>67</sup> The golden rule can be seen in spanning the globe in ancient cultures such as China, Persia, Greece, Rome and Egypt.<sup>68</sup> The belief appears to be focused on the happiness of humans. However, the secular understanding of morality has no foundation; one cannot identify where the truths originated nor the reason that morality is needed. When morality is centered on God and His perfect character there is a firm bedrock in which moral values are universal among all of creation.<sup>69</sup> In other words, morality is embedded in every human God created because, He, is the essence of morality. Furthermore, it is of no surprise that God's entire human creation would reflect a universal basis of moral values, regardless of difference in cultures.

The Christian perspective advocates that morality is transcendental, a work of God. The principle that morality is established by God sounds modest, but humanity cannot resolve what is morally right or wrong without guidance from God. Therefore, commands are used to shape the perception of morality. A person's moral compass must be calibrated, which is achieved by God forming the divine commands. All commands are rooted within God's character and therefore

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<sup>67</sup> ReasonableFaithOrg, "William Lane Craig v Erik Wielenberg | 'God & Morality' | NC State - Feb 2018," *YouTube* (YouTube, August 17, 2018), 37:00, last modified August 17, 2018, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHhmuqBW6Dw>.

<sup>68</sup> Leonard J. Swidler, "The 'Golden Rule': The 'Best Rule.'" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 54 no. 2 (Spring 2019): 280.

<sup>69</sup> ReasonableFaithOrg, "William Lane Craig v Erik Wielenberg | 'God & Morality' | NC State - Feb 2018," *YouTube* (YouTube, August 17, 2018), 11:40, last modified August 17, 2018, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHhmuqBW6Dw>.

holy, but was every command created by God with the purpose of establishing human morality? The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) asserts that the commands of God are broken into three distinct categories, moral, civil, and ceremonial.<sup>70</sup> The moral laws are necessary to form the foundation for human morality. If God had not issued the laws to His people, man's moral compass would be pointed in whatever direction that was humanly determined to be best.

### Summary

The secular argument against divine commands presents several problems, many of which have been addressed. The secular perspective has submitted the idea that divine commands are arbitrary as seen within the Baggett and Walls discussion on the Euthyphro dilemma. The dilemma was shown to be grounded in human thought, attaching distorted moral thinking to the commands that God issues. God was shown to be consistent and not arbitrary. God's commands are also not based upon emotional reactions to the sinful actions of humanity. God remains unchanged throughout history. The second contention proposed that God issues a command to be able to provide further condemnation to those who sin. The idea that divine commands are issued to further punish humanity is a premise that is falsely rooted in the thought that man is innocent before God. Since mankind is sinful and fallen in the eyes of God eternal punishment is deserving. Therefore, there is no need to issue any commands to condemn mankind for their sinful actions; people stand judged before God, even before the implementation of commands. The final contention presents the idea that God implements commands to be able to maintain power control over His subjects. The concept of power and control was demonstrated to be foolish since God is in a position of authority because He is the

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<sup>70</sup> Cornelius Burges and S. W. Carruthers, *The Confession of Faith of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster: from the Original Manuscript Written by Cornelius Burges in 1646* (London: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1978), 16.

creator of the universe. Commands are not needed to establish the power that God already has over creation.

After discussing the contentions over divine commands, the purpose was discussed. First, the commands demonstrate the sinful state of man's heart, no matter how hard one tried nothing could fix mankind's fallen state before God. A standard to be measured against is needed for humanity to understand the depths of how fallen the race has become because of sin. The Bible shows that no matter how hard a person tries to be righteous, all of humanity is found guilty of violating the commands of God. The only one who can redeem the fallen man is God Himself and is accomplished through Jesus Christ. The commands display to man the need for Christ, to restore the relationship between humanity and God. The second purpose of the commands issued to humanity is to provide a calibration of man's moral compass. Morality is firmly rooted within God and His divine characteristics. Man would be essentially free to develop individual morality to believe what is right or wrong if God would have remained out of human lives. However, the commands of God provide the foundations of morality to humanity. In conclusion, the purpose of this chapter was to provide the foundational information regarding the problems and the purposes of the divine commands issued by God. The chapter displayed that God's commands do have a divine purpose consistent with His plan for man.

