

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 237

GOD'S DECREES

*Known unto God are all his
works from the beginning
of the world.*

Acts 15:18

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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GOD'S DECREES

237

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THE DECREES OF GOD

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

THE decree of God is His purpose or determination with respect to future things.¹ We have used the singular number as Scripture does (Rom 8:28; Eph 3:11) because there was only one act of His infinite mind about future things. But *we* speak as if there had been many because our minds are only capable of thinking of successive revolutions,² as thoughts and occasions arise, or in reference to the various objects of His decree, which being many seem to us to require a distinct purpose for each one. But an infinite understanding does not proceed by steps, from one stage to another: “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Act 15:18).

The Scriptures mention the decrees of God³ in many passages and in a variety of terms. The word *decree* is found in Psalm 2:7. In Ephesians 3:11, we see His “eternal purpose”; in Acts 2:23, His “determinate counsel and foreknowledge”; in Ephesians 1:9, the mystery of His “will”; in Romans 8:29, He also did “predestinate”; in Ephesians 1:9, His “good pleasure.” God’s decrees are called His “counsel” to signify they are consummately⁴ wise. They are called God’s “will” to show He was under no control, but acted according to His own pleasure. When a man’s will is the rule of his conduct, it is usually capricious⁵ and unreasonable; but wisdom is always associated with will in the divine proceedings, and accordingly, God’s decrees are said to be “the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11).

The decrees of God relate to all future things without exception: whatever is done in time⁶ was foreordained before time began. God’s purpose was concerned with everything, whether great or small, whether good or evil. But with reference to the latter, we must be

¹ EDITOR’S NOTE: This article draws heavily on John Dick, “The Decrees of God,” *Lectures in Theology*, Vol. II, 164-180.

² **successive revolutions** – consecutive periods of time.

³ **decrees of God** – What are the decrees of God? A: The decrees of God are His eternal purpose according to the counsel of His own will, whereby for His own glory He has foreordained whatever comes to pass. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism* Q. 7; available from CHAP-EL LIBRARY)

⁴ **consummately** – in the highest degree; perfectly.

⁵ **capricious** – guided by whim or impulse; given to sudden changes.

⁶ How does God execute His decrees? A: God executes His decrees in the works of creation and providence. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism* Q. 8)

careful to state that while God is the Orderer and Controller of sin, He is not the Author of it in the same way that He is the Author of good. Sin could not proceed from a holy God by positive and direct creation, but only by decretive permission⁷ and negative action. God's decree, as comprehensive as His government, extends to all creatures and events. It was concerned about our life and death, about our state in time and our state in eternity. As God works all things after the counsel of His own will, we learn from His works what His counsel is (was), as we judge an architect's plan by inspecting the building erected under his direction.

God did not merely decree to make man,⁸ place him upon the earth, then leave him to his own uncontrolled guidance. Instead, He fixed all the circumstances in the lot of individuals and all the particulars that comprise the history of the human race from commencement to close. He did not merely decree that general laws should be established for the government of the world, but He settled the application of those laws to all particular cases. Our days are numbered, and so are the hairs of our heads. We may learn what the extent of the divine decrees is from the dispensations of providence⁹ in which they are executed. The care of Providence reaches to the most insignificant creatures and the most minute events—the death of a sparrow, the fall of a hair. Let us now consider some of the properties of the divine decrees:

First, they are *eternal*. To suppose any of them to be made in time is to suppose that some new occasion has occurred, some unforeseen event or combination of circumstances has arisen, which has induced the Most High to form a new resolution. This would argue that the knowledge of the Deity is limited and that He grows wiser in the progress of time—which would be horrible blasphemy. No man who believes that the divine understanding is infinite, comprehending the past, the present, and the future, will ever assent to the erroneous doctrine of temporal¹⁰ decrees. God is not ignorant of future events that will be executed by human volitions;¹¹ He has foretold them in innumerable instances, and prophecy is but the manifestation of His

⁷ **decretive permission** – permission granted by God's decree.

⁸ How did God create man? A: God created man, male and female, after His own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness with dominion over the creatures. (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 10)

⁹ **providence** – What are God's works of providence? A: God's works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions. (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 11)

¹⁰ **temporal** – temporary; not eternal.

¹¹ **volitions** – acts of willing, choice, or decision.

eternal prescience.¹² Scripture affirms that believers were chosen in Christ before the world began (Eph 1:4), yes, that grace was “given” to them then (2Ti 1:9).

Second, the decrees of God are *wise*. Wisdom is shown in the selection of the best possible ends and the fittest means to accomplish them...As the psalmist declared, “O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all” (Psa 104:24)...He who sees the workings of admirable skill in the parts of a machine that he has an opportunity to examine is naturally led to believe that the other parts are equally admirable. In like manner, we should satisfy our minds as to God’s works when doubts obtrude¹³ themselves upon us, and repel the objections that may be suggested by something we cannot reconcile to our notions of what is good and wise. When we reach the bounds of the finite and gaze toward the mysterious realm of the infinite, let us exclaim, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom 11:33).

Third, they are *free*. “Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?” (Isa 40:13–14). God was alone when He made His decrees, and His determinations were influenced by no external cause. He was free to decree or not to decree, and to decree one thing and not another. This liberty we must ascribe to Him Who is supreme, independent, and sovereign in all His doings.

Fourth, they are *absolute and unconditional*. The execution of them is not suspended upon any condition that may or may not be performed. In every instance where God has decreed an end, He has also decreed every means to that end. The One Who decreed the salvation of His elect also decreed to work faith in them (2Th 2:13). “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isa 46:10); but that could not be, if His counsel depended upon a condition that might not be performed. But God “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11).

Side by side with the immutability and invincibility of God’s decrees, Scripture plainly teaches that man is a responsible creature and answerable for his actions. If our thoughts are formed from God’s Word, the maintenance of the one will not lead to the denial of the

¹² **prescience** – knowledge of actions or events before they happen.

¹³ **obtrude** – forcibly thrust.

other. That there is a real difficulty in defining where the one ends and the other begins is freely granted. This is always the case where there is a conjunction of the divine and the human. Real prayer is composed by the Spirit, yet it is also the cry of a human heart. The Scriptures are the inspired Word of God, yet they were written by men who were something more than machines in the hand of the Spirit. Christ is both God and man. He is omniscient, yet “increased in wisdom” (Luk 2:52). He is almighty, yet was “crucified through weakness” (2Co 13:4). He is the Prince of life, yet He died. High mysteries all—yet faith receives them unquestioningly.

It has been pointed out often in the past that every objection against the eternal decrees of God applies with equal force against His eternal foreknowledge. Jonathan Edwards said, “Whether God has decreed all things that ever came to pass or not, all that own the being of a God own that He knows all things beforehand. Now, it is self-evident that if He knows all things beforehand, He either doth approve of them, or He doth not approve of them; that is, He either is willing they should be, or He is not willing they should be. But to will that they should be is to decree them.”¹⁴

Finally, attempt to assume and then contemplate the opposite. To deny the divine decrees would be to predicate¹⁵ a world and all its concerns regulated by undesigned chance or blind fate. Then what peace, what assurance, what comfort would there be for our poor hearts and minds? What refuge would there be to fly to in the hour of trial? None at all. There would be nothing better than the black darkness and abject¹⁶ horror of atheism. How thankful we should be that everything is determined by infinite wisdom and goodness! What praise and gratitude are due unto God for His divine decrees! Because of them, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). Well may we exclaim, “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36).

From *The Attributes of God*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Arthur Walkington Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England, UK.



¹⁴ Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, 525.

¹⁵ **predicate** – affirm.

¹⁶ **abject** – terrible and hopeless.

