

Divine Sovereignty & Human Responsibility

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Tension

The tension
should remain



1. The tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility has troubled theologians for centuries, yet the search results suggest this apparent conflict may be less a problem requiring solution than a mystery demanding acceptance.



Defining Terms

a. Divine Sovereignty or Providence is meant to communicate that God rules and provides according to power, knowledge, and good purposes.



Defining Terms

**b. Going further,
Omnipotence says that God
has the power to do
whatever can be done**



Defining Terms

c. Omniscience says that God knows everything, historical, actual, and potential



Defining Terms

d. God's good purposes say that He has not created the universe on a whim, but has a divine purpose for creation that He will carry to completion



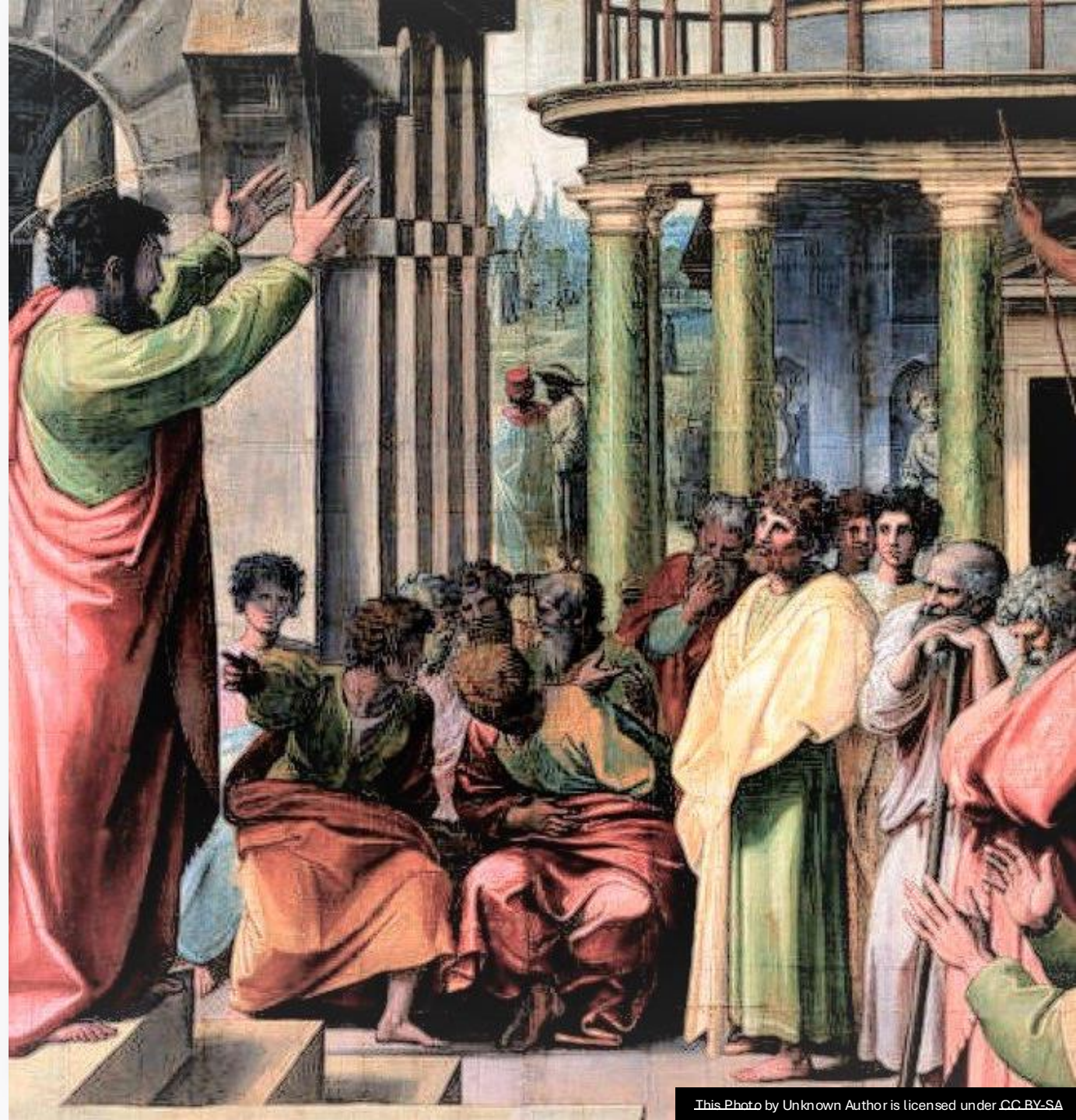
Defining Terms

e. God's sovereignty is complete, perfect, and as far-reaching as possible-- there is nothing that does not fall under his purview

ACTS 17:24-28

24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

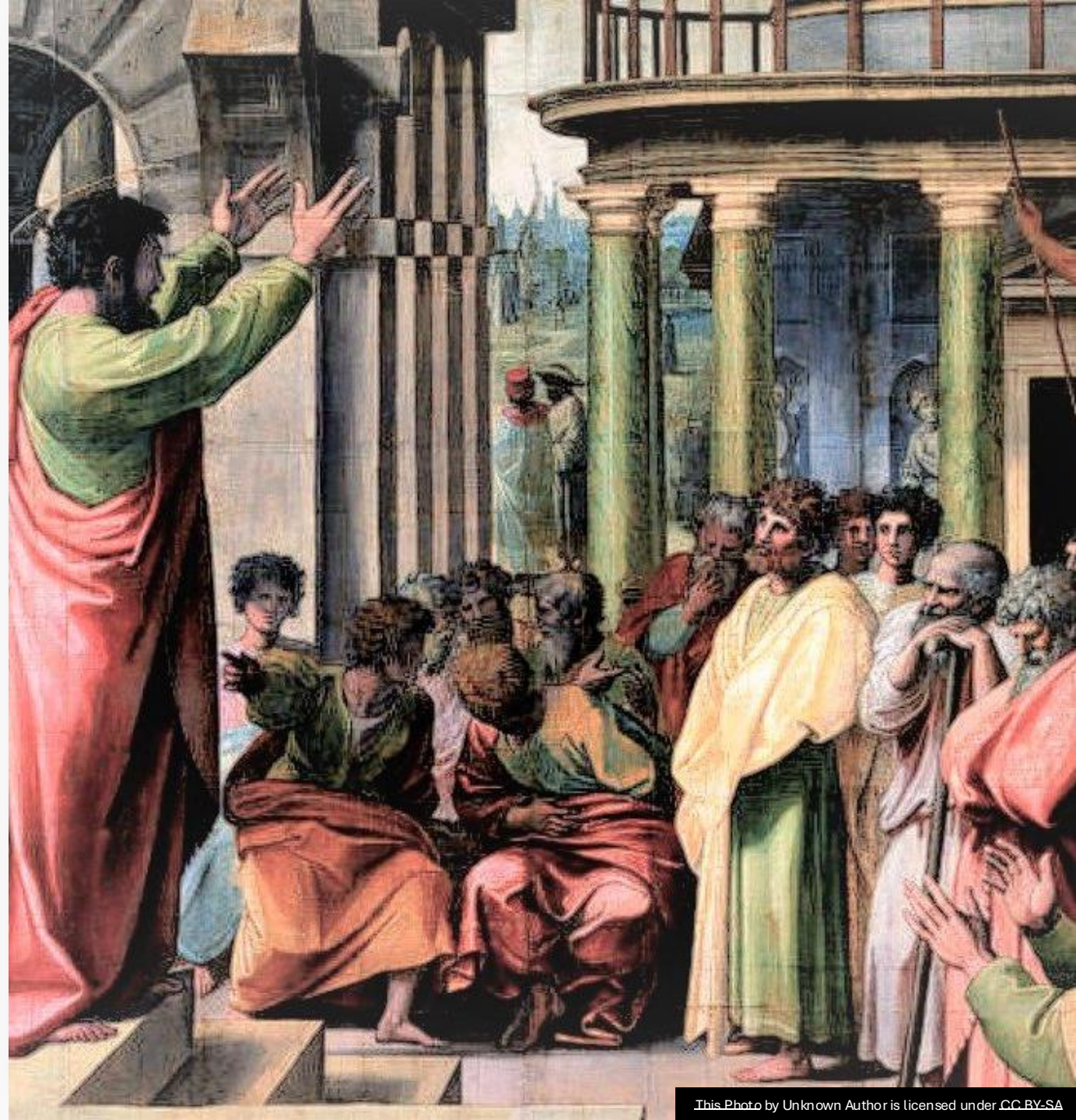
25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;



