

SOUTH GROVE FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH LONDON

Bible study/Prayer meeting

Date 1st March 2023

Preacher Rev Philip Knowles, Ps/Hymn. Read Ephesians 1:1-12

Text Ephesians 1:1-14

Series – The Doctrine of God series Title The Decree Of God (1)

The opening verses of Ephesians chapter 1 lists some of the Spiritual blessings that God has given His redeemed people in and through Christ.

These Spiritual blessings have been purchased by Christ's blood for their eternal inheritance, to look forward to in heaven, but also rejoice in upon earth.

verse 11 states "***In whom also we have obtained an inheritance...***" Christ Himself is the believer's inheritance, all benefits of His life, death and resurrection, we enjoy in and because of Him.

We have been made the recipients of sovereign grace, favour and blessing, according to the purpose and power of God.

Therefore, believers are instructed to learn, the blessings they have in Christ and live it out for the glory of God.

Verse 11 "***being or as the word means having been)predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will***"

Allow me to help explain some words in **verse 11**. The word **predestinated** means **to determine beforehand**;

The word **purpose** means **that which is set forth, accomplished**.

God had authorised, or purposed or accomplished the salvation of His people in Christ.

The word **counsel** literally means **advice**. It is from the verb that means **to take counsel, to consult**.

In the phrase **His own will**, the word for **will** signifies **the free choice of God to do these things for sinners**.

Now putting these words and their meanings together we discover, the divine counsel in view is the result of the eternal Godhead,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, purposing and taking counsel together from all eternity to save sinners and give them a glorious inheritance which is Christ Himself.

Such language means first of all, that which occurs was foreordained by God. The eternal plan of God ordered all that is in view as we read Ephesians 1 and of course all scripture.

Secondly, the basis of sinners obtaining this inheritance in Christ is God's pre-determination. Nothing occurs or no plan is put into action without God, and without Christ in view.

All of these details add up to one of the clearest presentations in Scripture of what is called God's decree or the divine decree, or the eternal decree of God.

Please let me encourage you by saying God's eternal decree, as founded in the infinite, unlimited mind of God,

will never be perfectly understood or grasped by finite or the limited understanding of man, it goes beyond our limits.

However, we believe this truth by faith, knowing God has revealed He ***worketh all things after the counsel of his own will***"

What is a decree? What does the word decree mean?

A Decree is a decision that is made law, therefore, it is binding, it is unchanging. **Ezra 5:13** ***“But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God.”***

Think of the NT, **Luke 2:1** ***“and it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.”***

So, the decree we are studying today, is the highest decree, it is God’s decree, which is eternal and unchanging.

All men’s decrees, are included in God’s eternal decree.

Therefore, **God’s decree** ***is His counsel, will, plans, purposes.***

(Scripture uses several terms for the eternal decree of God.

(In the Old Testament the word **etsah** is used in regards to the Divine decree which means **to counsel or to give advice**, **Psalm 33:11** ***“The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.***

The word **za-man** is also used which gives the idea **to sit together in deliberation, devise, to consider, discussion**, for instance, **Jeremiah 51:12** ***“for the LORD hath both devised and done that which he spake against the inhabitants of Babylon.***

The word **ratson**, which means **to please, to accept, to be delighted** and indicates **good pleasure or sovereign will**. **Psalm 51:18** ***“Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.***

(Isaiah 49:8 “Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages)

In the New Testament the most general word is **boule**, which labels the decree in general but also points to the fact that the plan of God is based on counsel and deliberation **Acts 2:23** “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”

The word **eudokia** emphasizes particularly the freedom of the purpose of God, **Eph1:9** “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.)

Having considered already **Ephesians 1:11**, let me give some definitions of the decree of God from the shorter Catechism and Westminster Confession of Faith.

Keep in mind throughout the series in the doctrine of God, when quoting the Shorter or Larger Catechism or the Westminster Confession of Faith, these do not replace scripture, but they are statements and definitions put in a question and answer form with scriptural references to help our understanding.

WCF chapter 3 – Of God's Eternal Decree

God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

Shorter Catechism Q. 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.*

Shorter Catechism Q. 8, How doeth God execute His decrees. **Answer, God execueth His decrees in the works of creation and providence.**

Notice that the Catechism speaks of 'God's eternal decree' – that is, God has decreed all things in space and time, but all is encompassed in one everlasting decree.

As we have noted throughout the series, ***God is self-existent, independent, the fountain of all life, eternal, immutable, omnipotent.***

He is all wise, supernatural and sovereign Creator and Ruler of the entire universe, which in turn means that by virtue of His very being He necessarily foreordained or decreed whatsoever comes to pass in the entire universe.

The truth of God's Decree is plainly revealed in Scripture, to help us to understand something of God's ways, and works.

Our minds regarding His decree, must be govern by the word, to stop speculation, over thinking, inventing new ideas and going into by path meadows.