## CHAPTER THREE: FOREKNOWLEDGE AND ITS CONNECTION TO HUMAN WILL

### Introduction

Can someone or something be omniscient? The concept that God is omniscient can be difficult to understand. The notion begins with the premise that God knows all things, past, present, and future which may seem simple to grasp. Omniscience is that divine perfection whereby God knows all things that can be known and that are not inconsistent with God's possession of his essential properties. The property of omniscience traditionally includes a knowledge of all proposition's past, present, and future which makes God's knowledge an eternal act, which never changes or grows.<sup>71</sup> The basic view of omniscience is the knowledge of the past, present, and future. The definition is often learned from catechisms, potentially from childhood in the case of many Christians. However, believing that God knows every historical, current, and future event and choice that will be made is a substantial proclamation. The statement may be difficult to comprehend in entirety. Does God's divine foreknowledge impact the ability for human beings to be able to make decision with their life? If God knows the decisions that will be made, then are human beings capable of a choice that results in the opposite of what God knows will happen? How is the human will and divine foreknowledge truly compatible? Is the human will free to choose without an being coerced by an external entity, or is the will directed by influences outside of the control of a person? Nathan Rockwood objects that if God knows the choices that will be made by humans, then human beings have no free-will.<sup>72</sup> Yet Mr. Rockwood is not the only person who finds a contradiction with

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<sup>71</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), Ch 12, Section B3.

<sup>72</sup> Nathan Rockwood, "Foreknowledge without Determinism," *Sophia* 58, no. 2 (October 2017): 103.



foreknowledge and human will. The problem is not even exclusive to theists or atheists. In fact, there are debates between Reformed and Arminian Christians on the connection between God's foreknowledge and the extent of human free-will. Van Inwagen provides the definition of free-will as "the ability to make a decision uncoerced."<sup>73</sup>

Attending to the potential problems created by divine foreknowledge and the human will is essential to adequately refute the notion that God creates further sin by issuing commands that God knew beforehand would be violated. In order to reconcile the view of the human will and foreknowledge one must first begin with a clear definition of the ideas of foreknowledge, free-will, and compatibilism. Lastly, after defining the terms and discussing potential problems, evidence will show that the theories of divine foreknowledge and human will to choose do in fact coincide.

### Foreknowledge and the Will Explained

One of the divine attributes of God is foreknowledge. God knows everything including past, present and future. God knows all decisions that will be made by His creation. The extent of God's knowledge includes not only a thorough knowledge of humanity but to all beings, including spiritual entities as well." How does God's omniscience interact with humanity's ability to make decisions? The answer to the question holds two responses. First, determinism is the concept that the human will is driven through linked events that cause a person to make a choice because of those previous events.<sup>74</sup> The theological position on determinism rests on the notion that God divinely orchestrates events around people's lives. Essentially, God is directing the choices humanity will make throughout their life. Compatibilism (also known as soft

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<sup>73</sup> Peter Van Inwagen. *Thinking about Free Will*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2017), 61.

<sup>74</sup> Carl Hoefer, "Causal Determinism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford University, Spring 2016), accessed May 1, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/>.

determinism) maintains God's omniscience, while allowing humanity to be able to make life choices on their own. Second, is libertarianism which holds humanity is "free with respect to a given action, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain from performing it; no antecedent conditions and/or causal laws determine that he will perform the action, or that he will not."<sup>75</sup> The idea that God knows what choice will be made is a major contention against the ability of humanity to be able to exercise the culturally popular idea of free-will. Is it possible to choose differently than what God knows will happen? This chapter will demonstrate that both free-will and compatibilism provide logical explanations of how omniscience and the ability to choose are compatible. However, problems will be addressed when both determinism and libertarianism are taken to the extremes. Weilenberg, is an atheist so therefore he does not believe in God. However, Weilenberg's claim assumes the presence of God and utilizes the extreme side of determinism in an attempt to make a pointed attack towards Christian theology.

