

The Decrees of God

A. Defined:

1. God's decree is His plan by which means He has determined all things that relate to the universe, including His own action towards it and all that comes to pass in it and of it.¹
2. The decrees of God are His eternal purpose . . . or purposes, based on His wise and holy counsel, whereby He freely and unchangeably, for His own glory, ordained, either efficaciously or permissively, all that comes to pass.²

B. Biblical Evidence of God's Decrees

1. God is not surprised or disappointed by the events in the universe. They are the outworking of His definite purpose and plan. Various terms and verses affirming the decrees of God:

a. Purpose

- 1) "To them who are the called **according to his purpose.**" – Romans 8:28
- 2) "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure **which he hath purposed in himself**" – Ephesians 1:9
- 3) "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated **according to the purpose of him**" – Ephesians 1:11
- 4) "**According to the eternal purpose** which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" – Ephesian 3:11
- 5) "The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and **as I have purposed**, so shall it stand: ²⁵ That I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under

¹ Barackman, pg. 69.

² Thiessen, pg. 147

foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders.” - Isaiah 14:24-25

b. Counsel

- 1) “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, **My counsel shall stand**, and I will do all my pleasure” – Isaiah 46:10
- 2) “The **counsel** of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.” – Psalm 33:11
- 3) “Him, being delivered by the **determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God**, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” – Acts 4:28
- 4) “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath” – Hebrews 6:17

c. Will

- 1) “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus” – Ephesians 1:1
- 2) “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” – Ephesians 1:5
- 3) “. . . who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” – Eph. 1:11

To us the decrees appear to be many purposes but to the divine mind they are in reality but one great all inclusive purpose.

C. Why did God decree anything?

1. He did not have to decree anything, nor was He limited by anything outside of Himself.
2. He decreed freely and willingly

3. He was not caprice or arbitrary in His design and will.
4. His decrees are based on His most wise and holy counsel.

D. What did God have in view when making His decrees?

1. Happiness has its rightfully place in God's economy, but it is **not** His primary goal. The following verses show God's concern for our happiness, but again this is not is the highest end of God.

- a. "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." – Acts 14:17

- b. "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" – 1 Timothy 6:17

2. God is concerned about promoting the holiness of His creatures, but this also is **not** His primary end.

- a. He created the new man in righteousness and true holiness,

"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." - Ephesians 4:24

- b. He admonishes us to holy,

"For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." – Leviticus 11:44

- c. He gave us His holy law,

"Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." – Romans 7:12

d. Christ died to sanctify the people,

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; ²⁶ That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” – Ephesians 5:25-27

e. The Holy Spirit regenerates and sanctifies men,

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.” – 1 Peter 1:2

But holiness is not the highest end of God.

3. The Highest aim of the decrees is the glory of God

a. Creation glorifies Him,

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.” – Psalm 19:1

b. He refines Israel for His name sake and His glory,

“For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another.” – Isaiah 48:11

c. God has made know the riches of His glory,

“And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.” – Romans 9:23

d. He ordained us to be,

“To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” – Ephesians 1:6

e. The twenty-four elders in heaven declared,

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

– Revelation 4:11

The end of all things is the glory of God and only as we adopt this as our real goal in life will we live on the highest plan and in full harmony with the purposes of God.

E. God has decreed all that comes to pass in the realms of the material and the physical

1. “This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. ²⁷ For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?” – Isaiah 14:26-27

2. He decreed to create the universe and man

a. Psalm 33:6-11

b. Proverbs 8:22-31

c. “For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else.” – Isaiah 45:18

d. “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” – Gen. 1:26

3. Decree to establish the earth

a. “Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.” – Psalm 119:90

4. Decree to establish the seasons

- a. “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” – Genesis 8:22
- b. “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” – Acts 17:26

5. Decreed not to destroy the earth by flood

- a. “And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.” Genesis 9:11

6. Decreed the distribution of the nations

- a. “When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.” – Deuteronomy 32:8

7. Decreed the length of human life

- a. “Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass” – Job 14:5

F. Decrees in the Moral and Spiritual Realms

1. To Permit Sin

- a. “Sin is not part of creation, but a quality introduced into creation by the creature himself.”³ Sin is the self-determined revolt of the creation against the will and commandment of God.
- b. “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: ¹⁴ But every

