

**The 1689 Confession of Faith; Chapter 3, Paragraph 1 – “Of God’s Decree”,
Message # 13 – “Mercy & Hardening as He Wills”, Presented in the
Adult Sunday School Class by Pastor Paul Rendall,
on October 31st, 2021.**

Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 7 – What are the Decrees of God?

Answer: “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.”

Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 8 – How doth God execute His Decrees?

Answer: God executes His decrees in the works of creation and providence.

And, I would add – The Redemption of His people, and the judgment of the wicked, through our Lord Jesus Christ)

Paragraph 3 – By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ, to the praise of his glorious grace; others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of his glorious justice.

1) Matthew 25: 34 1st Timothy 5: 21

2) John 12: 37-40 Romans 9: 6-24 1st Peter 2: 8-10 Jude 4

Paragraph 5 – Those of mankind that are predestinated to 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 other thing in the creature as a condition or cause moving him thereunto.

1) Romans 8: 30 Ephesians 1: 4-6 Ephesians 9: 2 2nd Timothy 1: 9

2) Romans 9: 11-16 Romans 11: 5, 6

Introduction

Romans 8: 28-30 – “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

As we think about these powerful words, we must ask ourselves – If God were not completely sovereign in His Decree, and His ability to bring about what He has decreed, then how could He possibly work all things together for good to those who love Him, to those who are called according to His purpose. He could not if He was not completely sovereign. But He is completely sovereign in the matter of choosing those to eternal life, whom He will, and passing by and leaving those persons in their sins, purposing to judge them for their sins at the final day.

God’s foreknowledge is not merely that He looked down the corridors of time and knew whether certain persons would come to faith in Christ. He purposed by the foreknowledge of His eternal purpose that they would come to Christ because He Himself would bring it about. You will notice that nothing is said of the free will of man choosing Christ on His own without grace. But rather, those whom He predestined, He also called with the effectual call, and justified them by His grace, and then will glorify all those whom He has chosen and called, on the Last Day when Christ. But you will notice that this last statement is in the past tense, as though it is already done. The reason for that is God’s Decree. In His mind, it is already done because He has purposed that it will be so.

1. God is Righteous in His showing mercy upon whomever He will show mercy.

It is not based on their doing anything good or bad, or because of their will or their perseverance in any way.

Romans chapter 9, verses 10-16 – “And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, ‘The older shall serve the younger.’ “As it is written, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.’ “What shall we say then?” “Is there unrighteousness with God?” “Certainly not!” “For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.’ “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs but of God who shows mercy.”

All of this was according to God’s eternal purpose, His decreed purpose, not only for the nations that they would become, but in terms of what they as individuals would become. God decreed that the older, Esau, would serve the younger, Jacob. But God decreed that He would love Jacob with an everlasting love, while He would leave Esau to act in his sin to his just condemnation, to the praise of His glorious justice.

Jacob’s salvation by God was not because of his good works, or the way that he lived before God before He was saved. Actually, Jacob’s works before he was saved were worthy of great condemnation. Esau’s preterition, that is, his not being chosen or called effectually to salvation was not because of his evil works. God’s purpose was to leave him to himself and to act out his own sinful desires.

2. There is a Righteous Order in God’s hardening of any sinner.

The order is:

First, in God’s decreeing, that He has not chosen that person to eternal life in eternity past.

Exodus 4: 21 – “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand.’ “But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, so that he will not let the people go.”

Romans 9: 17 and 18 – ““For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name be declared in all the earth.’ “Therefore He has mercy to whom He will, and whom He wills He hardens.”

God says to Pharaoh in the Scripture in Exodus 9: 16 – But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth. God says – You exalt yourself against My people in that you will not let them go. All of God’s actions are very righteous and just here, towards Pharaoh, dealing with him in the way that He did, because he was such a great sinner. His sovereign power over him would be demonstrated, and His name be known in all the earth by the great plagues that He brought against him.

Second, that then in time and space, He righteously passes by Pharaoh and leaves him to act out his sins, which will result in his continuing in them, to his own destruction, and God’s eternal judgment.