### **Foreknowledge**

The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy states that omniscience is the "knowledge of all knowable truths."<sup>76</sup> The trait of omniscience is one of the characteristics of God. The book of Psalms states that "His understanding is infinite." (Psalm 147:5b, ESV) Having a level of knowledge that is infinite and complete shows that God has knowledge of everything to include the decisions made by His creation. Modern history books are riddled with human choices and the circumstances that provide explanation for various choices. When a person looks back on historical events, the decisions made can be evaluated because of the visible impact on the present time. What about the choices that are about to be made either in the near or distant

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<sup>75</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977, 1974), 29.

<sup>76</sup> Bernard Gert, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy 3<sup>rd</sup> ed*, ed. Robert Audi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): *Divine Attributes*.

future? Knowing future actions is an arduous concept to fathom since humans have no firm ability to see into the future.

David describes God through the Psalms as “knowing the thoughts of humanity” and “scrutinizing the paths of man.” (Psalm 139:1-3, ESV) God can scrutinize the choices that are made because God knows the entire path from start to finish. The infinite knowledge that God has does not merely allow for the knowledge of how a path will affect life; God knows what path will be taken at every intersection presented to a person through life. God knows the entire path from beginning to end before the choice is made. Since God knows the outcome of the complete path, His knowledge provides the ability to thoroughly know the paths that are chosen.

### **Free-Will**

The discussion of the freedom of choice resonates with humanity because of the desire to be able to control decisions throughout one’s life. Plantinga’s definition of free-will states: “If a person is free with respect to a given action, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain from performing it; no antecedent conditions and/or causal laws determine that he will perform the action, or that he will not.”<sup>77</sup> Plantinga is not suggesting that people are not influenced by thought, emotions, or even life events. Plantinga is stating that the choices humanity makes are not causally determined by an outside entity.

How are free choices made? Choices through life are made by weighing the benefit of performing an action or not. Choice of clothing might be based upon a certain appearance that is desired. The choice of food is based on an appealing taste or the excitement of trying something new. The emotional connections found with romantic relationships are based upon physical and emotional connections established through desirable qualities. Even a self-sacrificial choice is linked to the idea of a greater good that could be accomplished if the

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<sup>77</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 29.

sacrifice is made. Self-sacrificial choices come about when a person believes that a cause is great enough to sacrifice one's self to further the cause. An example of a self-sacrificial choice can be found through an examination of a Christian martyr.

The notion of being able to exercise free-will is not merely a trendy idea or something people long for. No, the ability to be able to personally make a choice one way or the other is God's design and the Bible addresses the topic throughout scripture. Joshua makes a charge to the Israelites asserting to follow God or false idols. (Joshua 24:15, ESV) The Israelites had the freedom to choose the former or the later. Unfortunately, the Old Testament repeatedly shows that the Israelites struggled with the freedom of choice and adopted the religious traditions of pagan neighbors. Joshua, however, stood firm and declared that the Israelites choose God. The book of Hebrews similarly says that Moses "choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin." (Hebrews 11:25, ESV) The passage from Hebrews describes that people have a choice to follow God and turn away from sin. The passages from Hebrews and Joshua are not the only two passages of the Bible that support free-will, there are many. If the Bible teaches that humans have free-will, then why does it seem incompatible with God's divine foreknowledge?

The fact is human free-will is compatible with divine foreknowledge. God can know perfectly every time how any event will occur. God's ability to be able to know what decision will be made, in no way effects the decisions that will be made by humanity. Just because God knows the choice that will be made does not obligate the person to make said choice. Each person is free to choose to act or not in any given situation. God is able to know the choice that will be made because His knowledge is perfect, which includes the knowledge of His creation.