GOD'S DECREE DEFINED

Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711)

THE extrinsic works¹ of God originate in the decrees of God. This is true in a general sense, but also in a special sense, relating to man's eternal predestination, as well as the Counsel of Peace or the Covenant of Redemption,² wherein the Son became Surety³ on behalf of His elect. The manifestation of the extrinsic works of God relates to *nature*—creation⁴ and providence⁵—or *grace*, which is the execution of the great work of redemption.⁶

We will initially consider *the decrees of God*, which is a doctrine from which a believing child of God may derive extraordinary comfort, delight, peace, and joy. God is all-sufficient in Himself, having had no need to create any of His creatures. The creature can neither

¹ **extrinsic works** – *external* works of God—creation, providence, and grace—arising from the *internal* works of the members of the Godhead—decrees. The external works are divided into (1) the works of *nature* and (2) the work of *grace*. The works of nature are creation and providence. The work of grace is God's work of redemption through Jesus Christ.

² **Covenant of Redemption** – Differing views exist among those who believe in God's eternal purpose of salvation through the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Some believe that God's plan of salvation is expressed in two covenants: (1) a Covenant of Redemption that was made in eternity among the members of the Godhead, which is the foundation for (2) a Covenant of Grace that is made in history between God and His elect (i.e., John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Charles Hodge, R. L. Dabney, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Nehemiah Coxe, R. B. C. Howell, etc.). Of those who hold to a Covenant of Redemption, some believe that it is between the Father and the Son, while others include all the members of the Trinity. However, others believe that God's plan of salvation is expressed in only one Covenant of Grace, which has an *eternal* aspect between the members of the Trinity and an *historical* aspect between God and His elect (i.e., Edmund Calamy, Thomas Boston, John Brown of Haddington, John Gill, Hugh Martin, Benjamin Keach, etc.). For helpful discussions on this subject, see Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, Reformation Heritage Books, 237-278; Greg Nichols, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed and Baptist Perspective on God's Covenants*, Solid Ground Christian Books; David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Bought Her*, Crossway Books, 201-223.

³ **Surety** – one who undertakes the debt of another; as our Surety, Christ guaranteed a full legal satisfaction for our sin and our deliverance upon His payment of our debt upon Calvary's cross.

⁴ **creation** – What is the work of creation? A: The work of creation is God's making all things of nothing, by the Word of His power, in six normal consecutive days, and all very good. (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 9)

⁵ **providence** – What are God's works of providence? A: God's works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions. (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 11)

⁶ See FGB 236, *God's Eternal Purpose*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

add glory nor felicity⁷ to Him. However, it has pleased the Lord to create creatures in order to communicate His goodness to them and consequently render them happy. In decreeing creation, God has eternally purposed and decreed within Himself where, when, how, and of what nature each creature should be, and what each should do and encounter. Whereas the doctrine itself can be deduced from the Word of God, the manner in which God decreed is hidden from us. In this respect, we have hindsight rather than foresight. We discuss this doctrine in human terms, seeking to understand it in a manner consistent with God's Being.

*Socinians*⁸ and *Arminians*,⁹ considering the contingent¹⁰ nature of all that transpires, as well as the fact that man acts according to the free exercise of his will, are prepared to remove everything, particularly that which pertains to man, from under the domain of divine government. They cannot comprehend how God could have decreed everything so precisely. They argue, "What happens to the concept of contingency and what remains of the freedom of man's will? How can prayer, exhortation, and diligence have any purpose, and how then can God be exempt from being the cause of sin and the damnation of man? If man cannot add anything to his salvation, he might as well cease all efforts and live in indifference.¹¹" Consequently, they deny that God's decree extends to everything and that He has decreed specific events from eternity. We, however, being firmly grounded in the truth, maintain upon the basis of God's Word that there is such a decree of God, a truth that we confess and seek to use in a sanctified manner. In order to present this truth clearly to everyone, we shall consider the essential nature of God's decree and its particulars, confirming this from God's Word...

We shall begin by considering the testimony of the Word of God. Scripture, in teaching that God has created, maintains, and governs

⁷ **felicity** – happiness; state of well-being.

⁸ **Socinians** – followers of the sect founded by Faustus and Lelio Socinus, 16th century Italian theologians, who denied the deity of Christ, the Trinity, and denied that the cross brought forgiveness of sins.

⁹ **Arminians** – followers of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), Dutch theologian, born in Oudewater, the Netherlands. He rejected the Reformers' understanding of predestination, teaching instead that God's predestination of individuals was based on His foreknowledge of their accepting or rejecting Christ by their own free will.

¹⁰ **contingent** – dependent upon something that may or may not happen; not predetermined by necessity; therefore, in a contingent event there is an absence of necessity, not to be equated with chance, but rather to be understood as the result of the free operation of secondary causes.

¹¹ **indifference** – lack of care or concern.

all things according to a decree that He has decreed within Himself, uses a diversity of expressions to describe and represent this eternal decree: (1) It uses the word *decree*. “I will declare the decree” (Psa 2:7); “truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined” (Luk 22:22). (2) It uses the verb *to appoint*. “For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me” (Job 23:14). (3) It uses the phrase *determinate counsel and foreknowledge*. “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Act 2:23); “For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done” (Act 4:28). (4) It uses the phrase *the counsel of His will and His pleasure*. “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isa 46:10); “who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11). (5) It uses the word *purpose*. “Who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28); “Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself” (Eph 1:9).

These texts do not merely provide us with the various designations for this decree, but convincingly and simultaneously confirm the truth of the doctrine that God has eternally made a decree, according to which proceeds all that transpires in this time state.

In human decision-making, people will view a matter from all angles, considering both pros and cons, in order to determine its feasibility.¹² Often they cannot analyze the situation correctly, vacillate¹³ between two options, and ultimately must make a decision based on the facts as they appear to be at that moment and in similar situations. Far be it from us, however, to attribute such imperfections to the omniscient, only-wise, omnipotent, and immutable God. His ways are not as our ways. We cannot analyze in what manner the Lord decrees and establishes His counsel and purpose. We know, however, that He does so and that our human terminology gives expression to the unsearchable wisdom and immovability of God's purpose, as well as His comprehensive plan concerning all things as to the manner of their existence and the time of their occurrence.

The decree of God defined: We understand the decree of God, [then,] to be *the eternal, volitional, all-wise, sovereign, and immutable purpose of God concerning all and every matter, comprehending both the time and the manner in which these matters will occur*.¹⁴

¹² **feasibility** – degree of being easily or conveniently done.

¹³ **vacillate** – change one's opinion or thoughts.

¹⁴ For God to decree is to purpose and foreordain, to will and appoint that a thing shall be or not be.—*Thomas Boston*

Prior to the creation of the world there was only eternity, and thus matter, bodies, forms of life, and whatever else one may imagine, did not exist. God, Who inhabited eternity, purposed to create a world, populate it with creatures, and maintain and govern them, thereby determining and stipulating the place, activity, and the course of events transpiring during the existence of each creature. This decree is the original cause whereby and according to which all things exist and occur in time, existing and occurring without deviation from this decree. Men first form a mental concept of that which they wish to make, adding and subtracting things that initially they have either partly or fully observed. Concerning God, however, there was no design external to Him imposed upon Him after which He would pattern that which He wished to create. All that He has created is an expression of His counsel. God's decree is the vehicle whereby He gives expression to His counsel: all that exists and transpires is the expression of that decree. The decree of God, being an intrinsic act of His will,¹⁵ is not incidental to God, but is the decreeing God Himself.

