
The Decrees
Of God

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If Predestination
Is True – Why Pray?

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Sovereign Grace
Arthur Allen * C.H. Spurgeon
Horatius Bonar

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Arthur Allen

SOVEREIGN GRACE

Horatius Bonar
(1808-1889)

Man's entire apostasy and death in sin, so that he cannot save himself, and God's entire supremacy, so that He saves whom He will, are doctrines exceedingly distasteful to human pride. But they are Scriptural. Why was one thief saved and the other lost? *"Even so Father for so it seemed good in Thy sight."* (MT 11:25-27). God was not bound to save the one and He had power enough to have saved the other, and neither could save himself. What made the difference? The Sovereign Grace of God!

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THE DECREES OF GOD

By Rev. Arthur Allen

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"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." - (Shorter Catechism, Q. 7.)

THE question resolves itself into a discussion of the nature and properties of God's decrees. We frankly admit that the doctrine "That God hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass," goes beyond the powers of human interpretation. We willingly confess our ignorance concerning many mysteries that are involved in this doctrine. There is a mystery in the origin of sin, and so far as we are concerned, we are not prepared to "darken counsel by words without knowledge." We maintain, however, that sufficient has been revealed by experience and revelation fully to substantiate the truth, "that God from all eternity has elected certain men to everlasting life, and determined to effect their salvation in accordance with His own provision and purpose." God's

selection was not influenced by the foreknowledge of the faith, repentance and perseverance of the elect, but, on the contrary, faith, repentance and perseverance are the fruits of their election, and not the means. The remainder of mankind, the non-elect, are fore-ordained to everlasting death.

In approaching the subject it is essential that we should consider our limitations. As the Apostle has said, "O the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33). Augustine, commenting on the words of Paul, "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that thou repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9:20), said, "In such questions as these the Apostle throws man back into the consideration of what he is, and what is the capacity of his mind. This is a mighty reason, rendered in few words indeed, but in great reality. For who that understands not this appeal of the Apostle can reply to God? And who that understands it can find anything to reply?"

Revelation and Theology

Christian theology recognises the absolute authority of the supernatural revelation of God; it further acknowledges that both faith and Christian experience is the result of a supernatural cause,

inconsistent with your prayers being heard. 'I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you.' " Now, who is he that says this? Why it is he that has been with the Father from the beginning—"the same was in the beginning with God" and he knows what the purposes of the Father are and what the heart of God is, for he has told us in another place, "the Father himself loveth you."

Now since he knows the decrees of the Father, and the heart of the Father, he can tell us with the absolute certainty of an eye-witness that there is nothing in the eternal purposes in conflict with this truth, that he that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth. He has read the decrees from the beginning to end: hath he not taken the book, and loosed the seven seals thereof, and declared the ordinances of heaven? He tells you there is nothing there inconsistent with your bended knee and streaming eye, and with the Father's opening the windows of heaven to shower upon you the blessings which you seek. Moreover, he is himself God: the purposes of heaven are his own purposes, and he who ordained the purpose here gives the assurance that there is nothing in it to prevent the efficacy of prayer. "I say unto you." O ye that believe in him, your doubts are scattered to the winds, ye know that he heareth your prayer.

IF PREDESTINATION IS TRUE - WHY PRAY?

C.H. Spurgeon

An objection has been raised which is very ancient indeed, and has a great appearance of force. It is raised not so much by sceptics, as by those who hold a part of the truth; it is this—that prayer can certainly produce no result, because of the decrees of God have settled everything, and those decrees are immutable. Now we have no desire to deny the assertion that the decrees of God have settled all events. It is our full belief that God has foreknown and predestinated everything that happened in heaven above or in the earth beneath, and that the foreknown station of a reed by the river is fixed as the station of a king, and "the chaff from the hand of the winnow is steered as the stars in their courses."

Predestination embraceth the great and the little, and reacheth unto all things; the question is, wherefore pray? Might it not as logically be asked, wherefore breathe, eat, move, or do anything? We have an answer which satisfies us, namely, that our prayers are in the predestination, and that God has as much ordained his people's prayers as anything else, and when we pray we are producing links in the chain of ordained facts. Destiny decrees that I should pray—I pray; destiny decrees that I shall be answered, and the answer comes to me.

Moreover, in other matters we never regulate our actions by the unknown decrees of God; as for instance, a man never questions whether he shall eat or drink, because it may or may not be decreed that he shall eat or drink; a man never enquires whether he shall work or not on the ground that it is decreed how much he shall do or how little; as it is inconsistent with common sense to make the secret decrees of God a guide to us in our general conduct, so we feel it would be in reference to prayer, and therefore still we pray. But we have a better answer than all this. Our Lord Jesus Christ comes forward, and he says to us this morning, "My dear children, the decrees of God need not trouble you, there is nothing in them

and it maintains that God's special revelation can only be understood as it is illuminated by the Holy Ghost, "For God Who commanded light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6).