God knows all of the influences that have shaped a person's mind to be able to make all choices through life, both good and bad.

### **Compatibilism**

The foundation of compatibilism is based on the desires of the hearts of men as the driving force in humans making choices in life, even if the heart is in a sinful state.<sup>78</sup> Evil comes into the world when humanity becomes excessively focused on temporal desires.<sup>79</sup> Mankind is free to choose whether to act or not, but that decision will be made under the influence of the strongest desire of the person's heart. The desires of the heart can be seen through common choices that are made daily such as clothing and food choices. The everyday choices are based on a sense of appeal and taste. The choices that are connected to morally right or wrong actions are harder to recognize but are still rooted in a person's strongest desire of the heart. The concept of the desires of the heart applies to every human and is not exclusive to Christians.

Compatibilism's foundation of the choices that mankind makes comes from the human heart's desire. When a person is presented with a choice to be made, the person always will make the decision based upon the desire within the heart, much like a dog presented with two bowls to choose from, one with meat and another with vegetables. The Dog will choose the meat every time. The connection between human choices and divine foreknowledge can be seen through an illustration by Joseph Runzo. Runzo explains that God's knowledge of the choices that humans will make is rooted within the desires of man's heart.<sup>80</sup> Runzo employs a restaurant analogy further to explain his position. Consider the predictability of a friend ordering ice cream at a

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<sup>78</sup> Oliver D. Crisp, "The Debate about Reformed Thought on Human Free Will," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 8, no. 3 (2014): 238.

<sup>79</sup> John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problems of Evil*, rev. and expanded ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), 70.

<sup>80</sup> Joseph Runzo, "Omniscience and Freedom for Evil," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 12, no. 3 (January 1981): 134.

familiar restaurant. Typically, the friend always orders ice cream, which allows for the assumption that ice cream will be ordered again.<sup>81</sup> Runzo's explanation is not a perfect explanation about the concept of foreknowledge that God has but does provide a basic understanding of the notion of divine omniscience.

Compatibilism maintains both the ability for humans to make the choices they so desire in life, and for God to have full foreknowledge of all human choices. And, compatibilism holds that there is no contradiction between these two. As with the dog with the two bowls scenario, humanity is no different. 1 Kings 8:39b confirms that "God alone knows the hearts of man." God knows the desires of every person's heart, more so than a dog owner knows the pet's love of meat. Since God knows the desires of a person's heart, God knows what choices a person will make every time presented with a choice option. The infinite knowledge that God has does not interfere with human's ability to choose, and those human decisions do not pose a contradiction to the divine nature of God. Additionally, by keeping the divine omniscience of God and human choice, the responsibility of sin remains with human beings. The responsibility of sin remains with mankind due to the person's ability to choose and the person will always choose what the heart desires.

### Going Too Far Left and Right

Libertarianism, and compatibilism give a sound foundation on which divine foreknowledge and human choice can coexist. However, on the extreme sides of both libertarianism and determinism are open theism and hard determinism. Both open theism and hard determinism create problems both to culturally popular "freedom" and the divinity of God. Additionally, the conversation establishes incompatibility between free-will and divine foreknowledge which remains connected to the problem of evil. The basic premise behind the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 134.

problem of evil asserts that if God is omnipotent and does nothing to prevent evil, then God is responsible for evil in the world.<sup>82</sup> Weilenberg comments on the issuance of divine commands, when God knows that these commands will be violated, who is the source of further sin?<sup>83</sup> Weilenberg's claim is built from the problem of evil and utilizes aspects of hard determinism. The thread of hard determinism is identified by insinuating humanity never had a choice to make.