³ Shedd, William G. T. *Dogmatic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d. Volume 1, p. 386

man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.” – James 1:13-14

- c. “On the basis of God’s wise and holy counsel, He decreed to permit sin to come. He did this in the light of what He knew would be the nature of sin, of what He knew sin would do to the creature; and of what He knew He would have to do if He was to save anyone. God could have prevented sin’s coming; had He decided to preserve the will of the angels and of man from lapsing, they would have persevered in holiness. But for wise and holy reasons, which we may not be able to entirely discover, He decided to permit sin.” – Thiessen, p. 153

G. Decreed to Save from Sin

1. All Christians are agreed that God has decreed to save men, but not all are agreed as to how He does this.

a. The freedom of man

God could have made us an automaton, but He preferred to make us capable of choosing whether or not we would obey and serve Him.

- 1) Freedom has two forms in Scripture
 - a) Freedom is the ability to carry out the dictates of one’s nature, whether as that of a holy unfallen being or as that of a sinful and fallen one.
 - b) Freedom is also the ability to act contrary to one’s nature
- 2) “Originally angels and men had the freedom in both senses. They had the ability not to sin and also the ability to sin. But with the fall the creature lost the ability not to sin.”⁴

⁴ Thiessen, p.

- a) “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” – Gen. 6:5
- b) “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: ¹¹ There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. ¹² They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. ¹³ Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: ¹⁴ Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: ¹⁵ Their feet are swift to shed blood: ¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their ways: ¹⁷ And the way of peace have they not known: ¹⁸ There is no fear of God before their eyes.” – Romans 3:11;18
- 3) Man is now free to do only as our fallen nature suggests. We neither look to God for deliverance, nor do we have any claim on God’s help, we are in a pitiable condition.
- a) “For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. ¹⁶ If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. ¹⁷ Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. ¹⁹ For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. ²⁰ Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ²¹ I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. ²² For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” – Romans 7:15-24
2. God must take the initiative if man is to be saved. God cannot relax His law simply because we are no longer able to obey it.
- a. Since the fall God has provided to all men what we call “common grace.” This is the blessings of life, health, friends, fruitful seasons, prosperity, the delay of punishment, the presence and influence of the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the Church and much more.

- b. Common grace is **not** sufficient for salvation, yet it reveals the goodness of God to all sinful creatures.
- c. Within this common grace is a divine working of God, bringing the sinner to see their need; such as in John 16:8-11 where the Holy Spirit is convincing the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.

Because of this, we hold that God, in His grace, makes it possible for all men to be saved. So when the grace of God is presented along with the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, the many “whosoever” verses, along with those exhortations to turn, repent, and believe, are genuine invitations to men.

- d. God takes the initiative in salvation is evident in the following:
 - 1) God’s dealings with Adam and Eve after they had fallen – Gen. 3:8, 9
 - 2) In the general teachings of the Scriptures – Isaiah 59:15, 16; John 15:16
 - 3) Paul said, “not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” – Romans 2:4
 - 4) “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” – Titus 2:11
- e. The result of God taking the above initiative in salvation has resulted in His exhortations

To turn to Him

- 1) Proverbs 1:23 – “Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.”
- 2) Isaiah 31:6 – “Turn ye unto him from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted.”

- 3) Ezekiel 14:6 – “Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.”
- 4) Ezekiel 18:32 – “For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.”
- 5) Joel 2:13, 14 – “And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.
¹⁴ Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God? ¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly.”

f. To repent

- 1) 1 Kings 8:47 – “Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and **repent**, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness”
- 2) Matthew 3:2 – “And saying, **Repent** ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
- 3) Mark 1:15 – “And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: **repent** ye, and believe the gospel.”
- 4) Luke 13:3, 5 – “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye **repent**, ye shall all likewise perish . . . I tell you, Nay: but, except ye **repent**, ye shall all likewise perish.”

- 5) Acts 2:38 – “Then Peter said unto them, **Repent**, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”
- 6) Acts 17:30 – “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to **repent**”
- 7) 2 Chronicles 20:20 – “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to **repent**”

g. To believe

- 1) Isaiah 43:10 – “Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and **believe** me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.:
 - 2) John 6:29 – “Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye **believe** on him whom he hath sent.”
 - 3) John 14:1 – “Let not your heart be troubled: ye **believe** in God, believe also in me.”
 - 4) Acts 16:31 – “And they said, **Believe** on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”
 - 5) Philippians 1:29 – “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to **believe** on him, but also to suffer for his sake”
 - 6) 1 John 3:23 – “And this is his commandment, That we should **believe** on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.”
- h. This means that God, in and through His common grace, has made it so that man can make an initial response to God. This **does not mean** that man through this common grace is able to change the permanent bent of

his will in the direction of God, nor can man quit all sin and make himself acceptable to God.