ACTS 17:24-28

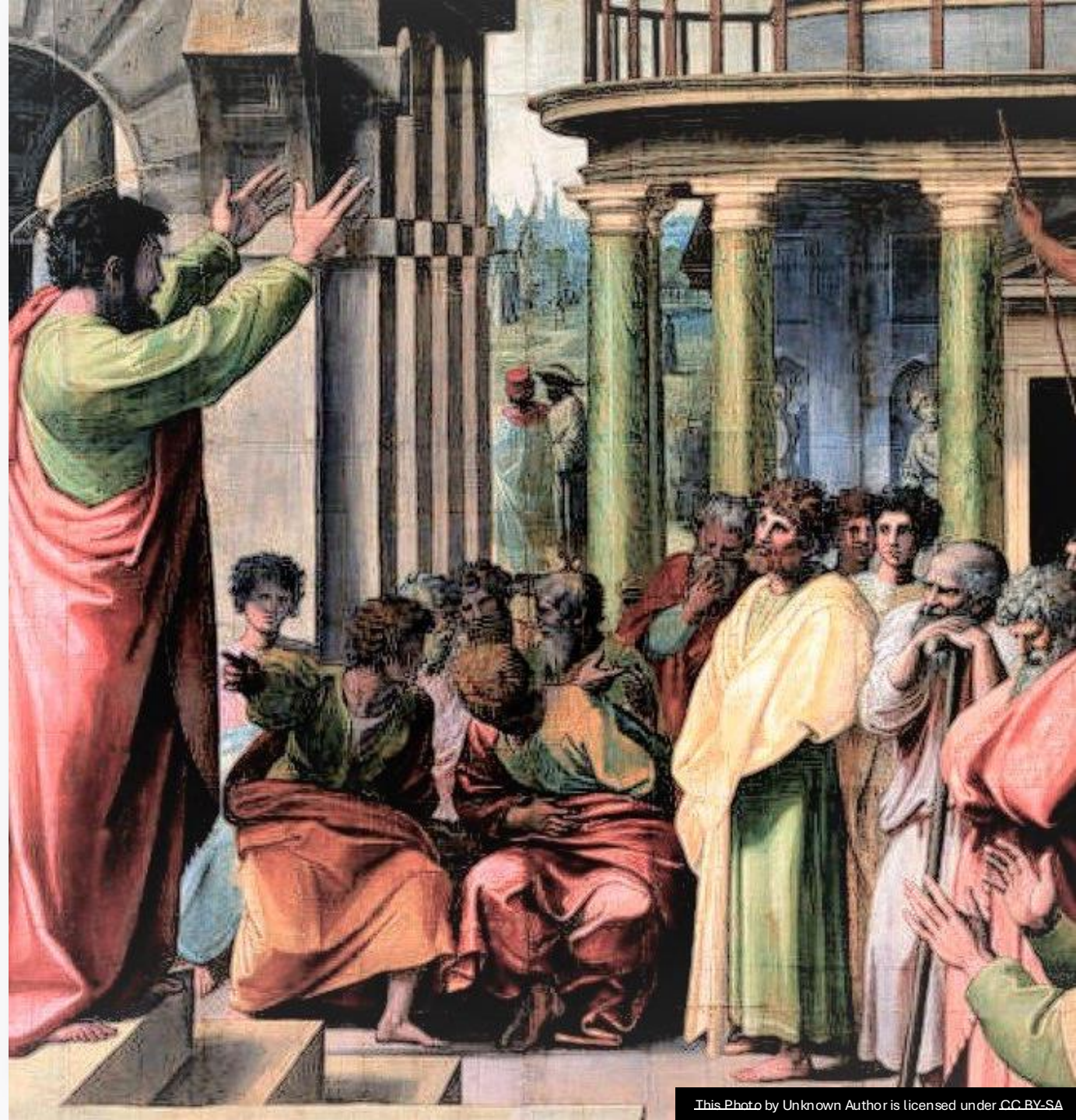
26 and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,

