

The 1689 Confession of Faith; Chapter 3, Paragraph 1 – “Of God’s Decree”,
Message # 9 – “The Liberty of 2nd Causes”, Presented in the
Adult Sunday School Class by Pastor Paul Rendall,
on October 3rd, 2021.

Paragraph 1 – “God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably(1), all things, whatsoever comes to pass(2); yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein(3); nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established(4); in which appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree.”(5)

1) Proverbs 19: 21; Isaiah 14: 24-27; 46: 10, 11; Psalm 115: 3; 135: 6; Romans 9: 19

2) Daniel 4: 34, 35; Romans 8: 28; 11: 36; Ephesians 1: 11

3) Genesis 18: 25; James 1: 1; 1st John 1: 5

4) Genesis 50: 20; 2nd Samuel 24: 1; Isaiah 10: 5-7; Matthew 17: 12; John 19: 11; Acts 2: 23; Acts 4: 27, 28

5) Numbers 23: 19; Ephesians 1: 3-5

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.
(*Add – And Redemption also, through our Lord Jesus Christ*)

1. The Liberty of 2nd Causes is seen in the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 2: 23 – “Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.....”

Him, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, was actually delivered up by the Jews from the highest and most righteous of motives, the love of sinners to accomplish their salvation, to redeem them unto Himself. He was delivered over in a most sinful sense, to be taken by the lawless hands of the Roman Governor Pilate and the Roman soldiers under his command, who crucified Him and put Him to death. God decreed this, and yet He had not any actual sinful part in their actions. In delivering His Son up to these wicked men, God righteously used the act of the crucifixion to fulfill His decree in relation to the salvation of all of His elect people, by poured out His wrath upon His Son at the cross. Out of His electing love for them, He set Him forth as a propitiation by His blood, (a wrath-removing sacrifice) so that He (the Father) might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3: 25 and 26)

Dr. Sam Waldron – The most common objection raised by the teaching of the Confession regarding God’s Decree is this. Does this not make God the author of sin? If it does not, then on what basis does the Confession assert that though God ordains all things, yet He is not the author of sin?”

Sam says – “Even though the Confession teaches that God decrees sin, it denies that God is the author of sin. This denial is to be justified on the basis of the liberty or contingency of the second causes mentioned in Paragraph 1. God is not the author of sin because He does not by His own immediate causation bring it to pass. It is the responsibility of the second causes who willingly engage in it.” (P. 78 of his *Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*)

2. God has Decreed that He will act as a Just Judge to punish wicked men, and as a Merciful Savior, in relation to fulfilling the Everlasting Covenant.

In this the Liberty of the Second Causes is proved

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Jeremiah 32: 26-41 – “Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, ‘Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me? Therefore thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it. And the Chaldeans who fight against this city shall come and set fire to this city and burn it, with the houses on whose roofs they have offered incense to Baal and poured out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke Me to anger; because the children of Israel and the children of Judah have done only evil before Me from their youth. For the children of Israel have provoked Me only to anger with the work of their hands,’ says the LORD.”

“For this city has been to Me a provocation of My anger and My fury from the day that they built it, even to this day; so I will remove it from before My face because of all the evil of the children of Israel and the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke Me to anger – they, their kings, their princes, their priests, their prophets, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And they have turned to Me the back, and not the face; though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not listened to receive instruction. But they set their abominations in the house which is called by My name, to defile it. And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.”

“Now therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you say, 'It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: Behold, I will gather them out of all countries where I have driven them in My anger, in My fury, and in great wrath; I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely. They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.”

You can see the liberty of the 1st Cause (God) in these verses, and you can just as easily see the liberty of the 2nd causes in these verses as well. Both are established by this passage. With God, there is nothing that is too hard for Him. He simply wills it, and it is done. According to His decree, He would give Judah and Jerusalem into the hand of the Chaldeans. They would come to do this according their own design and their own will, but God, the 1st Cause would ordain that it would be so, without at any point putting any pressure on their will, or concurring in their designs. He would simply give them over to the Chaldeans. The reason for this was that they had, according to their own will, worshiped other gods. They had burned incense to the Baals and had caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire.

Notice that this was something which God had not commanded them to do, nor did it come into His holy mind. Now, if that was the case, then when God decreed it, He had no part at all in the sin of those men in His decree. In eternity past, He saw that it would come to pass then, and He saw also what He would do in response to it. The wicked were free in the sense of their sin to do those wicked acts. God would be sovereign over them, those who were free agents in regard to all that they did.

Notice also, that it says in verse 33, that they had turned to God their backs and not their faces. This is what their mind instructed their will to do. When He reproved them for their sins by the prophets, and called them to repentance, told them what they should do, warned them of the awful judgments that He would bring upon them, they turned their backs to Him and not their faces. That is what their minds told their will to do. God’s decree foresaw this; yea ordained that it would be so, without ever once approving of it, or enabling them to do it in their mind or will. These show us the liberty of these men to do what they freely chose to do.

What is truly encouraging, though, is the promise that God gave to the Jews here; that eventually, according to His decreed purpose, He would gather them out of all the countries where He had driven them in His anger, in His fury, and in His great wrath. And He would bring them back to their own land, and cause them to dwell in safety. And His decreed purpose would be to make them His people by His working in regeneration. He would give them one heart and one way that they would fear Him forever, for the good of them and their children.

All of this would come to pass because of the Everlasting Covenant which He would make with them; those things which He had decreed from before time began. He would not turn away from doing them good, but He would put His fear in their hearts so that they would not depart from Him. He would rejoice over them to do them good, and would most certainly plant them in their own land, with all of His heart and with all of His soul. That was His decreed purpose.

3. Both God and Men have liberty. God's is absolute, Man's is concurrent and dependent.

Psalm 110: 1-3 – “A Psalm of David. The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth.’”

This verse one is often used in the book of Hebrews in connection with establishing the supreme excellence of the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Divine Son in both of His natures. He is called God in verse 8 of chapter 1. And in verse 5 the author says – “For to which of the angels did He ever say: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You?’” It was the decree of God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that the Son be begotten in eternity past, and that having been begotten of Him, He would send Him to be our Savior. He ordained in His decree that He would overcome the world and the Devil, and die for our sins, and be raised from the dead, and sit at the right hand of the Father, and from that vantage point, He would rule in the midst of His earthly enemies by sending the rod of His strength, the gospel to the ends of the earth. Christ's people would respond, according to the working of the Spirit, to be volunteers in preaching and spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth. God had the absolute liberty to decree this; believers have the concurrent and dependent liberty to respond to obey the Great Commission.