God's decree is from eternity. God does not decree things in response to issues that are already present; such is the manner of human decision-making. Rather, prior to the creation and existence of the world, He ordained all the events that He would bring into existence, that is, the time and place, means of execution, individual activities, and the individual circumstances from beginning to end for each. Scripture states emphatically, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Act 15:18). God, by virtue of His decree, has foreknowledge of all that will exist and occur in time, so that according to His will, by an act of His omnipotence, all matters are transferred from a state of potential existence to actual existence. It thus logically follows that God's eternal foreknowledge of all matters necessarily follows from the fact that He has eternally decreed them. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4); "...to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2Ti 1:9). That which exists prior to time is necessarily exclusive of the concept of time. Prior to the existence of time there was only eternity. Should the thought occur concerning the moment when God made His decree prior to the existence of time, one is, without knowing it, already thinking within the parameters¹⁶ of time. Eternity necessarily excludes duration of time and chronology. Eternity is an incomprehensible

¹⁵ **intrinsic...will** – This is a reference to the inward or internal works of God.

¹⁶ **parameters** – boundaries; limits.

concept for us as temporal creatures. Since God's decrees are existent prior to time, they are necessarily eternal. In the execution of things, both duration of time and chronology are factors. However, this chronology also has been eternally decreed by God by a singular act of His will. In sequence and nature, God Himself precedes His decree; however, in view of the eternal existence of this decree, such cannot be true in a chronological sense...

In considering God's decree, we must differentiate between viewing this decree *relative to the decreeing God*, it being a singular act of His will, or *relative to the matters that have been decreed*. In the latter, there are as many dimensions to this decree as there are matters to which this decree relates.

The decree of God is in all aspects volitional¹⁷ and noncompulsory.¹⁸ It is also not motivated in the least degree by any internal or external necessary causes. It is purely an expression of His sovereign good pleasure. "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself" (Eph 1:9), "after the counsel of His own will" (verse 11). Compulsion and volition are mutually exclusive, but necessity and volition can very well coexist. God's Being is of necessity volitional. The fact, however, that His will extends to matters that are extrinsic to His Being, that is, to create and govern them; to decree their manner of existence; to establish the course of events during their existence, that one will be rich and the other poor, that one will live in this locality and the other in that locality—all this is purely volitional. God could have decreed to create nothing; or if it were His will to create and govern, He could have created in a different fashion and have established a different course of events for His creatures. If a potter has power over clay to create a vessel purely by the free exercise of his will, if the head of a household has the prerogative¹⁹ to furnish his home as he pleases by placing one object here and another there, would then the sovereign Lord of all things not have the prerogative to deal with His clay and with His creatures according to His good pleasure? Would anyone be able to prevent Him, Who is omnipotent, from doing so, thus having to adjust Himself to the whims of His creation? Would anyone be able to say, "Why hast Thou decreed it to be thus and not otherwise?" Would any creature be able to compel Him to establish a particular decree? This obviously cannot be so! His de-

¹⁷ **volitional** – relating to an act of will.

¹⁸ **noncompulsory** – not imposed or forced upon as an obligation; voluntary.

¹⁹ **prerogative** – exclusive privilege or right.

cree is the expression of His sovereign good pleasure, and it is for this reason that everything, transpiring as it does, is good because He wills it to be so. How blessed it is for the creature to acknowledge this, approve of it, and surrender his will to the will of God.

God has decreed everything with eternal, infinite, and unsearchable *wisdom*. When people construct something peculiar or extraordinary, we are amazed and exclaim, “How has man been able to conceive this?” Nevertheless, the idea is not truly original, having been derived from other principles that have been observed either in animals, inanimate objects, or in the work of other men. By way of subtraction or addition, or by a rearrangement of order, he has developed the concept for his creation. But “who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him?” (Isa 40:13). He, Who is “the only wise God” (1Ti 1:17), Whose “understanding is infinite” (Psa 147:5), Who in wisdom has made all things (Psa 104:24), has also, before the existence of time, with wisdom ordained and decreed all things. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom 11:33).

From *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, Vol. 1, 193-198,
Reformation Heritage Books, www.heritagebooks.org.

Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711): Dutch theologian and major representative of the Dutch Second Reformation; born in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands.



The great design of God in His whole works of creation and providence is to manifest and make known the glory of His power, wisdom, goodness, and greatness to the children of men. Hence is that of David, from the beginning [of] Psalm 19: “The firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.” And if it be asked, “What is the great design of God in the Scriptures?” I answer, “It is just to bring a lost world to the knowledge of a Savior, ‘who is the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person.’ All the prophecies, promises, histories, and doctrines of the Word do point us to Him as the needle in the mariner’s compass points to the pole-star: to Him bore all the prophets witness (Act 10:43).—*Ebenezer Erskine*

God, it is true, has predestinated believers to heaven, but that is not all. I do not read in so many words that the saints are predestinated to Paradise, but I do read that they are predestinated to be conformed to the image of His dear Son. This is the end of the whole predestination of God: to make His elect like their elder Brother that He may be the first-born among many brethren.

—*Charles Spurgeon*

GOD'S ETERNAL DECREES

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

THE description that is given in the Bible of God's manner or method of working is what is commonly called the doctrine of the *eternal decrees of God*. These are things that God determined and ordained before He had done anything at all. Now, I want to admit very frankly that I am calling your attention to an extremely difficult subject. I do not apologize for that because, as I shall show you, this is not a question of choice. The business of someone expounding the Bible is to expound the whole Bible. But I do admit that it is a very difficult subject, and I imagine that that is why many of the books do not include it. But it is so scriptural that it must be faced. It is like the doctrine of the Holy Trinity¹—beyond our minds, in a sense. But as we saw with that doctrine, we must not avoid it just because it is difficult...Now, having said all that, let me come to a positive statement of the doctrine; and in order to make it clear, I shall put it in the form of a number of principles.

The first is that *from eternity God has had an unchangeable plan with reference to His creatures*. The Bible is constantly using a phrase like this: "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4). As the apostle Paul said about our Lord's birth, "When the fulness of the time was come..." (Gal 4:4). We can put this negatively...God never has an afterthought...He is omniscient and omnipresent; He knows everything from the beginning to the end, so He cannot have an afterthought. Nothing is accidental, haphazard, uncertain, or fortuitous.² God has a definite plan and purpose about creation, about men and women, about salvation, about the whole of life in this world, about the end of it all, about the ultimate destiny. Everything that God has done and has brought to pass is according to His own eternal plan, and it is fixed, certain, unchangeable, and absolute. That is the first statement.

The second is that *the plan of God comprehends and determines all things and events of every kind that come to pass*. If you believe that God has determined certain ends, then you must believe that He determines everything that leads to those ends. If you believe that God decided to create at a given point, that He decided that the end of the

¹ See FGB 231, *The Triune God*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² **fortuitous** – happening by chance.

world, according to time, is to take place at a given point, surely, if the end is determined, everything that leads to that end must also be determined. And you realize that there is also a kind of interrelationship between all events and things that happen and that all are leading to that end. So the doctrine of the eternal decrees of God says that all things are ultimately determined and decreed by Him.

Therefore, if everything is determined by God, it must include, of necessity, the free actions, the voluntary actions of free and voluntary agents. Now that is a fundamental statement. Let me break it up a little and give you the scriptural evidence. With regard to the whole system, this is put very plainly by the apostle Paul. He says, “That in the dispensation³ of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: 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” (Eph 1:10-11). Now that applies to everything. Paul is speaking there of the whole cosmos⁴ being united in Christ, and he says that God is going to bring this to pass in that way.