27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;



ACTS 17:24-28

28 for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'





Defining Terms

f. We can frame God's sovereignty with three terms:

i. **Creation- He has created all things (Gen 1:1)**



Defining Terms

ii. **Conservation-** He sustains all things (Col 1:17)

iii. **Concurrence-** He works all things out according to his will (Eph 1:5)

3. Human Responsibility

- a. Most decisions we make in life feel free and completely up to us
 - i. The decision to sit where you are sitting
 - ii. The decision to take notes or not

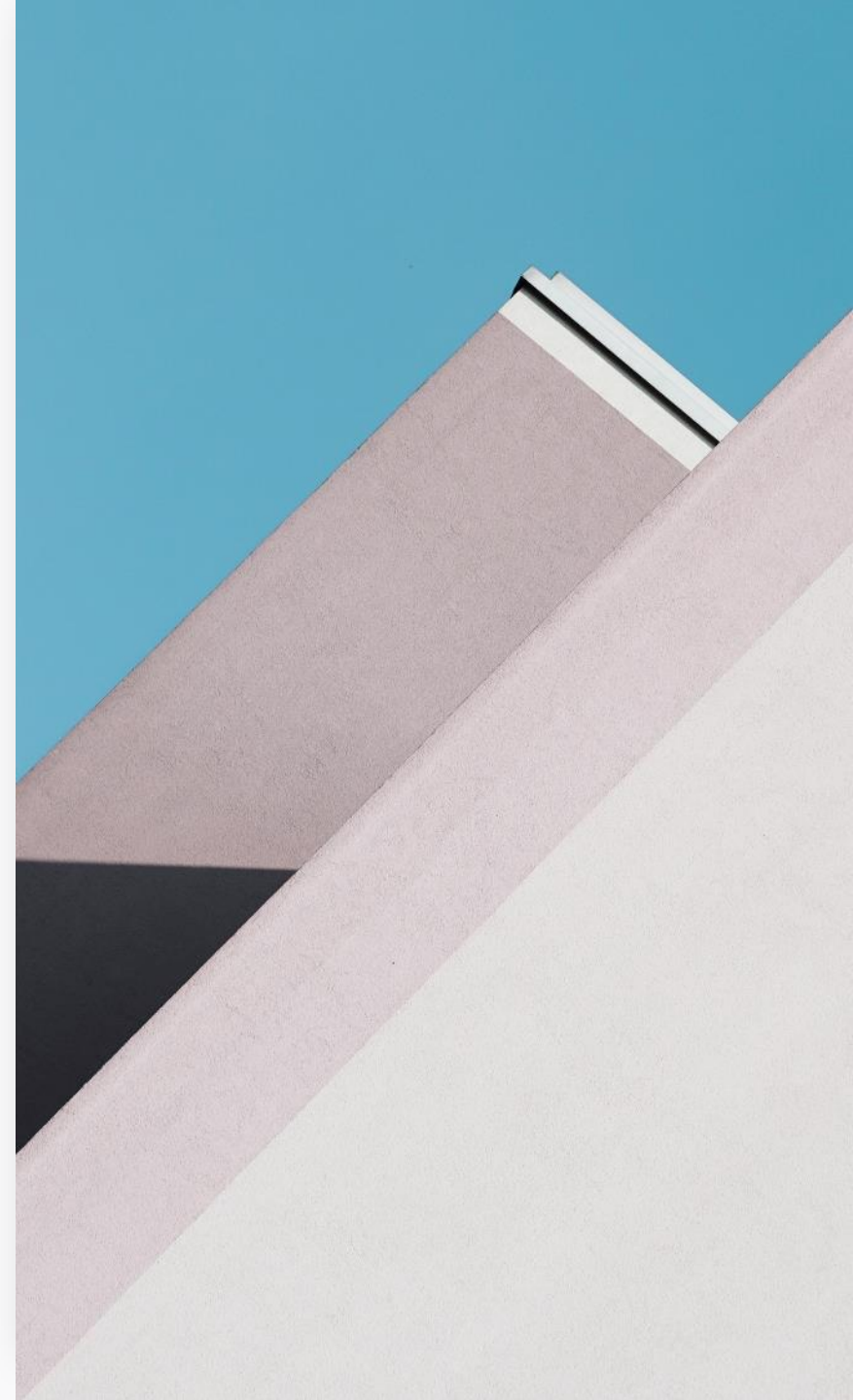
iii. These are not decisions that anyone is making for you

