

Studies in the Westminster Confession of Faith

Newtownabbey Free Presbyterian Church Rev Brian McClung 26th June 2013 Chapter 3 Part 4
Romans 8:28-30

Chapter 3 - Of God's Eternal Decree

III. *By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death.* Proof Texts: *1 Timothy 5:21; Matthew 25:41; Romans 9:22, 23; Ephesians 1:5, 6; Proverbs 16:4.*

IV. *These angels and men, thus predestinated and fore-ordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.* Proof Texts: *2 Timothy 2:19; John 13:18.*

V. *Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto: and all to the praise of His glorious grace.* Proof Texts: *Ephesians 1:4, 9, 11; Romans 8:30; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Romans 9:11, 13, 16; Ephesians 1:4, 9; Ephesians 1:6, 12.*

These three sections teach the following five propositions:

1. The decree of God determines that, out of the teeming masses of fallen angels and humanity, certain individuals shall attain to eternal salvation, and that the rest shall be left to be dealt with justly for their sins.
2. This determination of God in election unto salvation is all from eternity past and is utterly unchangeable.
3. This election is not conditioned upon foreseen faith or good works or perseverance in the creature, but that it rests upon sovereign grace and personal love, according to the secret counsel of God's will.
4. That the ultimate end or motive in this election unto salvation is the manifestation of God's own glory, the praise of His glorious grace.
5. This election unto eternal life is stated to be 'in Christ'.

The decree of God, and these sections of the WCF, has particular relevance to the everlasting state of angels and humanity. In speaking about the decree of God, with respect to the everlasting state of angels and humanity, we come to consider the doctrine of 'Predestination', which in turn consists of two fundamental aspects 'Election' and 'Reprobation'.

1. The decree of God determines that, out of the teeming masses of fallen angels and humanity, certain individuals shall attain to eternal salvation, and that the rest shall be left to be dealt with justly for their sins.

[1] God does elect from among angels and humanity those who will dwell with Him for ever. No one can deny that the concept of election appears in the Word of God. There may be discussion as to its meaning but the concept appears. There are elect and non-elect angels, *1 Timothy 5:21: I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.* With election is also inferred the non-election of others. The rest are 'fallen angels' reserved unto everlasting judgement, *2 Peter 2:4: For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; Jude v 6: And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.*

There are elect and non-elect sinners, *1 Thessalonians 1:4: Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.*

[2] God's elective decree is unto salvation. It is not merely an election to external privileges. It is more than a mere enjoyment of the external means of salvation. It is true God does favour nations and even groups within nations in this fashion. However, the decree to elect is unto salvation, *Acts 13:48: And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.*

[3] God's elective decree unto salvation has respect to individuals. God's elective decree to save is more than a general purpose to save believers as a general class. It is true that God has chosen a whole nation in the past,

namely the Jews, as His own special people in the earth. They were separated from among the other nations of the world to be in a peculiar manner, the people of God.

Yet not everyone from among the Jews was to be redeemed and therefore chosen of God unto salvation and within God's elective decree unto salvation. The Scriptures speak of an elect remnant from among the Jews, *Matthew 24:22: And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened; Romans 11:5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.*

[4] It is individuals God has elected and not characteristics. There are those who say that God did not chose individual people unto eternal life but rather those with certain characteristics. It is not those who would believe or who would engage in some other good work who are elected. It is persons.

It is names and not characteristics that were written down in the Lamb's book of life in eternity past, *Philippians 4:3: And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.*

The Scripture clearly teaches that: *...The Lord knoweth them that are his..., 2 Timothy 2:19.*

It is important to notice that the Scriptures teach that sinners are elected 'to' particular blessings and not because they belong to a class that possesses particular blessings. They are elected "*to salvation*", *2 Thessalonians 2:13*; "*to the adoption of sons*", *Ephesians 1:5*; to "*be holy and without blame*", *Ephesians 1:4*.

[5] This decree to elect is something separate from the calling and conversion of a sinner. Some understand election to be no more than a separation of sinners from the world, made in time. They thus identify election with effectual calling and conversion. The Scriptures, however, make a clear distinction. It is the relation of cause and effect. 'Calling' is the effect of 'election', *Romans 8:30: Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

2. This determination of God in election unto salvation is all from eternity and is utterly unchangeable.

[1] There are those who divide up the decree of God in election. They attribute part of the decree to eternity and part of it to time. They argue that general election takes place in eternity and is unchangeable. This is no more than a general conditional decree that such as believe and obey the gospel shall be saved. It does not relate to individual sinners nor make anything certain.

According to them special election only takes place in time when sinners actually repent and believe the gospel, performing the conditions contained in the general decree. If they subsequently fall into a state of unbelief and impenitence the decree is changeable and reversible.

Election in time is contrary to the teaching of Scripture, *Ephesians 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.* The phrase: "*before the foundation of the world*" is a reference to eternity past, *John 17:24: Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.*

Paul repeats the same thought in *2 Thessalonians 2:13: But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.* The phrase "*from the beginning*" denotes eternity past, cf. *Proverbs 8:23: I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.*

[2] Neither can you be 'elected' one day unto salvation and 'reprobated' the next day to eternal wrath. Yet there are those who believe that a believer may fall from a state of grace; that men may make their election void; that as they change themselves from believers to unbelievers, so the divine determination concerning them changes. Again the Scriptures say otherwise, *Psalms 33:11: The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations; 2 Timothy 2:19: Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his....* God's purpose is immutable, *Hebrews 6:17: Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath.* The purpose of God, therefore, according to election, shall stand; the number of the elect can neither be increased nor diminished.