Then there is further scriptural evidence...In the book of Proverbs, we read, “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD” (Pro 16:33). We call a “lot” a matter of chance and of accident, do we not? You “cast” a lot. Yes, says this passage in Scripture, “but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.” Or in the New Testament, we read that our Lord says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father” (Mat 10:29). A little sparrow drops dead and falls to the ground. Accident, you say. Chance. Not at all! “Not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father.” The life of a little sparrow is in the hands of God. But, He continues, “The very hairs of your head are all numbered” (v. 30). There are events that appear to be quite accidental, but they are controlled by God.

Then take our free actions. Read 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.” The king appears to be free, but God is controlling him as He controls the very rivers. Ephesians 2:10 tells us, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in

³ **dispensation** – God’s arrangement of events by divine rule and care.

⁴ **cosmos** – universe as a well-ordered whole.

them.” And in Philippians 2:13 we are told, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

But come to something more extraordinary and striking: the Scripture teaches us that *even sinful actions are in the hands of God*. Listen to Peter preaching on the Day of Pentecost at Jerusalem: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Act 2:23). Then Peter puts it like this in Acts 4:27-28: “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together”—notice—“for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” The terrible sin of those men was determined beforehand by the counsel of God.

And then you have a striking example of the same thing in the book of Genesis, the famous statement of Joseph to his brethren. Joseph, [retelling] the facts of his story, turned to his brothers and said, “So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God...” (Gen 45:8)... These sinful actions came under this great eternal decree of God.

Now let us be clear about this. In view of what we [know] about the holiness of God, we must at once say this: God does not cause evil in any sense or in any degree. He does not approve of evil. But He permits the wicked agents to perform it and then He overrules it for His own wise and holy ends.

Or take it like this if you prefer: the same decree of God that ordains the moral law that prohibits and punishes sin, also permits its occurrence. But it limits it and determines the precise channel to which it shall be confined, and the precise end to which it shall be directed, and overrules its consequences for good. The Bible clearly teaches us that. Listen again to this account of Joseph and his brethren in Genesis 50:20: “But as for you,” said Joseph, “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.” And I suppose in many ways the most striking example of all is to be found in the betrayal of Jesus by Judas: a free and voluntary action, and yet a part of God’s great eternal purpose and plan.

Now that brings me to my third general proposition, which is that *all the decrees of God are unconditional and sovereign*. They are not dependent in any sense on human actions. They are not determined by anything that people may or may not do. God’s decrees are not even determined in the light of what He knows people are going to do.

They are absolutely unconditional. They do not depend upon anything except God's own will and God's own holiness.

But—and I want to make this quite clear—that does not mean that there is no such thing as cause and effect in life. That does not mean that there are no such things as conditional actions. There is such a thing in nature and in life as cause and effect—yes. But what this doctrine says is that every cause and effect, and free actions, are part of the decree of God Himself. He has determined to work in that particular way. God has decreed that the end which He has in view shall certainly and inevitably be brought to pass and that nothing can hinder or frustrate it.

Now let me give you my evidence for all this. Take the prophecy of Daniel: “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35). Nothing can stay the hand of God or even question it. Or listen to our Lord stating this very thing in Matthew 11:25-26: “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.” Why has God withheld these things from the “wise and prudent” and “revealed them unto babes”? There is only one answer—it is that “even so” it seemed good in His sight.

Paul also says the same thing: “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph 1:5). I do commend to you a careful study of the first half of that first chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians. Observe all it says, and you will know that everything that God has done is always “according to the good pleasure of his will.” Nothing else at all. It is entirely of grace.

But, of course, you find this doctrine stated most clearly of all in that great and mighty ninth chapter of the epistle to the Romans. I want at this point especially to emphasize verse 11. You will find that it is a verse in [parentheses]; but what a verse! What a statement! “(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth.)” Paul's argument is that God had decreed that the elder should serve the younger because, before either of them were ever born, He had said, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (9:13).

“Why,” you ask, “did God love Jacob and hate Esau? Was it because of what they did?” No. Before they were ever born, before they were ever conceived, God had chosen Jacob and not Esau. It had nothing to do with their works in any respect.

God's purpose is unconditional and absolutely sovereign. Listen to Paul again: “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid” (Rom 9:14). God forbid that you should even think it! It is impossible: “For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (Rom 9:15-18).

Let me come on to the fourth principle, which is that *the decrees of God are efficacious*. Now this, of course, follows of necessity. Because God is a sovereign Lord, because of His omnipotence and His almightiness, His purposes can never fail. What God determines and decrees must infallibly be brought to pass. Nothing can prevent it. Nothing can frustrate it.

And that brings me to the fifth: *the decrees of God are in all things perfectly consistent with His own most wise, benevolent, and holy nature*. I think I need not argue that. In other words, there is no contradiction in God. There cannot be. God is perfect, as we have seen, and He is absolute...You and I here upon the earth, with our finite and sinful minds, are confronted with a problem. It is this: Why did God decree to permit sin? And there is only one answer to that question: We do not know. We know that He did decree to permit sin, or sin would never have taken place. Why, we do not know. It is an insoluble⁵ problem. But we shall see it all clearly when we are in glory and face to face with God.

Two things we can be certain of and must always assert: first, God is never the cause of sin. In Habakkuk 1:13, you will find it said, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil.” James says, “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (Jam 1:13). Second, the purpose of God is, in all things, perfectly consistent with the nature and the mode of action of His creatures. In other words, though we cannot reconcile it, there is an ultimate reconciliation. The

⁵ **insoluble** – not capable of being solved or explained.

decrees of God do not deny the existence of free agents and free actions. All we say is this: though God has granted this freedom, He nevertheless overrules it all in order that His ultimate ends may come to pass.

How can God decree everything and yet hold us responsible for what we do? Here is the answer: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory...” (Rom 9:20-23).

“But,” you may ask, “how do you reconcile those two?”

I answer, “I cannot. I know the Bible tells me the two things: that man, in a sense, is a free agent, and on the other hand, that God’s eternal decrees govern everything.”

Now I must come to my last proposition, which is that *the salvation of men and women and of angels, and of certain of them in particular, was determined by God before the foundation of the world*. He does this entirely of His own good will and His grace. I would again refer you to Matthew 11:25–26. And in John 6:37, we read, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” In verse 44, our Lord says, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” In Acts 13:48, I read this: “And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, you find, “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” Then in his letter to Timothy, Paul says, “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” (2Ti 1:9).

But especially I want to emphasize again that great statement, which I have already quoted, from Romans 9:20-23. The apostle Paul, preaching this great doctrine of the eternal decrees of God, imagines somebody in Rome asking a question and saying: “I do not understand this. It seems to me to be contradictory, to be unfair. If what you are telling me about these decrees is true, it seems that God is

unjust.” The questioner says to Paul, “Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?” (Rom 9:19).

And Paul’s reply is, “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory...?”

That is the apostle’s answer. That is the scriptural answer. That is God’s answer, therefore, to us and for us while we are in this world of time. It is beyond us. We cannot grasp the ultimate working of God’s mind. It is no use asking, “Why this?” and, “Why that? Why did God raise up Pharaoh? Why did He choose Jacob and not Esau? Why does He punish us if all things are determined and decreed?” The answer is, “Nay but, O man, who art thou?” You are pitting yourself against the mind of God. You are forgetting how small you are, how finite you are, how sinful as a result of the fall. You have to leave the ultimate understanding until you arrive in glory. All you have to do here in time is to believe that God is always consistent with Himself, and to accept what He has plainly and clearly told us about His eternal decrees, about what He has determined and decided before He ever created the world.