iv. But how does this relate to God's sovereignty?

Two Views of Freedom

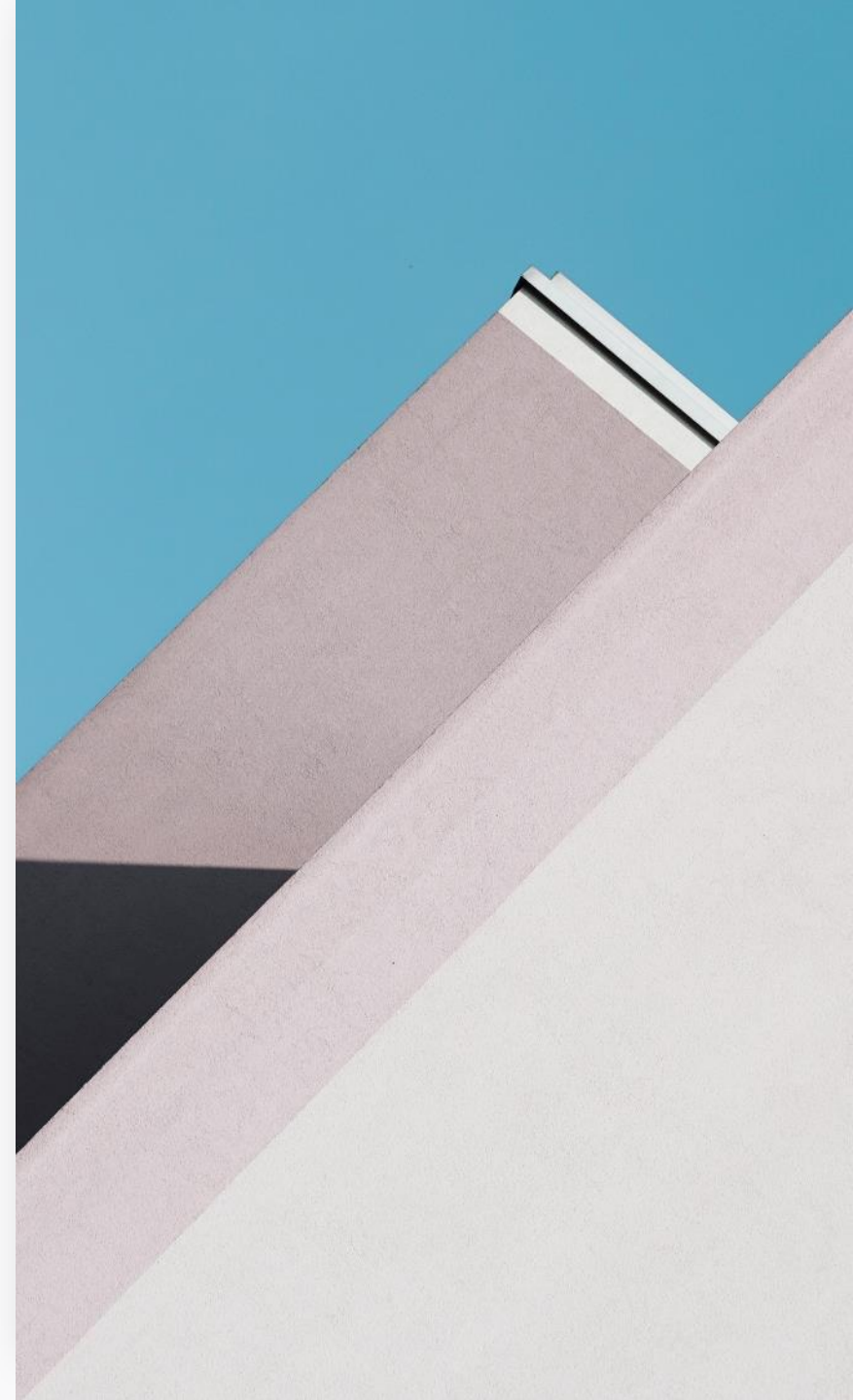
i. **Compatibilism**

(1) The belief that one can freely choose to do something, while it being determined at the same time