If God knows the actions that a person will choose before the choice, then was there ever a choice to be made by the person? The question surfaces as one considers the connection between free-will and divine foreknowledge. Yet, the question is not the only one that arises and challenges both the nature of God and the characteristics of humanity. If humans can choose to perform or not perform an action, then does God know the choice that will be made? Either God knows the choices to be made, or He does not. The first indicates that humanity never had a choice to make, or conversely God does not know the choice. If God does not know the choice then God has limited knowledge. Richard Swinburne states "it is metaphysically impossible for God to be essentially omniscient in what I will call the 'strong sense' of knowing all true propositions given that God or some other agent sometimes acts freely."<sup>84</sup> Consequently, both of these statements call into question the characteristics of God and His written word.

## **Hard Determinism**

The first perspective presented regarding free-will and divine foreknowledge is hard determinism. Hard determinism is the perspective that maintains God's omniscience and reduces

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<sup>82</sup> John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problems of Evil*, rev. and expanded ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), 17.

<sup>83</sup> ReasonableFaithOrg, "William Lane Craig v Erik Wielenberg | 'God & Morality' | NC State - Feb 2018," *YouTube* (YouTube, August 17, 2018), 47:10, last modified August 17, 2018, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHhmuqBW6Dw>.

<sup>84</sup> Richard Swinburne, "Causation, Time, and God's Omniscience." *Topoi* 36, no. 4 (May 2016): 84.

the freedom of humans to be able to choose actions. Due to the knowledge and plans of God, the thought that free-will is an illusion is maintained by those who adopt the view of hard determinism. God's plan for the world is perfect and will come to fruition, and every event that happens is pre-ordained to happen by God. The main idea of the hard determinist perspective is that humanity does not have the choice in the actions will be chosen, the choices made by man are determined by God beforehand.

Hard determinism therefore does not attempt to reconcile divine foreknowledge and free-will. Hard Determinism preserves God's omniscience without question but completely removes free-will from humanity. "Philosophers and theologians have argued that if God knows future human actions then human agents cannot be free."<sup>85</sup> Christian List recognized that free-will is difficult to surrender due to the connection of mankind's understanding of the human condition.<sup>86</sup> However, when free-will is then removed who, then, will be held responsible for sin?

If mankind is unable to choose between moral and immoral actions because human actions are determined by God, then man cannot be responsible for sin. The responsibility of sin is the contention that Weilenberg brings to the table regarding the divine commands issued by God who foreknows the commands will be broken. Essentially, Weilenberg is contending that since God foreknew that humanity would break the commands, then God is responsible for that additional sin.<sup>87</sup> Hard determinism is insinuating the same assignment of responsibility of sin by

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<sup>85</sup> Nathan Rockwood. "Foreknowledge without Determinism," *Sophia* 58, no. 2 (June, 2019): 103.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 156.

<sup>87</sup> ReasonableFaithOrg, "William Lane Craig v Erik Wielenberg | 'God & Morality' | NC State - Feb 2018," *YouTube* (YouTube, August 17, 2018), 47:10 last modified August 17, 2018, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHhmuqBW6Dw>.



stating that if mankind has no choice, then the one who causes the restriction is responsible. The conclusion implies God is responsible.

## Open Theism

If hard determinism removes freedom of the will from humanity, is there a view that keeps free-will intact? Indeterminacy is required for free actions and for agents to be morally responsible.<sup>88</sup> Open theism is the perspective that limits the ability of God to know what actions a person will make, and allows for human free choices to be made. “Though a libertarian account of human freedom may take various forms, libertarians all agree that a free action must be undetermined.”<sup>89</sup> Open theists can be thought of as the opposite side of the spectrum when contrasted against hard determinism, because a person can make the choice and set their will on what is wanted and not based on the determined will of an outside being.<sup>90</sup> Open theism holds that mankind retains full ability to be able to make free choices to perform, or not perform actions with no divine persuasion.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, open theism maintains a different perspective regarding the involvement of God in the decisions made by humans. Open theists propose that God is a casual observer of the actions that are chosen by man.<sup>92</sup> The description of a casual observer is someone who watches and has no influence or knowledge of how the choice will turn out. The open theist’s perspective seems to be more appealing than that of hard determinism due

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<sup>88</sup> Taylor W. Cyr, “Moral Responsibilities, Luck and Compatibilism,” *Eckentnis* 84, no. 1 (February 2019): 193.

