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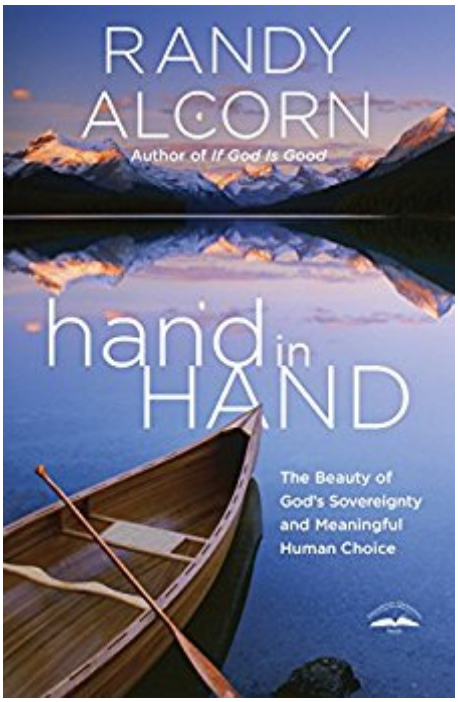
Hand In Hand: The Beauty Of God's Sovereignty And Meaningful Human Choice



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Synopsis

A careful guide through Scripture, hand in Hand shows us why GodÃ¢â ¬â„¢s sovereignty and meaningful human choice work together in a beautiful way.If God is sovereign, how can I be free to choose? But if God is not sovereign, how can he be God?Ã Â Is it possible to reconcile GodÃ¢â ¬â„¢s sovereignty with human choice? This is one of the most perplexing theological questions. ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s also one of the most personal.Ã Â In hand in Hand, Randy Alcorn says that the traditional approach to this debate has often diminished our trust in God and his purposes. Instead of making a one-sided argument from select verses, Alcorn examines the question in light of all Scripture. By exploring what the whole Bible says about divine sovereignty and human choice, hand in Hand helps usÃ¢â ¬Â|Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Carefully and honestly examine the different views on this issueÃ Â Ã Â Gain a deeper understanding of GodÃ Â Ã Â Appreciate GodÃ¢â ¬â„¢s design in providing us the freedom of meaningful choiceÃ Â Ã Â See the value in better understanding what we cannot fully understandÃ Â Ã Â Learn how to communicate about the issue in clear and compassionate waysÃ Â Ã Â More fully experience the unity Christ intends for his ChurchIncludes small-group discussion questions.

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Customer Reviews

This is by far the best and most understandable book I have read on God's Sovereignty as understood by a Calvanist or Armenian. There are vast truths in Scripture that prove both co-exist and do not negate the other. The truth is neither to the far left or far right. Extremism is debunked. Highly recommended this. Very readable.

Thoughtful, unbiased approach examining scriptures about sovereignty and free will. No straw man arguments. Calls for unity since Calvinists still preach the gospel and Armenians call on God to save the lost. The compatibilist view put forth is compelling because able to embrace all of scripture. God is ultimately sovereign over all yet I was encouraged that my choices and prayers are deeply meaningful-- without diminishing the greatness of God in any way. Alcorn also deals with the problem of pain with a non-fatalistic approach, full of compassion and encouragement. I read chapter 10 twice.

A most thorough and reasonable handing of a contentious subject.

God's sovereignty and man's choice beautifully explained.

The debate over the sovereignty of God and the free will of man originally heated up between Augustine of Hippo and Pelagius in the 4th century. This debate has raged throughout church history and does not show any signs of letting up. Arminians accuse Calvinists of serving a "tyrant God" who plays the role of a puppet master, making free will an illusion. Calvinists accuse Arminians of serving a "timid God" who is weak at the knees.Hand in HAND by Randy Alcorn addresses the thorny issue of God's sovereignty and the free will of man. Alcorn does not promise to end all arguments. But he does enter the ring as a sort of "theological referee." The author is a former Arminian theologian who has since turned into a Calvinist. While Alcorn prefers to say that he is a 4 point Calvinist, since he is uncomfortable with particular redemption, he is committed to Calvinistic presuppositions. This theological shift allows the author to sympathize with Arminians and provide some good teaching points for Calvinists who tend to be overzealous.Alcorn begins by reassuring readers that the subject should be discussed and notes six important reasons for

