

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—  
*Lesson 6—The Decrees of God, Q. 7-8*

- I. Being the eternal, perfect, and unchangeable purpose of God, the *decree* of God is singular, not plural. We speak of it in the plural as a condescension to our finite understanding because it embraces not only *many* particulars, but *all* things whatsoever, and because we're forced to study it by parts.
- II. There *is* a divine decree (cf. Dan 4.35; Isa 40.13-14; Rom 9.15, 18; Eph 1.5, 11; Mt 11.25-26). God doesn't order what He orders accidentally or unawares. He intentionally and wisely decrees.
  - A. If God is an intelligent agent, He must have a plan. If He's an eternal, infinitely wise, powerful, and immutable agent, He must have had one all-comprehensive plan from the beginning. And if He exists as three Persons, His plan must be mutual, that is, of the nature of a *covenant* in which the three Persons act in distinction from one another and yet in perfect harmony as one.
  - B. So what exactly *is* the decree of God?
    1. AA Hodge: It's His eternal, unchangeable, holy, wise, and sovereign *purpose*, comprehending at once all things that ever are or will be, in their causes, conditions, successions, and relations, and determining their certain existence.
    2. *Therefore* the decree of God is not the proximate cause of any thing in particular, but rather determines (by foreordination) that all things comprehended in His purpose (by foreknowledge) will be infallibly fulfilled.
      - a) E.g. if God foresees how any man will act in a given situation, and so foreseeing, proceeds to create him and place him in that situation, He, of course, in so doing, predetermines and foreordains the occurrence of the event. But the event itself is no less free, because it was produced solely by the rational, unbound, free will of the man himself.
        - (1) *Cf. Adam & Eve in the Garden.* \*God's knowing and decreeing beforehand doesn't make it any less free, because His decree decreed that it would be free and would come as a result of certain conditions.
- III. The decree must have the attributes of the Planner, cf. WSC 4
  - A. It must be absolutely righteous, benevolent, and just. It must be absolutely sovereign and immutable. It must be incomprehensible by the finite mind. And it must be in the service of His own glory.
  - B. It must include both *election* and *reprobation*, with election being a display of His mercy as the Sovereign and reprobation being a display of His justice as the Judge.
    1. \**Predestination* is God's decree as it relates to His moral creatures and relates to:
      - a) Christ: appointed as the Mediator of salvation (for men) and of preservation (for angels), Ps 2.7-9; 89.1-4, 19-37; Eph 1.4; 1Pet 1.20
      - b) The sons of God: *Election* is God's eternal purpose to save some of the human race in and by Jesus Christ, Mt 22.14; Rom 11.5; Eph 1.4; 1Pet 1.1
      - c) The sons of the Devil: *Reprobation* is God's eternal purpose to pass some men by with the operation of His saving grace, and to punish them for their sin. Thus it embodies a 2-fold purpose: to pass them by with grace and to punish them in justice, Mt 11.25-26; Rom 9.13, 17, 18, 21, 22; 11.7-8; 2Pet 2.9; Jude 4
    2. Thus the salvation of the elect rests on God's shoulders while the damnation of the reprobate rests on their own. *None* has any claim on God and *all* are guilty before Him, which leaves no ground for charges of injustice, impartiality, or unfairness in the salvation of the one and the judgment of the other.
  - C. Seven characteristics of God's decree and purpose
    1. It is founded in perfect wisdom, Prov 8.22-31
    2. It is eternal, Eph 1.4; 3.11; Acts 15.18; 1Pet 1.20; 2Th 2.13; 2Tim 1.9; 1Cor 2.7
    3. It is effectual, Isa 46.10; Num 23.19
    4. It is unchangeable, Job 23.13-14; Ps 33.11; Isa 46.9-10; Lk 22.22; Mal 3.6