3. Divine Foreknowledge

To help us understand this term I have a few “if” statements to consider.

- a. If God could foreknow in eternity past that man would sin without causing him to sin
- b. If He foreknew that the inhabitants of Keilah would betray David into the hands of Saul before they had had the chance to do so (1 Sam. 23:11, 12)
- c. If Jesus could know that the fate of Tyre and Sidon, and of Sodom and Gomorrah, would have been different had they had the manifestations of His works which were granted to Chorazin and Bethsaida and to Capernaum (Matt. 11:21-24)
- d. If God could foreknow that the Jews would kill Christ without causing them to do so and before He had created a man (Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 4:27, 28)
- e. Then He can also foreknow what men will do in response to His grace, whether or not they will receive “the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor. 6:1, 2).

4. Gracious Election

- a. Scripture teaches that election is based on foreknowledge
 - 1) Rom. 8:29 - “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”
 - 2) 1 Peter 1:1, 2 – “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”

- b. By election we mean that sovereign act of God in grace, whereby from all eternity He chose in Christ Jesus for Himself and for salvation, all those whom He foreknew would respond positively to His grace.
- c. Election is a sovereign act in grace. God was under no necessity or obligation to elect anyone.

Romans 11:5 – “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”

- d. According the Ephesians 1:4, election took place in eternity, and is not something that occurs as human history develops.

Eph. 1:4 – “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love”

- e. Election is based on the merits of Christ – Ephesians 1:4: we are accepted in the Beloved.

Eph. 1:4 – “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love”

Eph. 1:6 – “To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

- f. Election was a choice of men for Himself (Exodus 19:4-6; Numbers 8:17; Isaiah 43:21; Romans 11:4) and for salvation (2 Thess. 2:13); and it is based on His foreknowledge of what men would do in response to His grace (2 Cor. 6:1, 2; Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 1:1, 2).

- g. Election is of grace and that it is based on the foreknowledge of God. Our election is truly unconditional, in the sense that it does not rest upon our human merit. It is God’s grace that opens our eyes in the first place. Our response to God’s grace is not “merit.” There is no merit in the

asking for or in the willingness to receive a gift. Our salvation is a gratuitous favor, which is conditioned upon the act of asking.

H. God Decreed to Reward His Servants and the Punish the Disobedient

1. In His goodness God has not merely decreed to save those who respond to His prevenient grace, but also to reward those who serve Him (Isaiah 62:11; Matthew 6:4, 19, 20; 10:41, 42; 1 Cor. 3:8; 1 Timothy 5:18).

a. “That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly” – Matthew 6:4

b. “He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward.” – Matthew 10:41

God is entitled to absolute obedience in all things and at all times, and is under no obligation to reward even the most perfect and constant observance of His commandments. But in His great goodness He has decreed to reward those of His children who serve Him.

2. God has decreed to punish the wicked and disobedient. This applies to Satan and his hosts (Gen. 3:15; Matt. 25:41; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 20:1-3, 7-10) and men (Ps. 37:20; Ezek. 18:4; Nah. 1:3).

I. Decrees in the Social and Political Realms

1. God Decreed the Family and Human Government

a. Family and Marriage (Gen. 2:18; Matt. 19:3-10)

b. Government (Gen. 9:5, 6; Deut. 32:8; Acts 17:26, 27)

1) Rulers – Dan. 4:34, 35; Rom 13:1, 2

2. The Decree to Call Abraham and the Mission of Israel

3. The Decree to Found the Church and its Mission

J. Decrees of Final Triumph of God

1. To give all the kingdoms of the world to Christ (Ps. 2:6-9; Daniel 7:13, 14; Luke 1:31-33; Rev. 11:15-17; 19:11-20:6)
2. The New Heavens, New Earth and New Jerusalem – Rev. 21:1-22:5 when Christ will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; then the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit will reign forever and ever (1 Cor. 15:23-28. God decreed all these things and they will most surely come to pass.