pursuing the matter:1. To develop a deeper appreciation for God and his Word, which reveals him to us.2. To help us mirror Christ's humility.3. To embrace all of God's inspired Word, not just parts of it.4. To foster unity in the body of Christ.5. To avoid fatalism and crushing guilt.6. To prevent us from becoming trivial people in a shallow age.The author surveys the biblical data which point to the biblical reality of God's sovereign control over all things as well as human responsibility. He notes how these two realities intersect, creating a paradox not a contradiction.One chapter is devoted to addressing the matter of Open Theism, a theological cousin of Arminianism which denies God's definite foreknowledge of all things and affirms the libertarian free will of the creature. Alcorn makes it clear that both points are patently rejected in Scripture.Several features make Hand in HAND a worthy book; a book that will likely win the Gold Medallion Award:First, Alcorn writes with the proper tone and spirit. Much of the debate the occurs over these matters produce more heat than light. Dave Hunt's Book, What Love is This is a good example of this mean-spirited approach which caricatures a given theological view. Alcorn approaches the subject with humility and gentleness and invites readers of differing opinions to pay careful attention to the arguments.Second, misunderstood terms are clearly defined. The author does a good job of providing working definitions that are biblical and understandable. The clear terminology should help in future debates between Calvinists and Arminians.Third, the lines of orthodoxy are clearly drawn. Both Calvinists are Arminians are included in the so-called box of orthodoxy. This point is of great value, especially when both schools of thought accuse each other of heresy. Alcorn invites both sides to engage in meaningful debate without name calling. Additionally, Alcorn rightly notes that Open Theism is outside of orthodoxy. Any theologian who refuses to grant God the ability to possess definite foreknowledge of all things has moved outside the perimeter of orthodoxy.Fourth, a determinism continuum is presented. Sadly, many readers and students of theology are unaware of the theological landscape which includes many views concerning determinism and free will. The author clearly describes and defines these views: Hyper-Calvinism (outside orthodoxy), Compatibalism, Molinism, Libertarianism, and Open Theism (outside orthodoxy).Fifth, Biblical Calvinism is presented correctly. Apart from the merits of particular redemption which could be debated at another time, the author does a terrific job of presenting Calvinism as a biblical system which is passionately God-centered; a system which promotes evangelism and engagement with culture. Additionally, the author demonstrates repeatedly that Calvinism embraces the notion of free will, (what Alcorn prefers to call "meaningful choice") by pointing readers to the definition popularized by Jonathan Edwards - "choosing according to one's strongest inclination."Sixth, all readers are admonished to trust a sovereign God. In what proves to be the best chapter in the book (chapter

10), the author encourages readers of all theological backgrounds to trust in a God who is sovereign.Hand in HAND will not be received well by Open Theists and Hyper-Calvinists. Some Arminians and Calvinists may be bothered as well by some of the content. But as a pastor who has travelled a very similar theological path from Arminianism to Calvinism - and even attended the same Bible College, I trust that thousands of people will devour Hand in HAND in the days ahead. There is no doubt that Alcorn's work will spark questions and stimulate debate. But my prayer is that the debate will produce more light than heat. And in the final analysis, people will be drawn closer to the Savior and bank on his all-sufficient grace. Indeed, he is sovereign over all!www.baldreformer.wordpress.com5 stars

ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å"I admire the spirit of anyone who starts by looking for common ground;sometimes youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ll find a great deal more than you expect.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•- Randy AlcornIn his recent book, Randy Alcorn has done a great job of being fair to both Calvinists and Arminians, especially in light of the fact he identifies himself as a 4-point Calvinist. In the beginning of the book, Alcorn writes, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å"Historically, Calvinism and Arminianism have each held to a belief in both GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s sovereignty and meaningful human choice. But theyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve held those beliefs in different ways.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• This recognition sets the tone for what is a balanced tour of issues underlying the discussion of how Christians view the interplay of GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s sovereignty and human choice in different ways.Alcorn admits, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å"ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s essential to go to Calvinists if you want to know what Calvinists believe and to Arminians if you want to know what Arminians believe. Even the best-intentioned critics often donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t get their opponentsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ views correct.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• He is definitely seeking for peace and clarity in the discussion, writing, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å"We need to ask each other what we mean and not draw hasty conclusions.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Amen to that.The discussion questions in the back of the book are fair and well written, allowing the reader to explain his or her own view in a group setting. They are not designed to guide the reader to a particular outcome, which is refreshing.Alcorn does a commendable job of describing both Calvinist and Arminian soteriology and views of predestination and freewill. In contrast, my church uses Wayne GrudemÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Systematic Theology, which provides abysmally erroneous descriptions of Arminian theology, delivered in a partisan style. I would recommend AlcornÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s book as a corrective companion to Grudem's book. It is not designed to convince either side to change their views, but to carefully think about them in light of philosophical and Biblical considerations. Especially for Calvinist groups not inclined to

plunge into a book designed to defend the Arminian paradigm (such as Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities by Roger Olson), AlcornÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s book will provide fairly balanced descriptions of the variety of Calvinist and Arminian views on the subject.Alcorn describes the Arminian position pretty fairly throughout the book, which is a remarkable thing for someone who identifies himself as a Calvinist. I commend him in the strongest terms ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ Randy Alcorn, sir, my hat comes off to you. You have been honest and charitable in your descriptions of the Arminian view of salvation, even rebuking Calvinist vilifications, and you are an example to the likes of John Piper, RC Sproul, John MacArthur, and other Calvinists who regularly misrepresent and erroneously vilify Arminians by saying we believe things Arminians do not believe. I commend you and would wish success for your book for this reason alone. While I recommend the book, I cannot recommend the book without a few cautions and clarifications, which follow.CHARTS GOOD, DIAGRAMS POORAlcorn provides charts explaining how Calvinists and Arminians differ on their definitions of biblical terms. For the most part, these charts are surprisingly fair-minded and accurate. Rather than painting a caricature, Alcorn does a good job (with a few minor exceptions) of succinctly but thoroughly sketching each viewpoint. Alcorn also provides a ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Determinism ContinuumÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• which the reader should find helpful. Further on in the book, Alcorn provides some pictorial representations of various theological positions. Unlike the charts, I found that these diagrams were either overly simplistic or did not accurately represent the paradigms they were intended to represent.REDEFINING LIBERTARIAN FREE WILL AND COMPATIBILISMFor the greater part of the book, Randy Alcorn focuses primarily on issues relating to his ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Determinism ContinuumÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•, which depicts a range from 1) Hard determinism, 2) Soft determinism, or 'Compatibilism', 3) Molinism, 4) Libertarian freedom, and 5) Open theism. 1 through 3 fall under the heading of Calvinism, and 3 through 5 under the heading of Arminianism (both systems are presented as being able to embrace Molinism).The primary flaw in the book is the way Alcorn treats the word "Compatibilism." Alcorn sets a neutral tone, but he does seem to go to bat for the position he calls compatibilism. Along the way he admits that Arminians could embrace compatibilism in the way he defines it. Frankly, I think Alcorn has watered down his compatibilism so that it looks a lot more like classical Arminian views. It might have been better to coin a new term, such as ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“libertarian compatibilism," or better yet, explain better what the classical Arminian view of libertarian free will truly is. Instead, due to this tweaking of definitions, it appears Alcorn's version of Compatibilism has far more in common with Arminian views than with Calvinist 'Compatibilism.' This is helpful to know from the outset, and if I had only one suggestion to make for this book, I wish the author had shown on his

ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Determinism ContinuumÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• that his unique definition of compatibilism can be embraced by both Arminians and Calvinists, or to have identified two types: Deterministic Compatibilism (the standard meaning of compatibilism) and Libertarian Compatibilism (a newly created term to satisfy Alcorn's desire to use the word "compatible"). Instead, he places his unique view of compatibilism squarely on the Calvinist side, which makes little sense as the book progresses, especially as Alcorn admits that many Arminians will embrace the view he calls Compatibilism.This distinction requires some explanation. Let me contrast AlcornÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s view of compatibilism with how Wayne Grudem explains a compatibilist view:"In one sense events are fully (100 percent) caused by God and fully (100 percent) caused by the creature as well. However, divine and creaturely causes work in different ways. The divine cause of each event works as an invisible, behind-the-scenes, directing cause and therefore could be called the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“primary causeÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• that plans and initiates everything that happens...The analogy of an author writing a play may help us to grasp how both aspects can be true. In the Shakespearean play Macbeth, the character Macbeth murders King Duncan....on another level, a correct answer to the question, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Who killed King Duncan?ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• would be ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“William ShakespeareÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•: he wrote the play, he created all the characters in it, and he wrote the part where Macbeth killed King Duncan." (Wayne Grudem, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Systematic TheologyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•).Unlike Alcorn, Grudem describes compatibilism in the normal way: that every act and desire (including necessarily all sin, evil, and acts of rebellion) has not merely been sovereignly permitted by God, but that God was the directing, primary cause who has planned and initiated - and indeed caused - every act. Grudem would insist that we creatures still have freedom to chose what we want, but only because God has also scripted our desires and volition so that we 'willingly' 'choose' what He has scripted us to choose, even though many of our choices go against God's revealed will. If you said, "I am a compatibilist," most people would understand you to mean that you embrace a definition like GrudemÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s. Let me remind the reader, this is not the Libertarian-flavored 'Compatibilism' that Alcorn proposes.In chapter 7, I find AlcornÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Venn diagrams of various positions to be somewhat unhelpful. Most of them place some aspect of creaturely choice outside of GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s will. Yet this term, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s willÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•, may have multiple meaningsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â| which should we ascribe to the Venn circle so marked? These Venn diagrams are dissatisfactory by design, and set the stage for AlcornÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s suggested solution: Compatibilism, but again, a ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœcompatibilism ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ which both classical Arminians and compatibilist

Calvinists could agree with, and he admits this is so. Alcorn admits that some compatibilists will object to this way of defining compatibilism ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ and I think he is correct. It seems that on this front, Alcorn is in fact embracing libertarian free will under the umbrella of GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s sovereignty, but he doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t want to say so - he likes the term compatibilism, and he is going to stick with it and even redefine it so that it fits with his own (libertarian) view (!). Alcorn writes:ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Since God does whatever he pleases, it must please him to permit people, for the present, to displease him! The fact that God does whatever he pleases doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t prove that it pleases him to determine every thought and action. It may please him more to determine that his image-bearers can make real choices compatible with his sovereignty.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•When he speaks of moral evil, Alcorn adopts what I perceive to be a more Arminian tone. Alcorn affirms: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“ ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodnessÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (2 Peter 1: 3). God has given all of us the capacity to make right choices; doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t the fact that we often make wrong ones suggest that we, as well as God, are involved in determining our life direction?ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Elsewhere, he writes, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“God isnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t the author of evil, but he is the author of a story that includes evil. In his sovereignty, he intended from the beginning to permit evil, then to turn evil on its head and use it for a redemptive good.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• This is a nuanced statement that invites reflection from both sides. Exactly how is God the author of a story that includes evil, but he is not the author of the evil within this story?Someone who embraces Arminian doctrine without knowing their views are 'Arminian' might finish the book, reflect that they embrace most of Alcorn's version of Compatibilism, and start erroneously calling themselves a 4-point Calvinist! This is likely not helpful to the larger conversation and would create confusion.Alcorn firmly rejects both hard-determinism and open theism, devoting a chapter to a refutation of open theism (or the 'open future' view). Although I reject the open future view, I did not feel Alcorn described it with the fairness that characterizes the rest of the book. I have read several of Greg BoydÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s books (including his 450 page ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Satan and the Problem of EvilÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•) and I felt that his views were not presented with the nuance that Alcorn gives to other views. This is probably due to the fact Alcorn rejects the open future view as being unorthodox, to which I have to agree. Alcorn does do a good job of briefly rebutting the open future view.AlcornÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s inclusion of hyper-Calvinism among the systems he describes does much to clearly define the errors of hard-determinism. Alcorn rejects hyper-Calvinism as outside the bounds of orthodoxy. He writes, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“On the far left of the determinism continuum is the extreme of