Exodus 5: 1 and 2 – “Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a fest to Me in the wilderness.’” “And Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?’” “I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go.” (This was Pharaoh’s hardening his own heart; the start of his downward progression in sin.)

Exodus 7: 1-5 – “So the Lord said to Moses: ‘See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet.’” “You shall speak all that I command you.” “and Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of this land.” “And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.” “But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments.” “And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.”

You can see here that God’s hardening Pharaoh’s heart was not positively infusing hardness into it, but simply more and more confirming Pharaoh in what he already was, and what he was further becoming in his sins against God, and the people of God. He was reprobate (rejected by God), and God decreed this without ever negatively infusing hardness into him. Instead, God would not strive with him by His Holy Spirit or grant him the grace of repentance. He commanded him through Moses and Aaron to let the people go. And then He would simply leave him to himself to develop into a greater and greater sinner against Himself, confirming him in his unbelief and disobedience.

Pharaoh hardened his own first, and then God further hardened his heart by giving him up to what he, Pharaoh, was doing in his sin and self-deception.

Exodus 9: 27-35 – “And Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘I have sinned this time.’” “The Lord is righteous, and my people and I are wicked.” “Entreat the Lord, that there may be no more mighty thundering and hail, for it is enough.” “I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.” “So Moses said to him, ‘As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the Lord; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth is the Lord’s.’” “But as for you and your servants, I know that you will not yet fear the Lord God.” “Now the flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was in the head and the flax was in the bud.” “But the wheat and the spelt were not struck, for they are late crops.” “So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and spread out his hands to the Lord; then the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain was not poured on the earth.” “And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and thunder had ceased, he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants.” “So the heart of Pharaoh was hard; neither would he let the children of Israel go, as the Lord had spoken by Moses.”

So, the progression of sin downward in Pharaoh’s life was from his hardening his own heart to the word of God to him, and then God’s hardening confirmed Pharaoh more and more in his sin as he himself sinned more and more against God. This would end in his total destruction and eventual eternal judgment.

Exodus 14: 1-4 – “Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea.’” “For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are

bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.” “then I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord.” “And they did so.” These Egyptians and Pharaoh were vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction.

3. The Reasons for Vessels of Wrath and Vessels of Mercy

Romans 9: 19-24 – “You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault?’ “For who has resisted his will?” “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?” “Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ “Does not the potter have power over the clay from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?” “What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”

No one can resist God’s will for He is all powerful. Will a person question why he was formed the way that God wanted to form him? Let him be reminded that God is the Maker/Creator of all men, and He can decree and purpose whatever He pleases because He does all, whether in mercy or in justice, for His own glory and according to His own good pleasure. He is the potter and we are the clay, and He can form from the same lump of clay of common humanity, one vessel for honor and another for dishonor, according to His own purpose.

Verse 22 is a very interesting verse indeed, for it says so much about God. He “wants” to show His wrath and to make His power known. We must ask ourselves why He would want to make it known? It is because He is glorified in showing forth His attribute of perfect Justice. He is wise and holy, loving and good, but the truth about His holiness, and the truth about men as sinners, how much sin dishonors Him, this must be shown forth in an everlasting sense. He is an eternal God and this is why His love and His wrath are everlasting. He never compromises with sin and evil, but He is great enough to make the wrath of men to praise Him.

All men must fear Him and reverence Him if they would live forever. God has created all men to fear Him. And since by nature no one fears God unless they are changed by His grace, it is His purpose to save some by His mercy, and to punish the others, to the praise of His Justice. He strives with them, giving them commands through His servants, to heed His word, and then, instead of showing them mercy, He leaves them to sinful reasonings of their own hearts, and then gives them what they most certainly deserve – His judgments, both in this life, and in the life to come. Pharaoh, king of Egypt, in the days of Moses is the perfect example for our consideration in this regard. God accomplished everything He purposed to accomplish according to His decree, regarding both the mercy He showed to Israel, and the Justice He demonstrated to Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

Vessels of mercy are God’s elect people, chosen before time began, and prepared beforehand for glory. Even us, whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.” The riches of the glory of Christ’s grace and the revelation of His glory, made known to us by the Holy Spirit, fit us to be partakers of eternal life with Christ, forever.