The heart is not the recipient of illumination, but is taken possession of by the light. "God hath shined IN our hearts," not "INTO," as Dr. Hugh Martin states. "Into suggests an external source of light, that illuminates the soul from without; but in suggests that the soul is the dwelling-place of light," and it is this light that illuminates God's special revelation.

Therefore, man depends objectively upon supernatural revelation, and subjectively upon the working of the Holy Spirit, enabling man to apprehend special revelation. No violence is done to the faculty of reason; rather, it performs its proper function by being exercised under the authority of supernatural revelation. The fact that the works and operations of God are not compressed within the compass of the human intellect is not the repudiation of reason. Reason has both authority and evidence before it, and it has to submit to their right to instruct and guide us, but it simply cannot cope with that authority and evidence. The reality of evidence is one thing, the power to conceive and analyse it, quite another. "It is no objection to the brilliancy of the sun if it fails to illuminate the blind." Reason

acknowledges the reality of evidence in God's special revelation illuminated by faith, but it also realises its own limitations.

The Pride of Reason

The opposition to the mysterious works of God arises from intellectual pride. "Pride of intellect revolts against the claim that truth lies outside the realm of reason." Modernism denies the virgin birth of Christ because they cannot see any adequate reason for the Virgin Birth; but this does not alter the authority of supernatural revelation. Modernism violates every rule of Christian theology by passing the distinctive line between Christian theology and pagan philosophy. The Arminians of the more evangelical type are doing the same thing in regard to the doctrine of the fore-ordination of God. They are substituting the authority of pagan philosophy for the authority of God's special revelation. Those who adopt this procedure consciously or unconsciously ignore the fact of regeneration, for the transition from natural knowledge to Christian theology cannot be accomplished by purely intellectual means, but involves the supernatural phenomenon of regeneration.

Christian theology stands apart in its own exalted realm from all other learning, as it is judged by none, yet it judges all. "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man." (1

known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." "Because that when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." (Rom. 1: 18, 22).

Where, then, is man's responsibility? Paul answers, in natural theology and revelation, the authority of experience and testimony. Woven into the means whereby God executes His decrees is the factor that makes the whole human race inexcusable.

Human Responsibility

The question arises, how, then, can man be held responsible? The decrees of God are inoperative, apart from the means employed for their accomplishment. Acute thinkers have laid down the following axiom: "That the decree of God does not give existence to an event about which it is conversant." To illustrate the point: The decree to create the world was in the Divine mind from all eternity, but the existence of that decree in the Divine mind did not bring the created universe into being. It was not the bare decree, but "by the word of God were the heavens made and all the hosts of them by the breath of His mouth." (Psa. 33:6). It is the means by which God's decrees are made effective. The decree of Predestination has an eternal existence in the mind of God, but there was no efficiency in the existence of the bare decree to prevent Paul from being "a persecutor and a blasphemer and injurious." While the existence of the decree made Paul's conversion certain, it was the means that effected his conversion. Equally, the decree of reprobation must be considered in the same manner. It is not the mere existence of the decree, but the means by which the decree is accomplished. Therefore, it is the means employed that determines man's responsibility. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be

Cor. 2:15). Dr. Hugh Martin has said: "Let Mount Zion rejoice, walk about Zion, and go about her; tell the towers thereof, set your heart upon her bulwarks." (Psa. 48). "Carry not her interests and crown jewels outside these bulwarks, but let your defence be carried within."

While the doctrine of God's fore-ordination as a constituent truth of Christian theology is in harmony with the ordained course of those movements which in the external world are fulfilling God's purpose from day to day, its evidence must be found in its own peculiar sphere in the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the Word of God and in the experience of God's people. Though the human mind cannot transcend its natural limitations so as to look down from above on the point of reconciliation between the sovereign action of the Divine will and the free agency of the human spirit, yet the believer can say with Paul: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Neither is the Christian an unwilling captive, nor an independent servitor. "I know who I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." (2 Tim. 1:12). Between pride of reason on the one hand and Christian theology on the other, there is a world of thought in which the elements of Christian truth and paganism are inextricably mixed, and it is in this world that we find Arminians, Unitarians,

Socinians and a multitude of others, varying only in the degree in which they distort the truth. It is here that we find the opponents of the doctrine of the foreordination of God.

Mystery, but No Contradiction

There are many unfathomable mysteries in the doctrine of the fore-ordination of God, but are they of greater magnitude, or more profound, than those which we find in the doctrine of the Atonement? The attributes of God which stand out in the doctrine of the Atonement are justice and mercy. On the one hand we have the unswerving rectitude of God, impartial, inflexible, holding the sinner in an unrelaxing grasp, and which must inevitably lead to the full vindication of God's infinite justice, eternal death. On the other hand, mercy, unsearchable in the richness of its forbearance and tenderness, and because of its very nature, must bring pardon and forgiveness. "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." (Exod. 34:7). Here we have what appears to be a direct contradiction. We are told that God in His infinite justice "will by no means clear the guilty," and at the same time we are informed that "He is keeping mercy for thousands," but when God's special revelation