hyper-Calvinism, which holds that God determines every single thought and action of every demon and human being, so that there is no real creature choice at all.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• One wonders if he realizes he might have just thrown John Piper, RC Sproul, and Wayne Grudem outside the camp of ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“orthodoxyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•(!). Alcorn rightly expresses concern that many young Calvinists are in fact embracing hyper-Calvinism. He approvingly quotes a 5-point Calvinist in warning that every revival since Puritan times has been crippled or killed by hyper-Calvinism.He makes a few lighthearted jokes at the expense of both Arminians and Calvinists at the opening of chapter two. He admits these jokes are not to be taken seriously, but one struck me as being perhaps more accurate for Calvinists: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Calvinists have their TULIP; what flower do Arminians prefer? The daisy. Why? ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœHe loves me, he loves me not. He loves me, he loves me not ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â|ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• To me, this echoes the views of hyper-CalvinismÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s double-predestination rather than a caricature of conditional security. (hey, Mr. Reviewer, itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s a joke! Relax!) No matter...There is one place in which Arminian doctrine is sorely misrepresented. Alcorn writes, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Arminians understand Ephesians 2: 8ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ 9 like thisÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â| No one can be saved without GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s grace, but neither can he be saved without exercising his faith to accept that gift. In this sense, the believerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s faith is his gift to God.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• No, dear reader, that is not the position of classical Arminians. Faith is no more a gift to God than presenting a pardon in a court of law is giving a gift to the judge! Classical Arminians hold that even the ability to exercise faith in God is due to grace from God, but it is a grace which may be rejected. This is a significant error which hopefully will be corrected in subsequent editions.Randy Alcorn does a great job of being a referee for both sides. He is clearly seeking to transcend the partisan spirit and vilification that often pervades these discussions. He writes, in defense of Arminians, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“To be sovereign does not mean that one always has to be in meticulous control over everything that happens. God, for the Arminian, could shape all human events according to his will, he just chooses not to. This is still sovereignty. Arminian theologian Roger Olson expresses a common frustration: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“It is apparent to Arminians that distorted information about Arminian theology plagues contemporary Calvinist students, pastors and lay people.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â| Simply denying that Arminians believe in GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s sovereignty ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â| is so blatantly false that it boggles ArminiansÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ minds.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â| When people tell you that you believe what you donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t, it raises your defenses and impairs your ability to trust the other things they say.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• This is generally clear-headed, and while Alcorn does not buy into Arminian