And, above all, realize that if you are a child of God, it is because God has determined it, and what He has determined about you is certain and safe and sure. Nothing and no one can ever take you out of His hands, or make Him forgo His purpose in respect to you. The doctrine of the eternal decrees of God before the foundation of the world! He knew me. He knew you. And our names were written in the Lamb’s Book of Life before the world was ever made, before you and I or anybody else ever came into it.

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David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981): Welsh expository preacher and author; born in Cardiff, Wales, UK.



GOD'S GLORIOUS SOVEREIGNTY

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.—1 Chronicles 29:11

THE sovereignty of God is an expression that once was generally understood. It was a phrase commonly used in religious literature. It was a theme frequently expounded in the pulpit. It was a truth that brought comfort to many hearts and gave virility and stability to Christian character. But, today, to make mention of God's sovereignty is, in many quarters, to speak in an unknown tongue. Were we to announce from the average pulpit that the subject of our discourse would be the sovereignty of God, it would sound very much as though we had borrowed a phrase from one of the dead languages. Alas! that it should be so. Alas! that the doctrine which is the key to history, the interpreter of providence, the warp and woof of Scripture, and the foundation of Christian theology, should be so sadly neglected and so little understood.

The sovereignty of God—what do we mean by this expression? We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the godhood of God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing “according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (Psa 115:3). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is “The governor among the nations” (Psa 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleaseth Him best. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the “only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1Ti 6:15). Such is the God of the Bible.

How different is the God of the Bible from the God of modern Christendom! The conception of deity that prevails most widely today, even among those who profess to give heed to the Scriptures, is a

miserable caricature, a blasphemous travesty of the truth. The God of the twentieth century is a helpless, effeminate being who commands the respect of no really thoughtful man. The God of the popular mind is the creation of a maudlin¹ sentimentality. The God of many a present-day pulpit is an object of pity rather than of awe-inspiring reverence. To say that God the Father has purposed the salvation of all mankind, that God the Son died with the express intention of saving the whole human race, and that God the Holy Spirit is now seeking to win the world to Christ; when, as a matter of common observation, it is apparent that the great majority of our fellow-men are dying in sin and passing into a hopeless eternity, is to say that God the Father is *disappointed*, that God the Son is *dissatisfied*, and that God the Holy Spirit is *defeated*. We have stated the issue baldly,² but there is no escaping the conclusion. To argue that God is “trying His best” to save all mankind, but that the majority of men will not let Him save them, is to insist that the will of the Creator is impotent and that the will of the creature is omnipotent. To throw the blame, as many do, upon the devil, does not remove the difficulty; for if Satan is defeating the purpose of God, then, Satan is almighty and God is no longer the Supreme Being.

To declare that the Creator's original plan has been frustrated by sin is to *dethrone* God. To suggest that God was taken by surprise in Eden and that He is now attempting to remedy an unforeseen calamity is to *degrade* the Most High to the level of a finite, erring mortal. To argue that man is a free moral agent and the determiner of his own destiny, and that therefore he has the power to checkmate his Maker, is to strip God of the attribute of omnipotence. To say that the creature has burst the bounds assigned by his Creator, and that God is now practically a helpless spectator before the sin and suffering entailed by Adam's fall, is to *repudiate* the express declaration of Holy Writ, namely, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” (Psa 76:10). In a word, to deny the sovereignty of God is to enter upon a path that, if followed to its logical terminus, is to arrive at blank atheism.

The sovereignty of the God of Scripture is absolute, irresistible, infinite. When we say that God is sovereign, we affirm His right to govern the universe, which He has made for His own glory, just as He pleases. We affirm that *His right* is the right of the Potter over the

¹ **maudlin** – weakly emotional.

² **baldly** – in an uncompromisingly direct way; bluntly.

clay, i.e., that He may mold that clay into whatsoever form He chooses, fashioning out of *the same lump* one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor. We affirm that He is under no rule or law outside of His own will and nature, *that God is a law unto Himself*, and that He is under no obligation to give an account of His matters to any.

Sovereignty characterizes the whole Being of God. He is sovereign in all His attributes. *He is sovereign in the exercise of His power.* His power is exercised *as He wills, when He wills, where He wills.* This fact is evidenced on every page of Scripture. For a long season, that power appears to be dormant; and then it is put forth in irresistible might. Pharaoh dared to hinder Israel from going forth to worship Jehovah in the wilderness—what happened? God exercised His power, His people were delivered, and their cruel task-masters slain. But a little later, the Amalekites dared to attack these same Israelites in the wilderness, and what happened? Did God put forth His power on this occasion and display His hand as He did at the Red Sea? Were these enemies of His people promptly overthrown and destroyed? No, on the contrary, the Lord swore that He would “have war with Amalek from generation to generation” (Exo 17:16). Again, when Israel entered the land of Canaan, God’s power was signally displayed. The city of Jericho barred their progress—what happened? Israel did not draw a bow nor strike a blow: the Lord stretched forth His hand and the walls fell down flat. But the miracle was never repeated! No other city fell after this manner. Every other city had to be captured by the sword!

Many other instances might be adduced illustrating the sovereign exercise of God’s power. Take one other example: God put forth His power and David was delivered from Goliath, the giant; the mouths of the lions were closed and Daniel escaped unhurt; the three Hebrew children were cast into the burning fiery furnace and came forth unharmed and unscorched. But *God’s power did not always interpose³ for the deliverance of His people*, for we read, “And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented” (Heb 11:36-37). But why? Why were not these men of faith delivered like the others? Or, why were not the others suffered to be killed like these? Why should God’s power interpose and rescue some and not the others? Why allow Stephen to be stoned to death, and then deliver Peter from prison?

³ **interpose** – place yourself or something else between two people, groups, or things.

God is sovereign in the *delegation of His power to others*. Why did God endow Methuselah with a vitality that enabled him to outlive all his contemporaries? Why did God impart to Samson a physical strength that no other human has ever possessed?...The answer to all of these questions is, because God is sovereign; and being sovereign He does as He pleases.

God is sovereign in the exercise of His mercy. Necessarily so, for mercy is directed by the will of Him that showeth mercy. Mercy is not a *right* to which man is entitled. Mercy is that adorable attribute of God by which He pities and relieves the wretched. But under the righteous government of God no one is wretched who does not *deserve* to be so. The objects of mercy, then, are those who are miserable, and all misery is the result of sin. Hence, the miserable are deserving of punishment, not mercy. To speak of *deserving mercy* is a contradiction of terms. God bestows His mercies on whom He pleases and withholds them as seemeth good unto Himself. A remarkable illustration of this fact is seen in the manner that God responded to the prayers of two men offered under very similar circumstances. Sentence of death was passed upon Moses for one act of disobedience, and he besought the Lord for a reprieve.⁴ But was his desire gratified? No; he told Israel, "But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee" (Deu 3:26). Now mark the second case: "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake" (2Ki 20:1-6). Both of these men had the sentence of death in themselves, and both prayed earnestly unto the Lord for a

⁴ **reprieve** – cancellation or postponement of punishment.

reprieve. The one wrote, “The Lord would not hear me,” and died; but to the other it was said, “I have heard thy prayer,” and his life was spared. What an illustration and exemplification of the truth expressed in Romans 9:15! “For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

The sovereign exercise of God’s mercy—pity shown to the wretched—was displayed when Jehovah became flesh and tabernacled among men. Take one illustration. During one of the Feasts of the Jews, the Lord Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He came to the Pool of Bethesda, where lay “a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.” Among this “great multitude” there was “a certain man which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.” What happened? “When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath” (Joh 5:3-9). Why was this one man singled out from all the others? We are not told that he cried, “Lord, have mercy *on me*.” There is not a word in the narrative that intimates that this man possessed any qualifications that entitled him to receive special favor. Here then was a case of the sovereign exercise of divine mercy, for it was just as easy for Christ to heal the whole of that “great multitude” as this one “certain man.” But He did not. He put forth His power and relieved the wretchedness of this one particular sufferer; and for some reason known only to Himself, He declined to do the same for the others. Again, we say, what an illustration and exemplification of Romans 9:15! “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