<sup>89</sup> David Widerker, “A New Argument against Libertarian Free Will?” *Analysis* 76, no. 3 (2016): 298.

<sup>90</sup> Robert Kane, “Torn decisions, luck, and libertarian free will: comments on Balaguer’s free will as an open scientific problem,” *Philosophical Studies* 169, no. 1 (May 2014): 56.

<sup>91</sup> Robert F. Brown, “Divine Omniscience, Immutability, Aseity and Human Free Will,” *Religious Studies* 27, no. 3 (September 1991): 287.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* 287.

to the nature of maintaining human free-will. Since open theism allows for free-will and makes room for God as an observer, what is the negative aspect to consider?

Divine omniscience is called into question when God is described as a casual observer who maintains no knowledge of the results of human choices. As previously stated, one of the divine characteristics of God is omniscience. God's ability to have infinite knowledge of all things to include human choices is an attribute of God's divine nature. Asserting that God has infinite knowledge while maintaining that God is unable to know the choices to be made by men is a contradiction. When God's omniscience is in jeopardy from a contradiction, then God's divine plans fall under scrutiny as well. God's omniscient perspective on the world contributes to God's plans being perfect and flawless. God is described within the Bible as being the same through all times (to include the future). (Hebrews 13:8, ESV) God is described as being unchanging, and consistent in His actions, which is known as immutability. The open theist perspective undermines the immutability of God, by assigning the role of a casual observer. If God does not know what actions will take place on earth, then that would indicate that His divine plan must constantly change as well. Perhaps the open theistic preservation of free-will causes more damage to the deity of God than is beneficial to maintain human free-will.

#### Interacting with Weilenberg's Claim

Hard determinism and open theism are considered opposite ends of the spectrum regarding free-will and divine foreknowledge. However, when one takes determinism or libertarianism to extremes the consequence is damaging both to the human will and the divinity of God. Weilenberg attempts to utilize the extreme perspectives on divine foreknowledge, and humanity's freedom of choice to discredit God's benevolent character. The attack on God attempts to show that God directs all of the choices that are made to include the sinful choices

that are made by humanity. Despite the attempt to derail Christian theology, compatibilism and libertarian free-will provide a logical explanation of how divine foreknowledge and the human will mesh together and do not contradict one another. God's omniscience does not interfere with humanity's ability to make a choice for themselves. Humanity is responsible for the choices that they make, because the actions have been made from their own accord.

### Summary

As stated previously, Weilenberg is an atheist. He (Weilenberg) raises a theological question about God and His connection to sin, through the issuance of commands that are foreknown to be violated. The questions that are created by Weilenberg's statement is intriguing and causes one to pause. Since God knew that humanity would break His divine rules, how are the rules fair to humanity? If humans were destined to violate God's commands, is humanity responsible for sin? Should God be responsible for the sins of humanity? The answers to the questions created by Weilenberg's claim are a resounding no.

Hard determinism was shown to have a major impact on the ability for humanity to make and be responsible for a choice. Hard determinism demonstrates that God drives the choices that a person will make, and there is no option for humanity to perform the opposite of what God wants to happen. The hard line on God's orchestrating the decisions of humanity, does appear to confirm that God would be responsible for sin. On the other side of the extreme coin is open theism, which allows for humanity to be completely free with respect to their choices in life. Open theism may allow for the will to be free but it creates a major contention with the attributes of God. If God is a casual observer of humanity, and does not know the outcome of a choice until the decision is made, then God is not omniscient. Hard determinism and open theism do not

seem to effectively counter Weilenberg's claim, nor do the ideas preserve biblical truths about the characteristics of God.