5. It is unconditional, Acts 4.26-28; Dan 4.34-35
  - A. It can't be conditioned upon *anything* outside of God Himself since it was matured before *anything* outside of God was created and therefore embraces and determines *everything* exterior to Him, together with its conditions.
6. It is all-inclusive, Eph 1.11, including the free actions of good men, Eph 2.10; the free actions of wicked men, Acts 2.23; 4.27-28; 13.29; 1Pet 2.8; Jude 4; Rev 17.17; contingent actions, Gen 37.28; 45.7-8; Josh 14.15; the duration of men's lives, Job 14.5; Ps 39.4; and the place of man's habitation, Acts 17.26
  - a) God's decree *includes* the liberty of free agents *and* the contingency of second causes, and therefore can never be interfered with by either, Dan 4.35
  - b) God's works in time are not successively formed as the emergency arises, but are all parts of one all-comprehending plan. It's all reducible to one eternal purpose, Eph 1.11; Isa 46.10
7. With respect to sin, it is *permissive*, Job 1.12; 2.3; Jn 19.11; Acts 14.16; Rev 13.5-7
  - a) Hodge, "The *decretive* (decreed) and the *preceptive* (commanded) will of God can never be in conflict. God never decrees to do, or cause others to do, what He forbids. He *permits* men to sin, although sin is forbidden. He decrees that sin will be committed by moral agents and play a part in His plan, but He cannot decree to make them sin."
  - b) Sin is the rebellious act of free agents. God's decree embraces the sin, and wills it to occur by permission, but He is in no way the Author of it. Cf. WSC 13
  - c) God's decree must include the designed and deliberate permission of sin. But, with it, it must also include the determination to overrule it for His own glory, Gen 50.20; Rom 3.25; 8.32; Heb 9.14, 28. \*If He had not purposed to overrule it, it would never had been permitted.
  - d) At the end of the day, the matter of God's decree making sin certain and man's full responsibility for it, though it was certain, will remain enshrouded in mystery. But these facts from Scripture remain:
    - (1) God abhors sin
    - (2) God forbids sin
    - (3) God permits sin
    - (4) God restrains sin
    - (5) God punishes sin
    - (6) God overrules sin's consequences for good, Ps 76.10; Acts 2.23; 4.27-28
    - (7) That God cannot be the author of sin is therefore proved from: 1) the nature of *sin*: it's disobedience to God; 2) the nature of *God*: He's holy and always forbids and punishes sin; 3) the nature of *man*: he's a responsible free agent who originates his own acts. \*His sin is necessarily his doing and not God's, regardless if God's all-comprehensive decree made its occurrence certain.

D. What do we confess in these propositions? (AA Hodge)

1. God foreknows all events as certainly future (foreknowledge) *because* He has decreed them and thus made them certainly future (foreordination).
2. God's decree relates equally to all future events of every kind, to the free actions of moral agents, as well as to the actions of necessary agents, and to sinful as well as morally right choices.
3. Some things God has eternally decreed to do Himself immediately (e.g. creation); other things He has decreed to bring to pass through the action of second causes acting under a law of necessity (i.e. providence); and again other things He has decreed to prompt or permit free agents to do in the exercise of their free agency. Yet, the one class of events is rendered by the decree as certainly future as the other.
4. God has decreed ends as well as means, causes as well as effects, conditions and instrumentalities as well as the events which depend upon them. *In other words*, God decrees events as they actually occur, i.e., events produced by causes, and depending upon certain conditions. The decree that determines the event cannot leave out the cause or the condition upon

which it depends. That's why an eternal purpose/decreed on God's part must be one all-comprehensive act.

5. God's decree determines only the certain futurity of events, but doesn't directly effect or cause the event. However, the decree itself provides in every case that the event shall be effected by causes acting in a manner perfectly consistent with the nature of the event in question. That is to say, in the case of every free act of a moral agent the decree provides, at the same time: a) that the agent shall be a free agent, b) that his antecedents and all the antecedents of the act in question shall be what they are, c) that all the present conditions of the act shall be what they are, d) that the act shall be perfectly spontaneous and free on the part of the agent, e) that it shall be certainly future.
6. God's purpose relating to all events of every kind constitute one single, all-comprehensive intention comprehending all events, the free as free, the necessary as necessary, together with all their causes, conditions, and relations, as one indivisible system of things, every link of which is essential to the integrity of the whole. No single event is isolated because every event that occurs is interlaced with all other events in endless involvement.
  - a) All the errors of men on this subject spring from the tendency of the human mind to confine attention to one fragment of God's eternal purpose and regard it as isolated from the rest. But the decree of God separates no event from its causes or conditions anymore than we find them separated in nature.

#### Questions:

1. What does God's decree encompass?  
If God works all things according to His infallible and good will, then if we give ourselves up to Him we will always enjoy good.
2. What is God's chief motivation, His chief end, in ordaining "whatsoever comes to pass"?
3. How does God's decree not violate man's free will?
4. How does God's decree of things being certain not discourage men from the use of means?
5. How is God not the author of sin? From whence, then, does sin come and who is responsible for it?
6. Is Christ the Mediator of the angels who didn't fall? How so?
7. What is predestination? What does it entail and who does it encompass?
8. How is God neither unjust nor unfair to only elect some to salvation?
9. What are the practical effects of this doctrine?  
Humility. Confidence and implicit reliance upon the wisdom and goodness of God's purposes. Cheerful obedience to His commands, always remembering that God's precepts (as distinctly revealed), and not His decrees (as shrouded in mystery), are the rule of our duty. Let God be God and let us obey Him as such.
10. Memorize WSC 7 along with Eph 1.4, 11; Isa 46.10