God is sovereign in the exercise of His love. Ah! That is a hard saying; who then can receive it? It is written, “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven” (Joh 3:27). When we say that God is sovereign in the exercise of His love, we mean that He loves whom He chooses. God does not love everybody; if He did, He would love the devil. Why does not God love the devil? Because there is nothing in him *to love*; because there is nothing in him to *attract* the heart of God. Nor is there anything to *attract* God’s love in any of the fallen sons of Adam, for *all* of them are, by nature, “children of

wrath" (Eph 2:3). If then there is nothing in any member of the human race to attract God's love, and if, notwithstanding, He *does* love *some*, then it necessarily follows that the cause of His love must be found in Himself, which is only another way of saying that the exercise of God's love towards the fallen sons of men is according to His own good pleasure. In the final analysis, the exercise of God's love *must* be traced back to His sovereignty, otherwise He would *love by rule*; and if He loved by rule, then is He under *a law of love*; and if He is under a law of love, then He is not supreme, but is Himself *ruled* by law. "But," it may be asked, "surely you do not *deny* that God loves the entire human family?" We reply, it is written, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom 9:13). If then God loved Jacob and hated Esau, and that before they were born or had done either good or evil, then the reason for His love was not in them, but in Himself.

That the exercise of God's love is according to His own sovereign pleasure is also clear from the language of Ephesians 1:3-5, where we read, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." It was "*in love*" that God the Father predestined His chosen ones unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, "according"—according to what? According to some excellency He discovered in them? No. What then? According to what He foresaw they would become? No; mark carefully the inspired answer: "According to the good pleasure of *his will*."

God is sovereign in the exercise of His grace. This [is] of necessity, for grace is favor shown to the *undeserving*, yea, to the hell-deserving. Grace is the antithesis⁵ of justice. Justice demands the impartial enforcement of law. Justice requires that each shall receive his legitimate due, neither more nor less. Justice bestows no favors and is no respecter of persons. Justice, as such, shows no pity and knows no mercy. But after justice has been fully satisfied, grace flows forth. Divine grace is not exercised at the expense of justice, but "grace reigns through righteousness" (Rom 5:21); and if grace "reigns," then grace is sovereign.

Grace has been defined as the unmerited favor of God; and if un-

⁵ **antithesis** – direct opposite.

merited, then none can claim it as their inalienable right. If grace is unearned and undeserved, then none are *entitled* to it. If grace is a gift, then none can *demand* it. Therefore, as salvation is by grace, the free gift of God, then He bestows it on whom He pleases. Because salvation is by grace, the very chief of sinners is not beyond the reach of divine mercy. Because salvation is by grace, boasting is excluded and God gets all the glory.

The sovereign exercise of grace is illustrated on nearly every page of Scripture. The Gentiles are left to walk in their own ways, while Israel becomes the covenant people of Jehovah. Ishmael the firstborn is cast out comparatively unblest, while Isaac the son of his parents' old age is made the child of promise. Esau the generous-hearted and forgiving-spirited is denied the blessing, though he sought it carefully with tears, while the worm Jacob receives the inheritance and is fashioned into a vessel of honor. [Likewise] in the New Testament. Divine truth is hidden from the wise and prudent, but is revealed to babes. The Pharisees and Sadducees are left to go their own way, while publicans and harlots are drawn by the cords of love.

In a remarkable manner, divine grace was exercised at the time of the Savior's birth. The incarnation of God's Son was one of the greatest events in the history of the universe, and yet its actual occurrence was not made known to all mankind; instead, it was specially revealed to the Bethlehem shepherds and wise men of the East...Note particularly the two classes to whom the birth of the Savior was made known, namely, the most *unlikely* classes—illiterate shepherds and heathen from a far country. No angel stood before the Sanhedrin and announced the advent of Israel's Messiah! No "star" appeared unto the scribes and lawyers as they, in their pride and self-righteousness, searched the Scriptures! They searched diligently to find out where He should be born, and yet it was not made known to them when He was actually come. What a display of divine sovereignty—the illiterate shepherds singled out for peculiar honor, and the learned and eminent passed by! And why was the birth of the Savior revealed to these foreigners and not to those in whose midst He was born? See in this a wonderful foreshadowing of God's dealings with our race throughout the entire Christian dispensation—sovereign in the exercise of His grace, bestowing His favors on whom He pleases, often on the most unlikely and unworthy.

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FOREKNOWLEDGE

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

THERE are two things concerning the foreknowledge of God about which many are in ignorance: (1) the meaning of the term and (2) its scriptural scope. Because this ignorance is so widespread, it is easy for preachers and teachers to palm off perversions of this subject, even upon the people of God. There is only one safeguard against error, [and] that is to be established in the faith. For that there has to be prayerful, diligent study, and a receiving with meekness the engrafted Word of God. Only then are we fortified against the attacks of those who assail us. There are those who misuse this very truth to discredit and deny the absolute sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners. Just as higher critics repudiate the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, and evolutionists, the work of God in creation, so some pseudo Bible teachers pervert His foreknowledge to set aside His unconditional election unto eternal life.

When the blessed subject of divine foreordination is expounded, when God's eternal choice of certain ones to be conformed to the image of His Son is set forth, the enemy sends along someone to argue that election is based upon the foreknowledge of God. This foreknowledge is interpreted to mean that God foresaw certain ones who would be more pliable than others, and they would respond more readily to the strivings of the Spirit. So, because God knew they would believe, He predestinated them unto salvation. But such logic is radically wrong. It repudiates the truth of total depravity, for it argues that there is something good in some men. It takes away the independency of God, for it makes His decrees rest upon what He discovers in the creature.

It completely turns things upside down, for in saying God foresaw certain sinners who would believe in Christ, and because of this He predestinated them unto salvation, is the very reverse of the truth. Scripture affirms that God, in His sovereignty, singled out certain ones to be recipients of His distinguishing favors (Act 13:48); therefore, He determined to bestow upon them the gift of faith. False theology makes God's foreknowledge of our believing the cause of His

¹ **pliable** – easily influenced.

election to salvation. However, God's election is the cause, and our believing in Christ the effect.

Before we proceed further with this much misunderstood theme, let us define our terms. What is meant by *foreknowledge*? "To know beforehand" is the ready reply of many. But we must not jump to conclusions, nor must we turn to Webster's dictionary as the final court of appeal, for it is not a matter of the etymology of the term employed. What we need is to find out how the word is used in Scripture. The Holy Spirit's usage of an expression always defines its meaning and scope. Failure to apply this simple rule is responsible for so much confusion and error. So many people assume they already know the significance of a certain word used in Scripture, then they are too dilatory² to test their assumptions with a concordance. Let us amplify.

Take the word *flesh*. Its meaning appears so obvious that many would regard it as a waste of time to look up its various connections in Scripture. It is hastily assumed that the word is synonymous with the physical body, so no inquiry is made. But, in fact, *flesh* in Scripture frequently includes far more than what is corporeal;³ all that is embraced by the term can only be ascertained by a diligent comparison of every occurrence of it and by a study of each separate context...Now what has just been said on *flesh*...applies with equal force to the terms *know* and *foreknow*. Instead of imagining that these words signify no more than a simple cognition,⁴ carefully weigh the different passages in which they occur. The word *foreknowledge* is not found in the Old Testament. But *know* occurs there frequently. When that term is used in connection with God, it often signifies to regard with favor, denoting not mere cognition but an affection for the object in view. "I know thee by name" (Exo 33:17). "Ye have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you" (Deu 9:24). "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee" (Jer 1:5). "They have made princes, and I knew it not" (Hos 8:4). "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amo 3:2). In these passages, "knew" signifies either "loved" or "appointed."