The libertarian position on free-will maintained that the human will is will is free—to act or not without external coercion.<sup>93</sup> The idea that a choice is made without external coercion does not negate the presence of external influences that guide and shape a person's decision-making process. However, the final choice is still the responsibility of the individual. Weilenberg tries to threaten the omniscience of God by questioning the freedom of the will of humans. Yet, God's omniscience remains fully intact when humans can choose for themselves what decisions to make, whether we conceive of those free will choices in a compatibilistic, or an indeterministic free will, sense. When God knows that a person will choose to act in a certain way, His knowing does not necessitate that the person is bound to act in that manner. The libertarian approach to the questions of free-will and divine foreknowledge provides a clear explanation of how the two concepts are compatible with each other. However, the libertarian approach is not the only position that provides resolution to the problems presented by Weilenberg's claim.

The perspective of compatibilism is the other perspective on the connection between divine omniscience and the human will. Compatibilism keeps both divine foreknowledge and the ability for humans to make choices for themselves intact without jeopardizing either concept or Biblical truths. The compatibility of the will to make decision and foreknowledge is found within the desires of the human heart. R. C. Sproul explains the heart of man will always choose the greatest desire.<sup>94</sup> Humanity is shown to be making all choices based upon the direction of the heart, God will always know the choices that are made because God knows everyone's heart.

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<sup>93</sup> Peter Van Inwagen. *Thinking about Free Will*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2017), 61.

<sup>94</sup> R C Sproul, *Chosen by God* (LIGONIER MINISTRIES, 2017), 62.

Compatibilism allows the individual to determine the choices they will make each time a choice is presented. God knows the choices that a person will make every time an action is presented, but the individual remains responsible for their actions. A person may be capable to make an opposite choice from what God knows will happen, but a person will never makes a choice in opposition to the desire of the heart. God is not interfering with man's options; God simply knows the choices that humanity will make every time without error. Compatibilism also ensures the divine attribute of omniscience is maintained without question. Since God knows the choices that man will make through the direction of the heart, His infinite knowledge is not affected by human's free-will. The plans of God will also remain intact because there is no randomness involved with what mankind will choose. God always knows all things to come, so therefore His plans do not change and remain constant for all time without error.

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## CONCLUSION

Is God responsible for sin? Weilenberg presented a claim that calls into question the divine nature of God and attacks theological truths that could unravel Christianity. The thought that God is responsible for sin by issuing commands that humans will violate, challenges God's reasons for commands, as well as His omniscience. The function of this paper was to properly address and refute each aspect of Weilenberg's claim, and to demonstrate that God and Christianity remain theologically intact.

### Christian Foundations Prevail

First, the foundations of both morality and sin were addressed from the secular and Christian perspectives. The secular assessment proposes that morality ensures the continued success of any given society; the leaders of the community make the determination of what is morally acceptable or not. However, secular morality could not provide a logical explanation for the presence of universal moral truths. The proposal that humanity is responsible for the foundation for morality was demonstrated to be an insubstantial argument given the inconsistent actions and opinions of human beings. The Christian perspective indicates a much more secure foundation for determining the difference between actions classified as morally right or wrong. The moral framework is instituted by God, who is the unchanging and perfect creator of the world. Through God's work of creation, He implanted a sense of right from wrong within humanity which explains universal moral truths.

The topic of sin was addressed as Weilenberg attempted to shift the responsibility from humanity to God, implying that God established the rules that would lead to the occurrence of sin. However, the responsibility of sin could not effectively be transferred to God, because of

human free-will. Instead, the responsibility and consequences associated with individual choices must remain with the one choosing because each person is given the freedom to decide. Some suggested God ought to prevent the capacity to choose a wrong action, yet, the option would remove the freedom so highly esteemed. One cannot have both the freedom of moral choice and the inability to make wrong selection. Therefore, people retain the freedom to decide, yet assume responsibility for the sin presented by one's election.

