

# Who's In Charge?

Of The Decrees of God: "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated *according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*"  
Ephesians 1:11

# The Text (Eph. 1:11)

- The sovereignty of God's free grace in calling both Jew & Gentile to the inheritance of sons.
- This inheritance was based upon the merits of the very Son of God.
- Some obtained the inheritance and others did not because they were among those whom God ordained to it
- God's purpose is fully effectual; i.e. whatever he purposes to come to pass does actually come to pass.

“Who worketh all things according to the counsel of his will”

- Note, it is *God* who works
- It is according to *his wise will* and counsel
- All things (whatever comes to pass) falls under this designation, and so certainly this means all things pertaining to his will for our salvation.

God has foreordained, according to the counsel of his own will, whatsoever comes to pass.

- The Nature of a Decree
- The Objects of God's Decrees
- The Purpose of God's Decrees
- Some Properties of God's Decrees
- Some Good Uses of This Doctrine

# The Nature of a Decree

- For God to decree something means to have a purpose that it will or will not come to pass.
- This must be the case as there is an absolute dependence of all creation upon God.
- There is a significant difference between the decrees of God and of men:
  - Men's decrees are distinct from their persons, but it is not so with God. Thus we speak of God's decrees in the plural because of their many objects, not because of their many sources.
  - Men's decrees have a beginning, but God's decrees are eternal because God himself is eternal.

# The Objects of God's Decrees

- Whatever comes to pass, i.e. "all things."
  - The creation of all things that have being (Rev. 4:11)
  - The rule and government of all his creations (Rom. 11:36).
    - This includes even the free acts of his creatures (as the king's heart in Prov. 21:1) and seemingly random events (as the casting of the lot in Prov. 16:33)

# The Objects of God's Decrees

- The Governance of Rational Creatures
  - He has decreed what kingdoms and monarchies shall be on earth.
  - The Lot and Condition of Particular Persons
    - Time and place of their birth
    - Whether they will be born rich or poor
    - Relations such as wives and children (Gen. 24:44; Psa. 127:3)
    - All the comforts and discomforts of this life (1 Thess. 3:3)
    - The amount of time we have in life (Job 7:1; 14:5)

# The Objects of God's Decrees

- The Eternal State of His Rational Creatures
  - Some angels elect (1 Tim. 5:21), yet not all (2 Pet. 2:4 cf. Jude 6). The prospect of darkness is irreversible.
  - Similarly the eternal destiny of men (Rom. 9:21-23)
    - Some are elected to life by an immutable decree (Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13)
    - The rest are passed by and ordained to dishonor and wrath for their sin (2 Tim. 2:19-20)

# The Purpose of God's Decrees

- Fundamentally, the purpose or end of God's decrees is his own glory (Eph. 1:12)
- So, in Eph. 1:4-6,
  - Holy and blameless
  - Adoption
  - Good pleasure of His will
  - His grace
  - Acceptance in the Beloved

# Some Properties of God's Decrees

- They are eternal (Eph. 1:4; Acts 15:18)
  - Acts 15:18, God's foreknowledge is from his decree
- They are wise (Rom. 11:33)
- They are according to the freedom of his own will (Eph. 1:11; Rom. 11:34)
- They are unchangeable (Psa. 33:11; 2 Tim. 2:19)
- They are holy and pure (1 John 1:5; Jas. 1:13, 17) – God is not the author of evil.
- They are effectual (Isa. 46:10)

# Some Common Objections

- How is God not the author of sin?
  - It must be admitted that all sinful actions fall under the divine decree (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28)
  - The divine decree is not coercive and some refer to it as permitting or suffering (Acts 14:18).
  - God has decreed whatever comes to pass not for sinister ends which would make him the author of evil; but he has decreed it for good ends, which makes him the author of all good, even in the evil acts of men (Gen. 50:20)

# Some Common Objections

- Why make use of means?
  - As God has decreed the end, so too has he decreed all the means to that end. Must not separate the two.
  - Example: Paul on ship (Acts 27:31 cf. vv. 22-24). Thus also at v. 34 he made use of food to stave off hunger and to preserve life and health.
  - Example: Hezekiah (Isa. 38:20-22) made use of the plaster of figs, though God had promised his health to be restored.

# Some Common Objections

- Why repent and believe if salvation is already decreed? Or, what is the same: Why preach the gospel if the elect are already determined?
  - This is really a “subset” of previous objection.
  - It is impossible for us to know before faith comes who is and who is not elect.
  - Thus it is one of the “secret things” of God.
  - It is our duty to look to God’s commands, not to his decrees. Thus the duty is to repent and believe; the duty is to preach to every creature under heaven.
  - Men do not so curiously pry into God’s secrets in other matters, nor should they in this.

# Some Inferences

- Nothing falls out in our lives by chance. So we should not ascribe anything to luck or good fortune.
- We must look above our circumstances, whether they seem good or ill to us, to the hand of God who does all things well.
- It is fundamentally evil to murmur, for all murmuring is against the decrees of God. Demanding a reason for something, is a sort of calling God to account. "I would have ordered this much better had I only been consulted."
- This doctrine, rightly understood, prevents us blaming any of our evil actions on a righteous and holy God. We do what we do by our own choice

# A Final Inference

- Christians can comfort themselves in the knowledge that whatever befalls them comes from the hand of a loving and gracious friend and father who knows how to make all things work together for the good of his own people.
- “O what a sweet and pleasant life would ye have under the heaviest pressures of affliction, and what heavenly serenity and tranquility of mind would you enjoy, would you cheerfully acquiesce in the good will and pleasure of God, and embrace every dispensation, how sharp so ever it may be, because it is determined and appointed for you by the eternal counsel of his will!” ~Thomas Boston, Works, I:118.