In like manner, the word *know* is frequently used in the New Testament in the same sense as in the Old. "Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you" (Mat 7:23). "I am the good shepherd, and

² **dilatory** – inclined to delay; slow.

³ **corporeal** – of the nature of a physical body.

⁴ **cognition** – mental action of acquiring knowledge and understanding by thought, experience, and the senses.

know my sheep, and am known of mine" (Joh 10:14). "If any man love God, the same is known of him" (1Co 8:3). "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2Ti 2:19).

Now, the word *foreknowledge* as it is used in the New Testament is less ambiguous than in its simple form "to know." If you carefully study every passage in which it occurs, you will discover that it is a moot point whether it ever has reference to the mere perception of events yet to take place. The fact is that *foreknowledge* is never used in Scripture in connection with events or actions; instead, it always refers to persons. It is persons God is said to "foreknow," not the *actions* of those persons. To prove this, we will quote each passage where this expression is found.

The first occurs in 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." Careful attention to the wording of this verse shows that the apostle was not speaking of God's foreknowledge of the act of the crucifixion, but of the Person crucified: "Him (Christ) being delivered by."

The second is Romans 8:29-30: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called." Weigh well the pronoun used here. It is not *what* He did foreknow, but *whom* He did. It is not the surrendering of their wills nor the believing of their hearts, but the persons themselves, which are in view.

"God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew" (Rom 11:2). Once more the plain reference is to persons, and to persons only.

The last mention is in 1 Peter 1:2: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." Who are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father"? The previous verse tells us the reference is to the "strangers scattered," i.e., the diaspora,⁵ the dispersion, the believing Jews. Thus, the reference is to *persons*, not to their foreseen acts.

Now, in view of these passages (and there are no more), what scriptural ground is there for anyone to say God "foreknew" the acts of certain ones, i.e., their "repenting and believing," and that because of those acts He elected them unto salvation? The answer is, "None

⁵ **diaspora** – (among early Christian Jews) the body of Jewish Christians outside of Palestine.

whatever.” Scripture never speaks of repentance and faith as being foreseen or foreknown by God. Truly, He did know from all eternity that certain ones would repent and believe, yet this is not what Scripture refers to as the object of God’s foreknowledge. The word uniformly refers to God’s foreknowing persons; then let us “hold fast the form of sound words” (2Ti 1:13).

Another thing we want to call particular attention to is that the first two passages quoted above show plainly and teach implicitly that God’s foreknowledge is not causative, that instead, something else lies behind, precedes it—something that is His own sovereign decree. Christ was “delivered by (1) the determinate counsel and (2) foreknowledge of God” (Act 2:23). His counsel or decree was the ground of His foreknowledge. So again in Romans 8:29. That verse opens with the word *for*, which tells us to look back to what immediately precedes. What, then, does the previous verse say? This: “all things work together for good to them...who are the called according to his purpose.” Thus, God’s foreknowledge is based upon His “purpose” or decree (*see* Psalm 2:7).

God foreknows what will be *because He has decreed it*. It is therefore a reverse order of Scripture, putting the cart before the horse, to affirm that God elects because He foreknows people. The truth is, He foreknows because He *has* elected. This removes the cause of election from outside the creature and places it in God’s own sovereign will. God purposed in Himself to elect a certain people, not because of anything good in them or from them, either actual or foreseen, but solely out of His own pleasure.

Why He chose the ones He did, we do not know. We can only say, “Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.” The plain truth of Romans 8:29 is that God, before the foundation of the world, singled out certain sinners and appointed them unto salvation (2Th 2:13). This is clear from the concluding words of the verse: “...did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son.” God did not predestinate those whom He foreknew were conformed. On the contrary, those whom He foreknew (i.e., loved and elected) He predestinated “to be conformed.” Their conformity to Christ is not the cause, but the effect of God’s foreknowledge and predestination.

God did not elect any sinner because He foresaw that he would believe, for the simple but sufficient reason that no sinner ever believes until God gives him faith; just as no man sees until God gives him sight. Sight is God’s gift; seeing is the consequence of my using His gift. So faith is God’s gift (Eph 2:8-9); believing is the consequence of

my using His gift. If it were true that God had elected certain ones to be saved because in due time they would believe, then that would make believing a meritorious⁶ act. In that event, the saved sinner would have ground for “boasting,” which Scripture emphatically denies (Eph 2:9).

Surely, God's Word is plain enough in teaching that believing is not a meritorious act. It affirms that Christians are a people “which had believed through grace” (Act 18:27). If, then, they have believed “through grace,” there is absolutely nothing meritorious about believing; if nothing meritorious, it could not be the ground or cause that moved God to choose them. No! God's choice proceeds not from anything *in* us or anything *from* us, but solely from His own sovereign pleasure. Once more, we read of “a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom 11:5). There it is, plain enough; election itself is of grace, and grace is unmerited favor, something for which we had no claim upon God whatsoever.

It is highly important for us to have clear and scriptural views of the foreknowledge of God. Erroneous conceptions about it lead inevitably to thoughts most dishonoring to Him. The popular idea of divine foreknowledge is altogether inadequate. God not only knew the end from the beginning, but also He planned, fixed, predestinated everything from the beginning. And, as cause stands to effect, so God's purpose is the ground of His prescience. If, then, the reader is a real Christian, he is so because God chose him in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4); and chose not because He foresaw you would believe, but simply because it pleased Him to choose. [He] chose you notwithstanding your natural unbelief. This being so, all glory and praise belongs to Him alone. You have no ground for taking any credit to yourself. You have “believed through grace” (Act 18:27), and that, because your very election was “of grace” (Rom 11:5).

From *The Attributes of God*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

A.W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England.



⁶ **meritorious** – deserving reward or praise.

ELECTION AND PREDESTINATION

Thomas Boston (1676-1732)

*According to the purpose of him who worketh all things
after the counsel of his own will.—Ephesians 1:11*

God hath determined the eternal state of all His rational creatures, both men and angels. Our Confession of Faith tells us, agreeably to Scripture, chapter 3 article 3 that “by the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others are fore-ordained to everlasting death.”¹ More particularly,

1. We read of the elect angels (1Ti 5:21). The perseverance and standing of the holy angels in the state of their primitive integrity,² and their confirmation therein, was determined by the purpose of God. In the morning of the creation, heaven shined with innumerable glittering stars, the angels of light, of whom a vast number are, by their rebellion against God, become wandering stars, “to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever” (Jud 13). Now, the good angels are in a supernatural state without the least danger of change or any separation from the blessed presence of God in glory. [This flows] from the continual irradiations³ of divine grace, which preserves their minds from errors and their wills from irregular desires. Consequently, they cannot sin nor forfeit their felicity.

It was by an eternal decree of God that He passed by the angels that fell and doomed them to everlasting misery. The apostle tells us, 2 Peter 2:4, that “God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.” And saith Jude, verse 6, “And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” Mercy did not interpose to avert or suspend their

¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Savoy Declaration* are identical here. The *Second London Baptist Confession* of 1677/89 says, “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ, to the praise of His glorious grace; others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of His glorious justice.”

² **primitive integrity** – original state of sinlessness.