### No Problems with Divine Commands

Weilenberg called into question God's purpose of divine commands when he implied that God knew prior to the institution that the commands would be broken. Three problems simply endeavored to demonstrate that God is an emotional bully toward humanity.

The first problem that was presented attempted to show that God is emotional and acts irrationally, insinuating that the commands were created arbitrarily. The premise that God is emotional and irrational stemmed from the treatment of the Euthyphro Dilemma found in the writing of Baggett and Walls. However, the God of Christianity was shown to be unchanging, and the commands that were issued to man were not reactions to sinful events but actually delivered before a sinful act was chosen.

Second was the conception that God issued commands to humanity in order to provide further punishment to His sinful creation. The claim that commands are issued to ensure punishment seems to be valid since God has the foreknowledge to know that the commands will be violated. However, God does not require commands to be able to punish humanity for the sins committed. Humanity already stands condemned before God.

Third, the problem of power and control over humanity was the last contention discussed. Power and control persisted with the belief that God is a controlling bully over His creation, and

struggles to make humanity out to be a victim of God's tyranny. But power and control are not always dangerous; they can be if people abuse the power that comes with the positions that are held. Power and control typically derive from positions of authority over any given society. God would be no different: since He is the creator of the universe; one can confirm that God is entitled to lordship over what He has created.

After the successful refutation of a few of the common problems associated with divine commands was discussed, the purpose of divine commands was brought into focus. The rationale for divine commands was broken into two major categories. The first function of the commands is to develop the moral framework that humanity must follow during life on earth. Additionally, divine commands also validate that humanity is fallen from the holy standard of God. The commands must be kept to be able to remain righteous before God. However, maintaining the holy standard that God has delivered is impossible without the assistance of God Himself through the works of Jesus Christ. Not every problem that could be addressed regarding divine commands was discussed. However, out of the three potential problems of the divine commands, not one of the problems held up to further scrutiny

#### Human Will and Omniscience are Compatible

The final chapter presented the major concern that is connected to the claim that God is responsible for sin because of the foreknowledge that divine commands would be violated. The problems are focused on foreknowledge versus human freedom. Weilenberg's claim carries the hints of two extreme theological thoughts on omniscience and the condition of the human will. Hard determinism and open theism pose two problems. Either humanity does not have a choice to violate divine commands because it is the will of God for the event to take place, or humanity does have the freedom to choose and God does not know what will be chosen.



Divine omniscience and human will to act were demonstrated to be compatible with each other, with no major contradictions to each other or theological truths. The compatibility was shown to be possible from two perspectives. The first was found with the libertarian view of free-will. God retains His ability to foreknow the choices that humanity will make, as well as humans are able to make choices for themselves free of coercion. God retains divine foreknowledge over all choices to be made. No contention exists because God knowing the outcome does not obligate humanity to act in any manner. Since humanity remains in control over their will to decide the responsibility of sin stays with the individual.

The second aspect that was discussed was that of compatibilism, which allowed for the human will to choose and omniscience to be able to co-exist. The concept of compatibilism maintains that humans maintain the ability to decide for themselves, and God does know the choices that will be made. However, God knows the choices that will be made because He knows the desires of every person's heart. The desires of the heart shape the mind of every person, influencing the choices that will be made throughout life.

### Summary

In conclusion, the claim asserted by Weilenberg appeared to deal a crippling blow to Christianity with apparent irreconcilable problems. However, addressing the foundations of sin, morality, divine commands, the human will and foreknowledge, has effectively countered each aspect of Weilenberg's claim. Every facet of God and His divine nature remain unaffected by the claim. Therefore, this paper has effectively demonstrated that each of the major assertions within Weilenberg's claim are invalid and the overarching claim, refuted.

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