theology in toto, he is generally very fair-minded toward it. As to be expected, his descriptions of his own system (4-point, non-deterministic Calvinism) are also well expressed and fair-minded. Since Alcorn's version of Calvinism is definitely not normative - his libertarian nuances to compatibilism, rejection of deterministic compatibilism, and his rejection of limited atonement make him perhaps closer to an Arminian paradigm than a normative Calvinist paradigm - some of the definitive aspects of what he calls 'hyper-Calvinism' seem to actually be describing aspects of mainline Calvinism, and his descriptions of compatibilism seem at times to be identical to the Arminian view of libertarian freedom.Historically, Alcorn states that the first free will debate was between Augustine and Pelagius. This is not quite right, though ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ the first debates were of Christians against pagan fatalists, in which Christians (such as Tertullian, Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Justin Martyr, Archelaus vs. the heretic Manes; all 220AD or earlier) defended libertarian free will as a basic tenant of the Christian view that man was made in the image of God. Their view of libertarian free will, of course, would still be under the umbrella of GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s sovereign permission and design - free will is a gift from God.AlcornÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s sympathies to his view of Compatibilism are most exposed in Chapter 5, in which he assesses and describes various systems of reconciling GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s sovereignty with human choice. I would say he gradually loses his objectivity as the chapter proceeds, but since he has started off so refreshingly objective, he doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t slide far. Alcorn uses a description of compatibilism that an Arminian could identify as her own: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Humans choose and sin freely, yet God maintains control and uses even sin to accomplish his purposes.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• I couldnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t help but feel that Alcorn has loaded the preceding pages and then provided this definition in the hopes that his readers will embrace it as being ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœthe solution.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ Alcorn writes, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Compatibilism differs from libertarianism in that these human choices do not occur outside the realm of GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s design.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• What does he mean by ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“designÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•? It is not quite clear, but it seems Alcorn has misunderstood the position of many Christians who identify themselves as proponents of libertarian free will. Certainly Christian proponents of Libertarian free will do not think that they are exercising it 'outside the realm of God's design.' I believe that here Alcorn becomes inconsistent ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ not merely philosophically but in the definitions he uses ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ in how he is defining compatibilism and in how he distinguishes between soft-determinism and hard-determinism. He tries to narrow the definition of hard-determinism by saying that hard-determinists exclude God from using ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœmeans ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ but I doubt that many hard-determinists can be found who completely exclude

the use of means. The question libertarians wish to pose to deterministic compatibilists is not ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“How can we then explain our experience of freedom?ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•, it is ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“How can we then explain the reality of sin, rebellion against God, and Hell?ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Like many other compatibilists, Alcorn spends most of his time explaining how compatibilist choices really are creaturely and experienced subjectively as ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœfreeÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ I donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t mind that. What I mind is the implication that God has designed sin and designed people to rebel against Him and then be punished for it ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ and I would assert that this is often the destination to which any form of determinism, hard or soft, must lead us. Alcorn rejects these conclusions as being hyper-Calvinism or hard-determinism. Alcorn does have words of rebuke for people who embrace the view that every single thought and act is decreed by God ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ I suspect theologians such as John Piper and Wayne Grudem (who do embrace this concept) would either appeal to paradox or would reject this book for not ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœgetting itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢. We are left with a view of compatibilism which seems more Arminian, but which Alcorn seems to feel is more in the territory of Calvinism. Part of this tension is due to the fact Alcorn is seeking to maintain a level of some mystery and tension between God's choices and human choices. Again, however, this may lead the reader to tend to identify themselves as Calvinistic when in truth they may hold Arminian views.On a personal note, I would encourage the reader to recognize that Arminian theology is a theology that does combine and hold both GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s sovereignty and manÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s freedom together in a Biblically coherent manner. Reading Jacob Arminius himself shows that he rejected the hyper-Calvinism and hard-determinism of his day, and returned to a balanced view. This, of course, is my personal opinion, but it is one that has the support of the vast consensus of Christian history. Nevertheless, I recognize Calvinists as my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, and I commend this book to them. If nothing else, it will overturn many misconceptions that have been painted against Arminians through the years.As the book draws to a close, Randy Alcorn provides quotations and stories from Christians in the past who have disagreed on these matters, but who have engaged one another in a respectful love and appreciation.In the final analysis, Randy Alcorn has done an outstanding job and has accomplished his goal of providing a book designed to provoke thoughtful and considerate conversation between brothers and sisters in Christ. I believe that working through this book with a mixed group of Calvinists and Arminians would indeed produce far more light than heat. Aside from a few problems, I was surprised by this bookÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s congenial tone and fair-minded stance. It is a welcome addition to the books that claim to explore this issue.(Note: My review comes necessarily from my

paradigm as a classical Arminian. I am grateful to be a member of the Society of Evangelical Arminians, however, what I write below are my own views and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Society. I encourage readers to check out www.evangelicalarminians.org for educational articles and resources on Arminian theology.)

Exceptional, just like Randy's other books.

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