humanity? Cannot God inform us of our duty, without divulging to us His most secret counsels? "The decrees of God are His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His own will, whereby for His own glory He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass." God has not exposed His decrees to the criticism of the human conscience, but the means implementing His decrees lie open and become the subject of experience and testimony, therefore, authority. God invites us to recognise that authority: "O, House of Israel, are not My ways equal? Are not your ways unequal?" (Ezek. 18:29). If the pre-determined destinies of men are wrought out under a moral administration, where men are under a sense of moral responsibility to a Supreme Legislator, where righteousness is exalted and sin condemned, how can there be any inconsistency? If, on the one hand, man cannot accept the invitation of the Gospel without the supernatural operations of the Holy Spirit, it simply emphasises how completely dominated man is by sin. The whole human race is involved; there are no exceptions. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." On the other hand, if God, according to the counsel of His own will, makes certain men of the human race willing to accept the invitation of the Gospel, it is simply a manifestation of His grace.

Regeneration and Sanctification (Eph. 2:10), and Perseverance in Grace (Jude 1:24, 25).

The unalterable connection between election and redemption necessarily requires that those who are saved must have been predestinated to obtain salvation: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9). Whatever God's works may be in this world, they can never be the condition of choosing particular persons to obtain salvation in a past eternity.

Therefore, we claim in accepting the doctrine of Predestination we adhere strictly to the only acknowledged and authoritative means by which any doctrine in the Holy Scripture can be interpreted.

The Execution of God's Decrees

The decrees of God can only be ascertained by the means put into operation for the execution of those decrees. According to the doctrine of Predestination, God's decree had its seat in the Divine mind from all eternity, and the only way it has egress to the created sphere is by the means employed and the authority of experience and testimony of the means in operation. Is it essential that the Divine decrees must receive the veto of

is illuminated by faith, the seeming contradiction immediately vanishes.

Christian theology reveals that the attributes of God working in conjunction, meet in reconciliation at the Cross of Jesus Christ. To think of God's attributes working in isolation must lead to confusion. At the Cross of Christ the glory of infinite justice is displayed in all its awful majesty; but we also behold the meridian splendour of eternal mercy, and the one does not darken or eclipse the other.

The doctrine of the Atonement involves profound mysteries such as the incarnation, the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrection. We may describe the nails that pierce the hands and feet, or the derision of the Jews, but not the iron of Divine vengeance that pierced His soul, nor the hiding of the Father's face. But neither reason nor intellect is strained; they function in the normal manner. Reason does not question the qualifications of Christ to act as our substitute, and the mysteries of the Atonement do no violence to the intellect. Under an administrative moral government it is impossible to conceive of any other way whereby the sinner could be reconciled to God. God deals with man as an intelligent, responsible being, and the moral faculty of man is under obligation to the law of God. God addresses man personally by the moral law. It would be absurd to suggest that the natural and physical laws are synonymous with

the moral law. To do so, as Dr. Hugh Martin has said, "is the most miserable science - still more wretched philosophy. It is the destruction of morals, it makes Christianity an impertinence, an impossibility. Nay, it overthrows all evidence of the personality of God, and refuses all recognition of the personality of man." Therefore, the Atonement supplies the only systematic and satisfactory answer to the reconciliation between God and the sinner.

Predestination

In the doctrine of Predestination, we have, on the one hand, fore-ordination, which reveals the sovereignty of God over all His creation, and which must result in predestination. On the other hand we have the free will agency of man, as created, which makes man responsible for his actions and moral conduct. Here we have an apparent contradiction. But does it create a greater or more convincing obstacle than the seeming contradiction in the doctrine of the Atonement, between the infinite justice of God that determines that the "soul that sinneth shall die," eternally, and His infinite mercy that offers pardon and forgiveness? The solution to the problem of Predestination and man's self-responsibility is the same as the solution in the doctrine of the Atonement. The attributes of God working in conjunction, reconcile Predestination

and man's self-responsibility. We may not see the supernatural operations of God's attributes in the process of reconciliation between Predestination and man's self responsibility in the same way as we see the operations in the Atonement. Because (1) The reconciliation between Predestination and man's self responsibility is involved in the Atonement. "According as he hath chosen us in Him before the foundations of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." (Eph. i: 4). (2) The process of such reconciliation did not lend itself to such a mighty manifestation of His power.

The doctrine of Predestination does not present any greater problems or deeper mysteries than the doctrine of the Atonement. Why, then, should there be any question of the acceptance of the one and the rejection of the other? To accept in the one case the attributes of God working in conjunction to bring about the reconciliation of God and the sinner, and to insist on considering the attributes of God working in isolation in the doctrine of Predestination, is not only unfair, but thoroughly dishonest. As Scripture reveals, the doctrine of the Atonement and Predestination are inseparable. We are chosen in Christ: Our election is expressly represented as in Him, as our covenant Head, and the great means of the execution of that decree, "He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass" (Eph. 1:4) (2 Tim. 1:9). The benefits and effects of election are in Christ. (Eph. 1:7). Adoption (Gal. 3:26);