

TEACHING GOAL

To show that everything that happens is the result of God's decrees.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

Q. What are the decrees of god?

A. The decrees of god are, His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass.

S.C. 7; L.C. 12; W.C. of F. III; Savoy 3; Young 13

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: Ephesians 1:3-14

Support Passages: Romans 8:26-39, 9:11-18; Acts 2:23, 4:24-28; John 6:44,65; II Thessalonians 2:13; I Peter 2:8; Genesis 18:19; Isaiah 5:1-7; Deuteronomy 7:6-11; Amos 3:2

BIBLE STORY

Genesis 37:1-28, 50:15-21; Joseph's being sold into slavery in Egypt occurred by the will of God for His sovereign purposes.

MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him."

(Ephesians 1:3-4, ESV)

APPLICATION

As those who have been blessed with all spiritual blessings we ought to return to God our complete and wholehearted service. We should love Him who first loved us.

SUMMARY

The substance of this lesson is difficult indeed, yet, because it is found so often in Scripture, we dare not neglect it. It has been noted that the unbeliever who stands outside the gate to the narrow road to heaven, sees "WHOEVER BELIEVES" written above the door, but looking back after having passed through sees "PREDESTINED TO SONSHIP" written there. The unbeliever thinks of God's decrees as the work of a bigoted egotist, but the Christian saint rejoices that he has been blessed with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3ff)

These blessings include the following: (a) The Father's choosing us in Christ before the foundation of the world; (b) Predestining us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself; (c) The bestowal of grace upon those He has chosen; (d) The redemption of His chosen people through the blood of Christ; (e) The forgiveness of our trespasses; (f) Lavishing the riches of grace upon us; (g) Making known the mystery of His will; (h) Being kindly disposed toward us which He purposed in Christ; (i) Causing us to obtain an inheritance by His gracious predestination; (j) Working all things for our good, after the counsel of His own will; (k) Raising up a people for Himself to the praise of His glory; (l) Causing us to listen to the message of truth, the gospel of our salvation; (m) Enabling us to believe on Christ; (n) Sealing us with the Holy Spirit of promise; (o) Making believers to be temples of the Holy Spirit as a pledge (earnest money) of their inheritance.

So odious is this doctrine to the unbeliever and so precious to the believer, that the Confession instructs us to handle the "high mystery of predestination - - with special prudence and care, that men attending the will of God revealed in His word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation (calling), be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence and abundant consolation, to all that sincerely obey the gospel."¹ Over and over again the Apostle praises God for choosing him and saving him because Saul, on the road to Damascus, was hopelessly in bondage to sin. Only a direct, powerful, gracious exercise of God's election in Paul's behalf could and did save him. Truly, Paul was, "the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

If you have read the passages of Scripture suggested in the previous part of this lesson, you have seen the words "chosen", "elect", "predestined", "foreordained", etc. In many cases the word "foreknowledge" or God's knowledge, is also associated with them. Lesson six noted that God's foreknowledge is equivalent to His foreordination (decree) for all that God foreknows is certain to come to pass because He causes it to be so. Therefore it is no comfort to the Arminian to claim that predestination is based on, or contingent to, foreknowledge. Furthermore, even though God decreed the Garden of Eden, the fall of man and his redemption, He is by no means the author of evil. (James 1:3, 17; I John 1:5; Hebrews 7:26-27; etc.)

Here we have man's real problem with God's decrees. It is our problem and not God's problem. Since it is not apparently given to mankind to understand such things, we are not to propose solutions to the origin of sin and election. The Bible tells us that sin entered the world through the devil, who fell from his original place of authority in heaven, and by means of Adam's disobedience. We know virtually nothing about things which happened before the creation of the universe and mankind. Some have proposed that God permitted sin in His universe by virtue of His "permissive decrees". However, the problem is not solved by this view, but remains. Why should God even "permit" sin? He could have decreed a world without it just as well. Some call the problem of sin a paradox and others an antinomy. Everywhere in scripture, however, God is represented as holy, righteous, just, good, etc. God is not the author of sin and that's that!

¹ The Westminster Confession of Faith, Ch. III, Para. VIII.