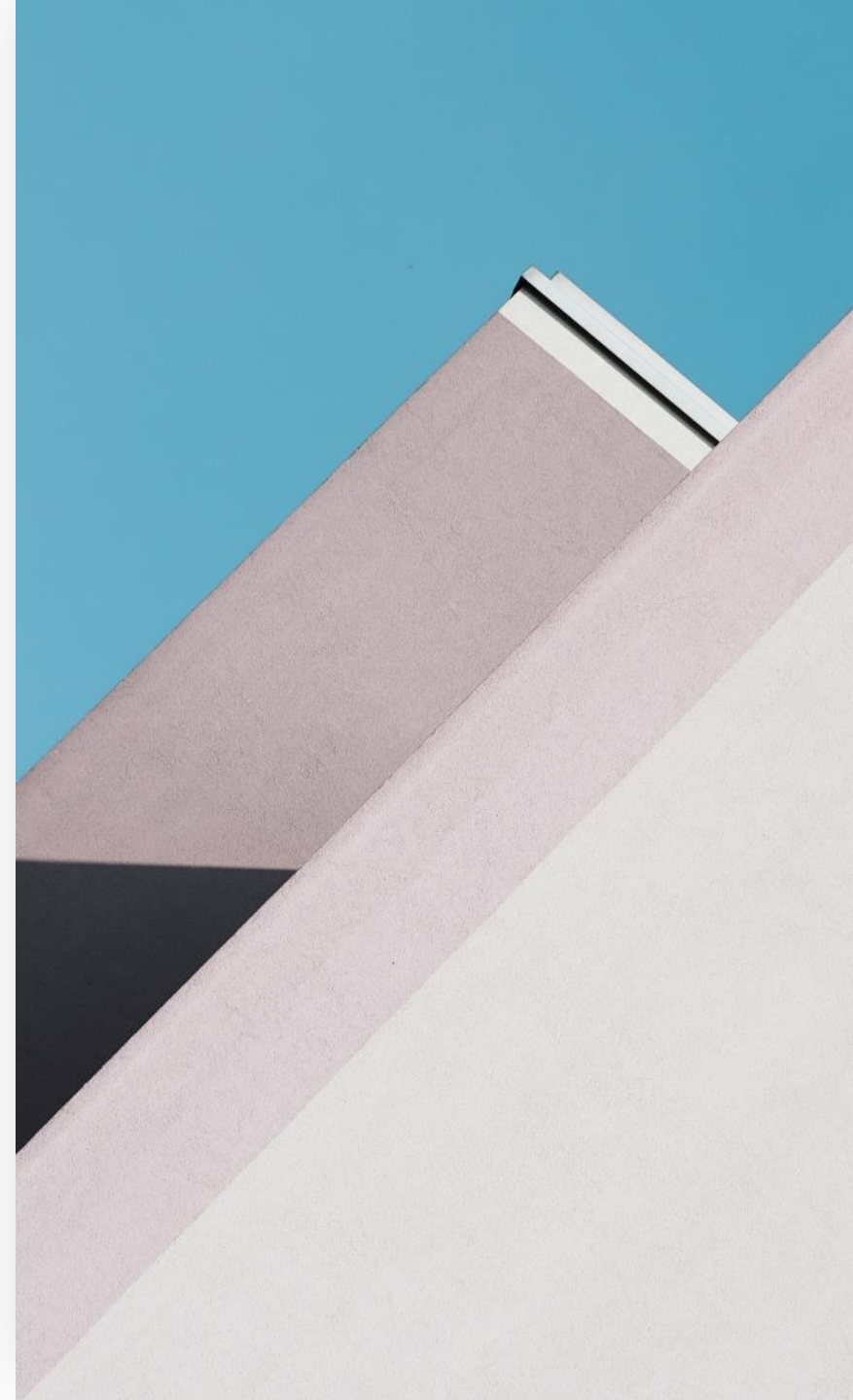
Two Views of Freedom

(2) Consider the story above, the Compatibilist would say that while it is determined that the ship travels to Liverpool, I can freely choose to travel to Liverpool by boarding the ship, even though the ship was headed that way with or without me.



Two Views of Freedom

(3) In summary, this view says, just because something has been predetermined does not mean that I can have no choice in choosing that thing



Two Views of Freedom

ii. Incompatibilism

(1) The belief that freedom is incompatible with being determined to act in a particular way



Two Views of Freedom

ii. Incompatibilism

(2) Using the ship again, the incompatibilist would say, while it is true that the proper authorities had already determined the destination of the ship from New York to Liverpool, in order for it to be a free decision, you must ultimately choose to travel to Liverpool on that particular ship



Two Views of Freedom

ii. Incompatibilism

(3) This view highlights the "fork in the road" decision, noting that all free choices must have at least two options without being coerced



4. One intriguing and prominent biblical narrative is the resolution of the discord between Joseph, the son of Jacob, and his eleven brothers.

a. Joseph reinterprets the events as a matter of divine providence (Gen 50:19-20)

b. However, this is not to give his brothers a pass on their behavior--they are still culpable (responsible), even though God had a plan to elevate Joseph

c. God is not responsible for their mistreatment of him (they are), yet he still uses their horrible actions in Joseph's maturity and development

5. Another example is Judas in the Gospel of John (Jn 12: 4-6; 18:2ff.)

a. Judas is responsible for his treason, yet he also fulfills Scripture

b. In this way, Judas acted in accordance with what he desired to do (being an agent of Satan, of course)

6. Scripture affirms both:

- a. God works all things out according to the counsel of his will
- b. AND humanity is responsible for their actions
- c. When asked how he reconciled the two doctrines, Charles Spurgeon said, "I never try and reconcile friends, and neither should we"

d. This is an eternal mystery and tension that God's people must accept, as the Word is not shy about affirming either one.

e. Its acceptance requires humility (Deut 29:29)

Concluding Thoughts

a. God must be sovereign over all creation in order for me to trust that He is capable of doing what He says

He can do

b. My actions must be genuinely my own in order for me to truly love God and love not be coerced

Concluding Thoughts

c. I am neither a Compatibilist or Incompatibilist entirely

d. I affirm what Scripture says and where it goes silent--so do I

Questions for Consideration

- a. When I choose, am I really choosing?
- b. Can I choose outside of God's choice?
- c. Am I responsible for my own choices?