

God's Decrees

Session 01

In our doctrine series, we have looked at *The Doctrine of the Scriptures* and *The Doctrine of God*. Tonight, we begin looking at *The Doctrine of God's Decrees*. Let me just remind you why we are focusing on Biblical doctrine on Wednesday evenings. The goal of theology is not reduced to merely getting right ideas into our head. The reason we care about theology is so that we can **know** God more deeply, **enjoy** Him more fully, and **walk** with Him more obediently. We work through the difficult and demanding nature of theology that we might see and savor the glory of God in the person of Christ. The Baptist Confession says, "**God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass;**" So, we test every theological conviction and conclusion against the Bible. What the church has traditionally believed is important and human experience cannot be ignored but theology is ultimately not an excuse in explaining what the church has taught or what we feel in our consciences. We must always search the Scriptures to see if these things are so. So, that is what we do.

The word "decree" means to officially decide or order that something must happen. The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. The decrees of God are declarations or pronouncements that He has made in working out His plan in the various ages. The Bible says that God causes all things to work together for good.

The decrees of God have to do with the decisions that God made in eternity past regarding everything that will come to pass, that has come to pass and will come to pass. God and God alone can decree. It speaks of God's supreme power and unqualified authority, by virtue of the simple fact that He is God.

Isaiah 46:9 *"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, 10 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:"*

God proclaims that He declares, He proposes, He announces, He informs the end from the beginning, even the things that are not yet done. His decrees are eternal. God is "the one who says" something and it happens. There should be no doubt about his future plans, for his purposes will be accomplished; he does everything that he pleases. When God decreed all things, He did not call a committee in order to get some input, nor did He attempt to find out what other people thought. No, the Bible is very clear. Nobody gave Him counsel. He did whatever pleased him to do. A wise counselor may present a plan of action that might work, but God has the ability to conceive a perfect plan and also has the power to carry out his wise plans in a successful manner. Nothing happens by chance or apart from God's decree. God uses means to accomplish His decrees, but He is not dependent on the means and the means are not indispensable. God makes His plans in Himself. There are no conditions to His decrees coming to pass. When God says His council shall stand, He is saying that His plan or His decision will certainly and without fail come to fruition. God's decrees are immutable, and God's decrees cannot be frustrated or hindered. He cannot fall short of what he has determined. God has eternally made His plans from all eternity and His plans remain eternally fixed and unaltered.

Ephesians 1:11 *"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:"*

Paul gives us here the extent of His decrees. It is according to God's purpose that He has decreed and now works them out. How many things? All things are being worked out after the council or plan of God's own will. God's decrees are comprehensive. God's purpose is concerned with everything, whether great or small. All things are all things. It is everything that is according to the plan of God that was purposed in eternity. Everything that happens was decreed to happen before it ever happened. All things would be those things we call righteous and those things we call wicked. Nothing happens outside of God's decree, and everything that comes to pass is the perfect outworking of God's decree. Whatever is done in time, was foreordained before time began. Things happen because God has ordered them to happen before they happen. God is not simply reacting to events as they happen; He has determined what the events are to be and how the events themselves come to pass. There is a cause, and there is an effect. God orders and things happen. All causes are caused. All things would be those things we call good and those things we call bad. All things would be those things that prosper us and those things that break us. God has decreed all things that happen, and they are working toward a purposed and planned end. There is nothing over which God does not have control.

John Piper said, "God "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11). This "all things" includes the fall of sparrows (Matthew 10:29), the rolling of dice (Proverbs 16:33), the slaughter of his people (Psalm 44:11), the decisions of kings (Proverbs 21:1), the failing of sight (Exodus 4:11), the sickness

of children (2 Samuel 12:15), the loss and gain of money (1 Samuel 2:7), the suffering of saints (1 Peter 4:19), the completion of travel plans (James 4:15), the persecution of Christians (Hebrews 12:4-7), the repentance of souls (2 Timothy 2:25), the gift of faith (Philippians 1:29), the pursuit of holiness (Philippians 3:12-13), the growth of believers (Hebrews 6:3), the giving of life and the taking in death (1 Samuel 2:6) and the crucifixion of his Son (Acts 4:27-28)."

God's decrees are made with perfect judgment and laid in the depth of wisdom. Nothing is determined by God that could have been better determined. Wisdom is shown in the selection of the best possible ends and of the best means of accomplishing them. The brothers of Joseph certainly did evil toward Joseph, but the Bible tells us that while these brothers meant to do evil, God meant their evil to accomplish good. The devil is an instrument, but God is behind it all. All of God's decrees are decided before the plan comes to pass. The decrees of God are not to be seen as fatalism because the will of God is saturated with God's perfect wisdom and His holy plan. We make plans that are not planned with perfect wisdom. We are not perfect, so our wisdom is flawed. Our flesh pushes us to make selfish and self-serving plans. We make plans but our plans are not necessarily holy plans. But all of God's plans and all of God's purposes and all of God's decrees are perfectly wise and perfectly holy. God's decrees are perfectly wise, have no mistakes, no missteps, and are not done with no alternate motives. All God's decrees are made and are accomplished in His perfect holiness. His decrees are made without sin, God is completely set apart from sin. We never make any plan that is not in some way tainted with sin. But none of God's plans have one bit of sin in them.

Romans 8:28 "***And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.***"

God orders all events for the good of His people. Joseph's family will join him in Egypt in the next chapter and thereby survive the famine that will run its course for seven years. They find themselves in Egypt because God intends to keep His promise to Abraham. God does not permit things to happen. He purposed all that comes to pass in time, before time began. And all that He ordained from eternity and performs in time, is good and for His glory.