

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Theology Proper – Study of God– Part 3
The Decree of God, Creation, Providence,
and the Problem of Evil

Introduction

- We have already discussed what God is like.
 - Attributes of greatness and goodness.
 - Greatness = spirituality, personality, life, infinity, and constancy.
 - Goodness = holiness, righteousness, justice, genuineness, veracity, faithfulness, benevolence, grace, mercy, and persistence.
- Now we will discuss what God actually does.
 - Decree of God.
 - Creation.
 - Providence.
 - Problem of Evil.

The Decree of God

- Some Definitions:
 - Elmer Towns: “The decree of God is His plan, by which He creates, directs, sustains, and takes responsibility for creation and His creatures including their salvation, nurturing, rewarding, or punishing within the predetermining limits of His nature.”
 - Millard Erickson: “His eternal decision rendering certain all things that will come to pass.”



Plan Vs. Decree

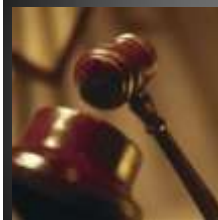
- Older Theologians use “decree.”
- Newer like “plan.”
- Why?
 - Decree sounds arbitrary and monarchical, whereas the word plan bespeaks of architectural design.
- It's just semantics. They refer to the same thing.



Key Terms

- The theological vocabulary that is attached to this subject are as follows: predestination, foreordination, election, and reprobation.
- It is good to look at the relevant terms in the original languages.
- Hebrew:
 - Yatsar = to ordain.
 - Psalm 139:16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were **formed** for me, when as yet there was none of them.
 - Isa 37:26 Have you not heard? I designed it long ago; I **planned** it in days gone by. I have now brought it to pass, and you have crushed fortified cities into piles of rubble.

Key Terms



- Ya'ats = Planned
 - Isaiah 14:24-27 The LORD of hosts has sworn: "As I have **planned**, so shall it be, and as I have **purposed**, so shall it stand, 25) that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and on my mountains trample him underfoot; and his yoke shall depart from them, and his burden from their shoulder." 26) This is the **purpose** that is purposed concerning the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. 27) For the LORD of hosts has **purposed**, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?
- 'Etsah = Counsel
 - Psalm 33:11 The **counsel** of the LORD stands forever, the **plans** of his heart to all generations.
 - Job 38:2 "Who is this that darkens **counsel** by words without knowledge?"

New Testament Key Terms

- Proordizo = Predestinate.
 - Acts 4:27-28 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28) to do whatever your hand and your **plan had predestined** to take place.
- Protasso = Appointed Times.
 - Acts 17:26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, **having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,**



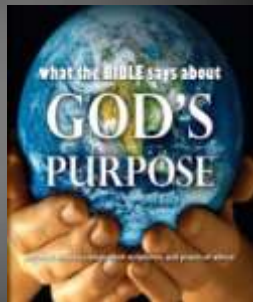
New Testament Key Terms

- Protithemi = Purposed.
 - Ephesians 1:9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he **set forth** in Christ
- Prothesis = purpose.
 - Romans 9:10-13 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11) though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's **purpose** of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls-- 12) she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13) As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."



Restrictive or Expansive

- It is important to find out if these words are restrictive or expansive.
 - Predestinate is only used of believers = restrictive.
 - Foreordain is used of people, events, etc. = expansive.
- Theologians group all of these concepts that denote God's advanced knowledge, appointing, willing, and wishing under the umbrella term of "predestination."
 - This is useful, but remember that the Scripture is restrictive in its usage.
 - For the rest of our discussion, I will use it in the broad sense.



Predestination in Both Testaments

- In the OT, the vocab words are often associated with the covenant with Israel.
 - Not always. Abraham was individually elected. God moved first, the Abram believed.
- Predestination is by God's great power.
 - God's mere words brought physical reality into existence.
 - He hammered the gods of Egypt with 10 plagues.
 - He raised up Assyria to judge Israel and then punished them for their arrogance and evil.
 - These things show His total power to make whatever He wishes to come to pass.
 - His power stretches over our individual lives.
 - Psalm 139:16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.



Predestination in OT is Efficacious

- Whatever God wills shall come to pass.
 - Isaiah 46:9-11 – remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, 10) declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose," 11) calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.
- We cannot thwart His plan.
 - Proverbs 19:21 – Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.
- There are no variables in the plan of God.



