

THE WORKS OF GOD

VIII

The Divine Decrees

1. **The Divine Decrees in General.** The decree of God is His eternal plan or purpose, in which He has foreordained all things that come to pass. Since it includes many particulars, we often speak of the divine decrees in the plural. **The Decrees in General** though in reality there is but a single decree. It covers all the works of God in creation and redemption, and also embraces the actions of men, not excluding their sinful deeds. But while it rendered the entrance of sin into the world certain, it does not make God responsible for our sinful deeds. His decree with respect to sin is a permissive decree.

a. Characteristics of the decree. The decree of God is *found* in wisdom, Eph. 3:9-11, though we do not always understand it. It was formed in the depths of eternity, and is therefore *eternal* in the strictest sense of the word, Eph. 3:11. Moreover, it is *effectual*, so that everything that is included in it certainly comes to pass, Isa. 46:10. The plan of God is also *unchangeable*, because He is faithful and true, Job 23:13, 14; Isa. 46:10; Luke 22:22. It is *unconditional*, that is, its execution does not depend on any action of man but even renders such action certain, Acts 2:23; Eph. 2:8. Moreover, it is *all-inclusive*, embracing the good and the wicked actions of men, Eph. 2:10; Acts 2:23, contingent events, Gen. 50:20, the duration of man's life, Job 14:5; Ps. 39:4, and the place of his habitation, Acts 17:26. With respect to sin it is *permissive*.

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b. Objections to the doctrine of the decrees. Many do not believe in the doctrine of the decrees, and raise especially three objections. (1) *It is inconsistent with the moral freedom of man.* But the Bible clearly teaches not only that God has decreed the free acts of man, but also that man is none the less free and responsible for his acts, Gen. 50:19, 20; Acts 2:23; 4:27-29. We may not be able to harmonize the two altogether, but it is evident from Scripture that the one does not cancel the other. (2) *It makes people slothful in seeking salvation.* They feel that, if God has determined whether they will be saved or not, it makes no difference what they may do. But this is hardly correct, because man does not know what God has decreed respecting him. Moreover, God has decreed not only the final destiny of man, but also the means by which it will be realized. And seeing that the end is decreed only as the result of the appointed means, it encourages rather than discourages their use. (3) *It makes God the author of sin.* It may be said, however, that the decree merely makes God the author of free moral beings, who are themselves the authors of sin. Sin is made certain by the decree, but God does not Himself produce it by His direct action. At the same time it must be admitted that the problem of God's relation to sin remains a mystery which we cannot fully solve.

2. **Predestination.** *Predestination is the plan or purpose of God respecting His moral creatures.* It pertains to men, both good and bad, to angels and devils, and to Christ as the Mediator. Predestination includes two parts, namely, election and reprobation.

a. Election. The Bible speaks of election in more than one sense, as (1) the election of Israel as the Old Testament people of God, Deut. 4:37; 7:6-8; 10:15; Hos. 13:5; (2) the election of persons to some special office or service, Deut. 18:5; I Sam. 10:24; Ps. 78:70; and (3) the election of individuals unto salvation, Matt. 22:14; Rom. 11:5; Eph. 1:4. The last is the election to which we refer in this con-

nection. It may be defined as *God's eternal purpose to save some of the human race in and by Jesus Christ.*

b. Reprobation. The doctrine of election naturally implies that God did not intend to save all. If He purposed to save some, He naturally also purposed not to save others. This is also in harmony with the teachings of Scripture, Matt. 11:25, 26; Rom. 9:13, 17, 18, 21, 22; 11:7, 8; II Pet.

Reprobation 2:9; Jude 4. Reprobation may be defined as *God's eternal purpose to pass some men by with the operation of His special grace, and to punish them for their sin.* It really embodies a twofold purpose therefore: (1) to pass some by in the bestowal of saving grace; and (2) to punish them for their sins.

It is sometimes said that the doctrine of predestination exposes God to the charge of injustice. But this is hardly correct.

Objection to Predestination We could speak of injustice only if man had a claim on God, and God owed man eternal salvation. But the situation is entirely different if all men have forfeited the blessings of God, as they have. No one has the right to call God to account for electing some and rejecting others. He would have been perfectly just, if He had not saved any, Matt. 20:14, 15; Rom. 9:14, 15.

To memorize. Passages pertaining to:

a. God's decree in general:

Eph. 1:11. "In whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His will."

Ps. 33:11. "The counsel of Jehovah standeth fast forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations."

Isa. 46:10. "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

b. Predestination:

Eph. 1:11, cf. above under *a.*

Ps. 2:7. "I will tell of the decree: Jehovah said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee."

Eph. 1:4, 5. "Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love, having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

Rom. 11:5. "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace."

Rom. 9:13. "Even as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Rom. 9:18. "So then He hath mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardeneth."

For Further Study:

- a. Is foreknowledge the same as foreordination or predestination? Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:29; 11:2; I Pet. 1:2.
- b. How does the Bible indicate that Christ was also an object of predestination? Ps. 2:7; Isa. 42:1; I Pet. 1:20; 2:4. In what sense is this to be understood?
- c. What indications have we that the angels were also objects of predestination? I Tim. 5:21. How should we conceive of this?

Questions for Review

1. *What is the divine decree?*
2. *Why do we sometimes speak of 'decrees' in the plural?*
3. *What are the characteristics of the decree?*
4. *What is the nature of God's decree respecting sin?*
5. *What objections are raised against the doctrine of the decrees?*