

GOD'S HUMBLING AND ENCOURAGING DECREE

(SUNDAY, AUGUST 16, 2015)

Scripture reading – Isaiah 1:1-20; 1 Thess. 1

INTRODUCTION

Holding to correct theology doesn't mean your life will simply be wonderful and all your problems will be solved.

Consider Paul and others in Scripture and in church history.

Bad theology is never an option, of course.

We must often pray that God will give guidance so that we properly understand His Word.

It is never what I like that is the standard.

Rather our focus always must be, what saith the Lord? What does God say in His Word?

We continue in our study of God's Decree – His eternal plan that includes every aspect of His creation.

As we observed last week, this is a doctrine that must be carefully understood.

Some make the mistake of turning predestination into God just merely seeing what would happen in the future.

Others make the mistake of turning predestination into an excuse for laziness.

Why do I have to do anything if God simply has planned everything and is sovereign in salvation?

The doctrine of God's decree should humble you!

It should also encourage you in your duty before the Lord.

Be humbled! Be diligent in God's Work!

We will consider three main points.

- 1) God has predestined some men and angels unto eternal life and others have been foreordained unto everlasting death.
- 2) This sovereign work of God election is not based on man, but God's glory and grace.

3) God also has appointed the means whereby His elect will be brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

1) GOD HAS PREDESTINED SOME MEN AND ANGELS UNTO ETERNAL LIFE AND OTHERS HAVE BEEN FOREORDAINED UNTO EVERLASTING DEATH.

An excellent question to ask someone who does not hold to the doctrines of sovereign grace is to ask him why some believe unto salvation and others do not.

If salvation is not the result of man's wisdom or man's work, why do some believe and others reject?

Billy Graham and others have foolishly preached, God has cast a vote in your favor and the devil has cast a vote against you. You have to make the deciding vote.

This is a horrible statement, but even still it doesn't get to the root of the question nor the problem for man lost in sin.

Men and women lost in sin would never seek after God left to their own devices.

It is an awesome thing to consider the truth of election – that God from eternity has predestined some men and angels unto eternal life and others have been foreordained unto everlasting death.

Had God not so predestined, we understand from Scripture that all men and women would suffer eternal punishment, the just punishment for sin.

The unbeliever, of course, scoffs at such an idea, and blasphemes a God who would send any to eternal destruction.

Such is the folly of man who hates the righteous judgment and absolute holiness of God.

It is very important to keep in mind that sinful humans are very poor judges of what is right and just.

It is utter foolishness to think that people are basically good or that people working together apart from God's mighty moving will make the right choices concerning truth and justice.

We also must keep in mind that in holding to the truth of Scripture as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, we are not declaring that we know the reasons for God's eternal choices, other than He has determined to bring glory to Himself in both His work of salvation and justice.

Let us consider again some of the evidence for God's awesome and sovereign work of predestination.

A. A. Hodge summarizes this evidence in three parts.¹

First, the subjects are always spoken of in Scripture as individuals.

Acts 13:48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

2Th. 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth,

Eph. 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

Second, the names of the elect are said to be written in heaven and to be in the Book of Life.

Phil. 4:3 And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names *are* in the Book of Life.

Heb. 12:23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

Third, the blessings to which men are elected concern individuals and not communities. Those elected are given “salvation,” “the adoption of sons,” and “to be holy and without blame before Him in love.”

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Gal. 4:4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, **5 to redeem those who were under the law,** that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Now it is true that sometimes Scripture uses the word election in a broader, non-individual sense.

¹ A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, 70.

John Frame uses the terms historical election and eternal election to distinguish the two.²

Israel was elected as God's people. Every descendant of Israel was set apart by God's covenant promises and signs.

But not everyone in Israel was eternally elect.

Rom. 9:6 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, **7** nor *are they* all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "*In Isaac your seed shall be called.*"

In a parallel way today, there are those who join local churches and even receive the sacraments who are not eternally elected.

For a time they enjoy even some of the blessings of God's grace as we see in Hebrews 6:4-6.

This also is part of God's sovereign plan even though it is difficult for us to see this unfold in the lives of those we know and love.

The doctrine of God's decree as I mentioned earlier does not mean that all of our problems are solved or that we have no sorrows or tears.

What did Paul the apostle write in viewing the state of his own people?

Rom. 9:1 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, **2** that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.

It is quite significant that Paul begins Romans 9 in this way.

