

Studies in the Westminster Confession of Faith

*Newtownabbey Free Presbyterian Church Rev Brian McClung 18th September 2013 Chapter 3 Part 5
Romans 9:16,21*

Chapter 3 - Of God's Eternal Decree

III. *By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death.* Proof Texts: *1 Timothy 5:21; Matthew 25:41; Romans 9:22, 23; Ephesians 1:5, 6; Proverbs 16:4.*

IV. *These angels and men, thus predestinated and fore-ordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.* Proof Texts: *2 Timothy 2:19; John 13:18.*

V. *Those of mankind that are predestinated unto 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 foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto: and all to the praise of His glorious grace.* Proof Texts: *Ephesians 1:4, 9, 11; Romans 8:30; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Romans 9:11, 13, 16; Ephesians 1:4, 9; Ephesians 1:6, 12.*

These three sections teach the following five propositions:

1. The decree of God determines that, out of the teeming masses of fallen angels and humanity, certain individuals shall attain to eternal salvation, and that the rest shall be left to be dealt with justly for their sins.
2. This determination of God in election unto salvation is all from eternity past and is utterly unchangeable.
3. This election is not conditioned upon foreseen faith or good works or perseverance in the creature, but that it rests upon sovereign grace and personal love, according to the secret counsel of God's will.
4. That the ultimate end or motive in this election unto salvation is the manifestation of God's own glory, the praise of His glorious grace.
5. This election unto eternal life is stated to be 'in Christ'.

Having considered the first two we are presently coming to the remainder of these five propositions concerning the decree of God as it relates to the subject of salvation.

3. This election is not conditioned upon foreseen faith or good works or perseverance in the creature, but that it rests upon sovereign grace and personal love, according to the secret counsel of God's will.

According to Arminians, God's decree respecting the salvation of men is founded upon their foreseen faith and good works. God looks down through time and sees those who will believe and thus elects them unto salvation. Thus this makes the decree of God, although prior in time, in order to come after the actions of men, and makes it dependent upon the determination of the creature's will. Scripture is directly opposed to this opinion, that is so derogatory to the supreme dominion and absolute authority of God:

[1] God claims the right of sovereign, unconditional election as His prerogative. *Romans 9:16,21: So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy & Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?* As we will see, as we proceed, it is nothing less than the absolute sovereignty of God that is at stake in this matter.

[2] Election is declared not to rest upon works, *Romans 11:5-7: Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work. What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded; 2 Timothy 1:9: Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.* It is clearly stated that election is by grace and if it is by grace then it cannot be by works. One cancels the other out!

However, foreseen faith and repentance are works. If election depends upon God looking down the corridors of time and seeing who would believe and repent then this makes election dependent upon a sinner's works.

All mankind are dead in trespasses and sins. No one can exercise faith or repentance. Faith and repentance are both gifts from God, *Eph 2:8,9, Acts 11:18*, and they are the fruit of election and not the cause of election, *Acts 13:48*. John Dick in his Lectures on Theology had this to say about the subject: *Election is ascribed to grace, to the exclusion of works; and these two causes are represented as incompatible and mutually destructive. ...In Rom. 9:10-13, Paul produces the case of Jacob and Esau as an illustration of the subject, and traces the predestination of individuals to happiness or misery to the sovereignty of God, without any consideration of their works. As the lot of the two sons of Isaac was settled prior to their personal conduct, so the apostle signifies, that the appointment of particular persons to salvation, depends solely upon the good pleasure of God.*

[3] Election is conditioned upon the good pleasure of God's will. *Eph 1:5,11: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will; In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.* We are here given the two conditions upon which election proceeds. There is no room here for the creature's foreseen faith or repentance. Rather the conditions are God's good pleasure and the counsel of His own will. It is not the creature who is at the centre of the decree of redemption but a sovereign God Himself. Charles Hodge in his commentary on Romans had this to say on *Romans 9:16,18: Were it otherwise, there would be no shadow of objection to the doctrine. "How could men say it was unjust, if God chose one and rejected another according to their works? And how could any one object, as in verse 19, "that as the will of God could not be resisted, men were not to be blamed if the decision in question did not depend on the will of God, but on that of men? How easy for the apostle to have answered the objector, "You are mistaken, the choice is not of God, he does not choose whom he wills, but whom he sees will choose him! It is not his will, but man's that decides the point." Paul does not so answer, but vindicates the doctrine of the divine sovereignty. The fact, therefore, that Paul had to answer the same objections which are now constantly urged against the doctrine of election, goes far to show that the doctrine was his.*

4. That the ultimate end or motive in the election of some unto salvation is the manifestation of God's own glory, the praise of His glorious grace. This is true of God in all His works, namely Creation, Providence and Redemption. It is most certainly true with respect to His work of redemption, *Eph 1:6,12 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved; That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*

Saving some magnifies God's goodness, which consists of His mercy, love and grace. Only saving some and destining others to suffer eternally for their sins, magnifies His holiness, truth and justice. God could justly have dealt with fallen humanity as He purposed to deal with the fallen angels. None of them are ordained unto salvation. They are reserved in everlasting chains awaiting judgment. However, the God of heaven is a God who is *gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy, Psalm 145:8*. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, *Ezekiel 18:32; 33:11*. Therefore He purposed to display His goodness in electing some unto eternal life.

The saving of our souls is always cause to praise the Lord. Whatever other circumstances attend our way in this life, if we are saved, then that is cause in itself to praise the Lord, *Psalm 100:4: Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.*

5. This election unto eternal life is stated to be 'in Christ'. The elect are stated to have been "*chosen in Christ*". This is the express language of Scripture, *Eph 1:4: According as he hath chosen us in him*

This cannot mean that the mediatory work of Christ was the cause of their election; for, as has been already shown, election proceeds from the good pleasure of the sovereign will of God. The phrase, "*chosen in Christ*," signifies that God had respect to the mediation of Christ, not as the cause of election, but as the means by which the purpose of election was to be executed.

The mediation of Christ was necessary, in order that the effects of electing love might be bestowed upon God's chosen, in a way consistent with the rights and honour of His justice. These statements indicate that the divine purpose is one, embracing the means as well as the end; but according to our conceptions of the operations of the divine minds the end is first in intention, and then the means are appointed by which it is to be carried into effect.