

## Lesson 4 - God's Plan or Decree

1. The meaning of "Decree"
  - a. It is really simply God's plan. "God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass . . ." (WCF, 3.1).
  - b. Creation and providence are the execution of God's plan. "WSC 8. How doth God execute his decrees? A. God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence."
  - c. Isaiah 49:10 - I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." Also, see Isaiah 14:24, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will happen."
2. All things work out according to God's plan -- "whatsoever comes to pass."
  - a. Notice how this fits in with 2.2. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things, and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever Himself pleaseth.
  - b. Eph. 1:11 - "having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will."
  - c. See also Acts 17:26, 2:23, 4:28.
3. Some qualifications to avoid misunderstanding
  - a. "Yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin." God doesn't force people to sin or give them the idea. Sin is rooted in the creature's free choice.
  - b. "nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures" -- human beings are still free. I will explain this in more detail when we look at providence, but, for now, just note that the Confession does not oppose "free will." It brings God's sovereignty and man's free will together."
  - c. "nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." There is the first cause, but there is also the second cause. For example, God decreed that Christ would die on the cross, but the nails were the cause of Him being held there physically.
4. The proper response to God's decree
  - a. The response to God's decree is similar to that of providence.
  - b. First, we acknowledge everything we have as ultimately coming from God.
  - c. Second, we accept God's will for us, the concrete situation in which we find ourselves. This is what God wanted, so we accept that.
  - d. Third, we trust God for our future, knowing that He has a plan for us.
5. The decree and salvation
  - a. The Scripture often ties God's decree into the salvation of human beings. Thus, our salvation is rooted in God's decree. How we conceive of this is rooted in how we conceive of how God saves us. We will explore this when we look at man's will and effectual calling. For now, note the certainty and connection of the decree of salvation in 2 Tim. 1:9-10, Eph. 1:11 and Rom.

8:28-30.

- b. We should be especially cautious when explaining reprobation. We should more properly conceive of this as God's letting go their own way. It's easy to go off the rails if we push this too hard, which leads us to point # 6.
6. Care but not neglect in teaching this doctrine recommended
- a. "The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care" (WCF, 3.8). Dabney: "In preaching it, that proportion should be observed, which obtains in the Bible; and no polemical zeal against impugnors for the doctrine ought to tempt the minister to obtrude it more often" (Systematic Theology, 46). How should we teach it? "And when taught, it should be in the mode which usually prevails in Scripture, viz., *a posteriori*, as inferred from its result, effectual calling" (ibid.).
  - b. However, when we see God saving us, we can know that it is part of His plan and that it is eternal! Great comfort: "So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation, to all that sincerely obey the Gospel" (WCF, 3.8).