This precious doctrine does not mean we are reduced in any way to robots.

And yet very importantly we see that deep human emotion and sorrow must be shaped by God's truth.

And so as you know, God's Word in Romans 9 cuts off any attempts to argue that God is unfair or unjust!

Under this point, let us also examine the evidence that God's work of predestination also applies to the angelic host.

Matt. 25:41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:'

² John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 209ff.

1Tim. 5:21 I charge *you* before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.

We also must consider the truth of Scripture as it relates to those God did not determine to elect unto salvation and therefore have been foreordained unto eternal judgment.

Rom. 9:18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

1Pet. 2:8 and

“A stone of stumbling

And a rock of offense.” They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

Jude 4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reprobation involves two elements.

One is negative. God according to His eternal counsel determined to pass over some and not elect them unto eternal life.

The other aspect is positive. In reprobation God simply treats sinners on the principle of strict justice, precisely as they deserve.³

No one then can say to God, what you are doing is unfair.

No one deserves God’s grace. And no one truly wants absolute justice.

Be humbled!

2) THIS SOVEREIGN WORK OF GOD ELECTION IS NOT BASED ON MAN, BUT GOD’S GLORY AND GRACE.

I have already discussed how God’s decree is not simply based on God foreseeing what events would take place in the future.

God’s work of election cannot simply be that God saw who in the future would believe in Christ and those who would reject God’s offer of salvation in Jesus Christ.

If that were the case, then there would a reason for some to boast.

³ Hodge, 75.

Saving faith would be turned into a work.

2Tim. 1:9 who has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,

Faith is a gift that God gives.

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, (NKJV)

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, (ESV)

One of the questions of Eph. 2:8 is what is the gift? Is faith the gift of this verse?

Probably more likely the gift is the whole process of salvation by grace through faith.⁴

This verse does undercut that God somehow just saw those who would exercise faith and those who would not.

If this were the case, then salvation would not be the same gift as Scripture declares it to be.

Why did God choose some and determine not to choose others?

The only answer is that this is one found in Ephesians 1 and in other places – God’s glory and the good pleasure of His will.

Eph. 1:5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, **according to the good pleasure of His will,**

Eph. 1:6 **to the praise of the glory of His grace,** by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

Eph. 1:9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, **according to His good pleasure** which He purposed in Himself,

Eph. 1:12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the **praise of His glory.**

Listen also to Romans 9:22-23.

Rom. 9:22 *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, **23** and

⁴ ESV Study Bible, s.v. Eph. 2:8.

that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,

Be humbled! Be diligent in God's Work!

3) GOD ALSO HAS APPOINTED THE MEANS WHEREBY HIS ELECT WILL BE BROUGHT TO SAVING FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.

The doctrine of God's decree also establishes the fact that God uses means to accomplish His eternal purposes.

What are the means that God uses to accomplish His eternal purposes in salvation?

First is redemption by Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.

Second is God's call to salvation through the working of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the preaching of the gospel.

Rom. 8:30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

In 1 Thessalonians 1, Paul gives thanks for the believers in Thessalonica.

4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.

The next verse speaks of the means that God used in bringing those in Thessalonica to saving faith.

5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

Those that God has redeemed in Christ, called, justified, adopted, and is now sanctifying, He continues to guard and keep.

1Pet. 1:5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

And what would God now have his people do in light of His sovereign work?

God directs us in reaching the lost with His glorious gospel, not motivated by guilt but by grace!

Motive of guilt vs. motive of grace and calling.

Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen.

Rom. 10:15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

*"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
Who bring glad tidings of good things!"*

1Cor. 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

CONCLUSION

How sweet and awful is the place

With Christ within the doors,

While everlasting love displays

The choicest of her stores.

While all our hearts and all our songs

Join to admire the feast,

Each of us cry, with thankful tongues,

"Lord, why was I a guest?

"Why was I made to hear thy voice,

And enter while there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?"

'Twas the same love that spread the feast
That sweetly drew us in;
Else we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin.

Pity the nations, O our God,
Constrain the earth to come;
Send thy victorious Word abroad,
And bring the strangers home.

We long to see thy churches full,
That all the chosen race
May, with one voice and heart and soul,
Sing thy redeeming grace.

Be humbled! Be diligent in God's Work!

Closing Hymn: 98

BENEDICTION – JUDE 24, 25

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present *you* faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, *Be* glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.