Therefore, we look upon God's eternal decree as revealed in scripture with an finite, limited mind.

IFRIST, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GOD'S DECREE.

1The source of God's decree.

God decree is God's decree.

God's decree has it source, it's origin, establishment in God himself.

Everything that God has decreed comes into existence, comes to pass because of His decree. God decree rests in His own good pleasure.

There are no people, events, that shape God's plan. There are no pre existing circumstances that cause Him to act. There was nothing before God.

God's decree comes to pass, not because God knows what will come to pass, or take place, but because He has decreed what comes to pass.

Whatever takes place is according to His divine decree.

God is never uncertain about His plans, and purposes. Everything detail within His decree is certain and fixed.

From eternity God's plan is unchangeable with reference to all His creatures.

God's plan is stated in **Ephesians 1:4** as **“...before the foundation of the world...”**

Therefore, while the world was decreed from all eternity, it did not exist from all eternity, yet in God's mind what He decreed was if it was already in existence.

The same thought is spoken of Christ in **Rev 13:8** as **“the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”** Though, the world was not created, and Christ had not physical died in time, yet in eternity in the mind of God, it's as if the event of Christ death had already taken place.

For instance, in **John 17**, the Lord Jesus Christ is praying to His heavenly Father concerning God's eternal decree in the redemption of every sinner given to Him within the everlasting covenant of grace.

what is interesting to note, that Christ is praying before He goes to Cross to finish His work, and yet He says in **verse 4** ***I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.***”

How can this be, well the answer is in the mind of God, its as if the death of Christ had already taken place, and He had finished the work of purchasing sinners.

Also think of God’s decree concerning Christ’s second coming and sitting upon the throne in Jerusalem. **Ps 2:6** “**Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.**”

Did you see those words **Yet have I set**, though Christ’s second coming has not taken place in time, He has not yet returned to rule and reign upon earth, but God speaks of it as if it has already taken place.

Remember when we spoke of the eternality of God, God knows the end from the beginning. He sees past, present and future in one view, in the eternal now.

From eternity God had a definite plan concerning creation, concerning man, concerning salvation, concerning the final end of all things. All that God does or brings to pass in this world is according to that unchangeable purpose, all is fixed, certain and absolute.

2 The singularity of God’s decree.

While we often speak of or read about the decrees of God, the purposes of God, yet we must always remember, God’s eternal decree is one decree, yet it relates to all events.

We may speak of the purposes of God, but keep in view, God is working out His one eternal purpose and pleasure in Christ, to receive all honour and glory due to His name, that all things He

might have the pre-eminence, **Isaiah 46:9-10** “**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:**”

(Acts 17:26 “**And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation)**

3 The Sovereignty of God's decree.

The sovereignty of God's decree determines all that ever comes to pass. Nothing can take place outside God's will.

No event can occur without His permission. Otherwise, He would not be God, eternal and infinite. **Acts 15:18** “**Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.**

God's eternal plan encompasses all that ever comes to pass, for instance in **Ecc 3:1-2** “**To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ² A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted,**” and we could read the whole chapter.

God's eternal decree, determines, the start and end of everything. For instance the time of birth and death, but also, includes all in between.

Also, God's plan encompasses the voluntary actions of man as a free agent. Man is a free agent in the sense that he thinks, he desires, he chooses, and he acts accordingly, but it is all included within the purposes of God, according to His plan.

Those who rule in government positions are ordained of God.

Proverbs 21:1 *“The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.”*

Romans 13:1 *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”*

Ps 75:7 *“he putteth down one, and setteth up another.”*

Daniel 2:21 *“he removeth kings, and setteth up kings...”*

The sovereignty of God's decree declares that man's sinful actions are under divine control.

God is Holy, Light, and in Him is no darkness.

God is not the author of sin, nor tempts any man to sin,

However, God does permit or allow the sinful actions of men and woman to take place, But He also overrules it for His own holy purposes.

This is where it goes beyond our limited understanding.

God's decree, includes the good acts or works of men, **Eph 2:10**, but also the wicked actions of men, **Proverbs 16:4** *“The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.”*

We see it this clearly in the Saviour's life. At **His birth**, in **Matt 2:12-15**, Herod's evil plans to destroy Christ, were included within God's purposes in terms of having a particular prophecy fulfilled.

His death **Acts 2:23**, *Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain”* The terrible sin of those who crucified Christ was determined beforehand by the counsel of God.

In other words, He permitted their sinful actions within His purposes that they would be fulfilled, to save sinners.

Gen 50, think of all the jealousy, and hatred, of Joseph's brothers to ward him, yet as the same time all divinely controlled by God, so that Joseph would be where the Lord purposed to use him and fulfil His will, **verse 20** "***But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.***" Therefore, He ***worketh all things after the counsel of His own will...***"