Predestination in the New Testament

- The New Testament continues this teaching.
- Jesus taught that God is in control of even the small things.
 - Matt 10:29-30 – Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30) But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.
- God is also in control the large details, like ordaining the nations.
 - Acts 17:26 – And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,



New Testament Predestination

- God planned and ordained our salvation.
 - Ephesians 1:4 even as **he chose us** in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love.
- The Apostles taught that Christ's redeeming work was preplanned.
 - Act 2:23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the **definite plan and foreknowledge of God**, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.
 - 1Pe 1:20 He was **foreknown before the foundation of the world** but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you
 - 2Ti 1:9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his **own purpose and grace**, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,



Implications of Predestination

- To say the least, these passages show that redemption was not God's plan B.
 - This disproves Process-theology or Open Theism.
- If redemption was planned or decreed before the foundation of the world, then this would also demand that the Fall was part of the plan.



Predestination and Paul

- Paul was quite defensive about the doctrine.
 - Rom 9:18-23 So then he has **mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.** 19) You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" 20) **But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?** Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" 21) Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? 22) What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23) in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—
- He says much more about it.
 - Eph 1:11-12 In him we have obtained an inheritance, **having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,** 12) so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.
 - Rom 8:28-30 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29) **For those whom he foreknew he also predestined** to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30) And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.
 - 2Th 2:13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, **because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved**, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

God is in Control

- Why predestinate? For God's own glory.
 - Rev 4:11 "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."
- God's plan is all-inclusive, meaning that He planned not just the ends, but also the means.
 - Although this is a great mystery that is hard to explain, we must conclude that the plan of God does not "force" free agents to act in certain ways, but renders their free acts certain in accordance with what He has decreed.
 - This includes both good acts, such as that of Cyrus, and evil acts, such as that from Judas Iscariot.
 - Furthermore, since God is immutable, so too is His plan.
- Some may have a huge problem with this, but our standard must be the Bible. We have no right to add to the Bible that which it does not say, or even imply.
- God is sovereign and His plan outranks our "free" decisions.
- This is compatibilism.



Logical Priority of Wills

- This now brings us to a discussion of logical priority between God's plan and human choices.
- This is where Calvinists and Arminians part ways with each other.
- Calvinists believe that God's plan is logically prior to human choices. In contrast, Arminians believe that human choice is logically prior to God's plan.
 - For example, the Arminian would argue that God knew in eternity past that I would believe, and as a result He put it into His plan that I would be one of the elect.
 - The Calvinist, in contrast, would say we don't know why God put me in His plan as one of the elect, but because He placed me as elect and because the Holy Spirit moved upon me to receive Christ, my eyes were opened and I was saved. My choice was not prior to God's choice, but was a result of God's choice.
- The Calvinist/Arminian debate hinges upon one issue: What is mean by foreknowledge or to foreknow?

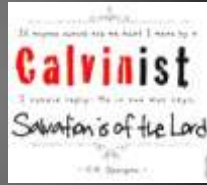
What is meant by Foreknow?



- There are only three passages in the entire New Testament that use the verb "foreknow."
 - We already know due to the attribute of omniscience that God foreknows events, people, etc.
- The question then is whether we use a narrow or broad understanding of foreknowledge when reading those three verses.
 - Arminianism requires a broad view since they claim God was foreknowing our choices.
 - Calvinism requires a narrow view claiming that foreknow was specific to people thus implying foreordination.

The Three Passages are Clear

- Rom 8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
 - God is foreknowing people here.
- Rom 11:2 God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel?
 - Again, God is foreknowing people.
- 1Pe 1:20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you
 - Christ was foreknown.



God's Plan is Logically Prior

- Thus, human choice does not have logical priority over God's plan.
 - The fact that "foreknow" must mean that God personally and intimately knew the persons He predestined, proves that the Calvinist position is correct.
- Romans 9:11-13 unmistakably proves the same.
 - Rom 9:11-13 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad--in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls-- 12) she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13) As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."
- Exactly how human will works into this is not a subject for Theology Proper, but will be addressed in Soteriology.

Congruism vs. Compatiblism

- However, a Reformer named Amyraut gave an explanation that satisfies most evangelicals.
- Many refer to his viewpoint as Amyraldianism or Moderate Calvinism.
- His explanation is called congruism, and it basically means that God works with and upon the human will to accomplish His decreed will.
 - It is irresistible, but not forceful. Instead it is seen as the Holy Spirit using sweet moral persuasion on human beings.
- It is much better than the Arminian view, but it still is not as biblical as the compatibilist view.
- This will be addressed in greater detail in Soteriology.

Summary of the Decree of God

- In summation, the Plan of God is from eternity, and it truly does encompass everything God declared would happen.
- The concept of God's plan, mixed with His sovereignty, is completely Scriptural as we have seen with seven Hebrew and Greek terms.
- Furthermore, we looked at passages that show God planned the small and simple things in life, such as our hair and the days of our lives.
- We also read of God controlling complicated issues such as the details of history.
- Likewise, God rendered both good and evil acts certain, such as the acts of Judas or Cyrus.
- Finally, even in terms of redemption, we see that God's plan or decree predestined salvation for the elect.
- All of these passages put together are what theologians call the Decree of God.