³ **irradiations** – beaming forth of spiritual light; illumination of the mind.

judgment, but immediately they were expelled from the Divine Presence. Their present misery is insupportable,⁴ and worse awaits them. Their judgment is irreversible; they are under the blackness of darkness forever. They have not the least glimpse of hope to allay⁵ their sorrows, and no starlight to sweeten the horrors of their eternal night. It were a kind of mercy to them to be capable of death; but God will never be so far reconciled to them as to annihilate them. Immortality, which is the privilege of their nature, infinitely increases their torment.

2. God hath likewise appointed the final and eternal state of men and women. It is said, “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?” (Rom 9:21-23).

(1) He hath elected some to everlasting life by an irreversible decree: “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom 8:29-30). “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph 1:4). “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation” (2Th 2:13). From eternity, God elected some from among the lost posterity of Adam to everlasting life and glory, according to the good pleasure of His own will. Therefore, all is referred by our Savior to the good pleasure of God (Mat 11:25-26). And all the means for accomplishing the ends of election are likewise of divine appointment, particularly the redemption of ruined sinners by the death and sufferings of Christ: “He hath chosen us in Christ” (Eph 1:4). The Father did first, in the order of nature, choose Christ to the mediatory⁶ office, and as the chief corner

⁴ **is insupportable** – cannot be endured; unbearable.

⁵ **allay** – lessen the intensity of.

⁶ **mediatory office** – referring to a mediator, a go-between; one who intervenes between two hostile parties for the purpose of restoring them to a relationship of harmony and unity; “It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: unto whom He did from all eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified,

stone to bear up the whole building; whence He is called God's *elect* (Isa 42:1). And then He chose a company of lost sinners to be saved by and through Christ; therefore, He is said to predestinate them to be conformed to the image of His Son.

(2) God hath passed by the rest of mankind, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures and hath ordained them to dishonor and wrath for their sins, to the praise of His glorious justice. Hence, Christ is said to be "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence to them that stumble at the word being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed" (1Pe 2:8). "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour" (2Ti 2:19-20). In Jude, verse 4, we read of "ungodly men, who were before of old ordained to condemnation." And in Romans 9:22-23, we read of "vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory" and of "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction."

I come to consider the end⁷ of God's decrees. And this is no other than His own glory. Every rational agent acts for an end; and God being the most perfect agent and His glory the highest end, there can be no doubt but all His decrees are directed to that end. "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things" (Rom 11:36). "That we should be to the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:12). In all, He aims at His glory: and seeing He aims at it, He gets it even from the most sinful actions He has decreed to permit. Either the glory of His mercy or of His justice He draws therefrom. Infinite wisdom directs all to the end intended. More particularly,

1. This was God's end in the creation of the world. The divine perfections are admirably glorified here, not only in regard of the greatness of the effect, which comprehends the heavens and the earth, and all things therein; but in regard of the marvelous way of its production. For He made the vast universe without the concurrence⁸ of any material cause. He brought it forth from the womb of nothing by an

and glorified." (*Second London Baptist Confession*, 8.1) See also FGB 183, *Christ the Mediator*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁷ **end** – purpose for which something is designed; goal.

⁸ **concurrence** – cooperation.

act of His efficacious⁹ will. And as He began the creation by proceeding from nothing to real existence, so in forming the other parts He drew them from infirm and indisposed matter, as from a second nothing, that all His creatures might bear the signatures of infinite power. Thus, He commanded light to arise out of darkness and sensible creatures from an insensible element. The luster of the divine glory appears eminently here. Hence says David, “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Psa 19:1). They declare and manifest to the world the attributes and perfections of their great Creator, even in His infinite wisdom, goodness, and power. All the creatures have some prints of God stamped upon them, whereby they loudly proclaim and shew to the world His wisdom and goodness in framing them. Hence says Paul, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead” (Rom 1:20).

2. The glory of God was His chief end and design in making men and angels. The rest of the creatures glorified God in an objective way, as they are evidences and manifestations of His infinite wisdom, goodness, and power. But this higher rank of beings are endued with rational faculties, and so are capable to glorify God actively. Hence it is said, “The LORD hath made all things for himself” (Pro 16:4). If all things were made for Him, then man and angels especially, who are the masterpieces of the whole creation. We have our rise and being from the pure fountain of God’s infinite power and goodness; and therefore we ought to run towards that again, until we empty all our faculties and excellencies into that same ocean of divine goodness.

3. This is likewise the end of election and predestination. For He hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children, to the praise of the glory of His grace (Eph 1:5-6). That some are ordained to eternal life and others passed by and suffered to perish eternally in their sin is for the manifestation of the infinite perfections and excellencies of God. The glory and beauty of the divine attributes are displayed here with a shining luster: His sovereign authority and dominion over all His creatures to dispose of them to what ends and purposes He pleaseth; His knowledge and omniscience in beholding all things past, present, and to come; His vindictive justice¹⁰ in ordaining punishments to men as a just retribution for sin; and His omnipotence in making good His word and putting all His threatenings in execution.

⁹ **efficacious** – producing the intended or desired effect; effective.

¹⁰ **vindictive justice** – punishment inflicted for wrong-doing.

The glory of His goodness shines likewise here in making choice of any, when all most justly deserved to be rejected. And His mercy shines here with an amiable luster in receiving and admitting all who believe in Jesus into His favor.

4. This was the end that God proposed in that great and astonishing work of redemption. In our redemption by Christ, we have the fullest, clearest, and most delightful manifestation of the glory of God that ever was or shall be in this life. All the declarations and manifestations that we have of His glory in the works of creation and common providence, are but dim and obscure in comparison with what is here. Indeed, the glory of His wisdom, power, and goodness is clearly manifested in the works of creation. But the glory of His mercy and love had lain under an eternal eclipse without a Redeemer. God had in several ages of the world pitched upon particular seasons to manifest and discover one or other particular property of His nature. Thus, His justice was declared in His drowning the old world with a deluge of water and burning Sodom with fire from heaven. His truth and power were clearly manifested in freeing the Israelites from the Egyptian chains and bringing them out from that miserable bondage. His truth was there illustriously displayed in performing a promise that had lain dormant for the space of 430 years, and His power in quelling His implacable enemies by the meanest¹¹ of His creatures. Again, the glory of one attribute is more seen in one work than in another: in some things there is more of His goodness, in other things more of His wisdom is seen, and in others more of His power. But in the work of redemption, all His perfections and excellencies shine forth in their greatest glory. And this is the end that God proposed in their conversion and regeneration. Hence, it is said, “This people have I formed for myself, they shall shew forth my praise” (Isa 43:21). Sinners are adopted into God’s family and made a royal priesthood on this very design (1Pe 2:9).

From *The Whole Works of Thomas Boston: An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion*, Part 1, 157-158, in the public domain.

Thomas Boston (1676-1732): Scottish Presbyterian minister and theologian; born in Duns, Berwickshire.



¹¹ **meanest** – lowest.

CREATION

Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686)

I should now come to speak concerning the decrees of God...God is unchangeable in His essence, and He is unchangeable in His decrees. His counsel shall stand; He hath decreed the issue of all things and carries them on to their period by His providence. Therefore, I shall proceed to the execution of His decrees.

What is the work of creation? Answer: It is God's making all things of nothing, by the word of His power, in six normal consecutive days, and all very good.¹ "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen 1:1).

The creation is glorious to behold: it is a pleasant and fruitful study. Some think that when Isaac went abroad into the fields to meditate, it was in the book of [creation]. The creation is the heathen man's Bible, the plowman's primer, the traveler's perspective glass,² through which he receives the species and representation of those infinite excellencies that are in God. The creation is a large volume in which God's works are bound up, and this volume hath three great leaves in it—heaven, earth, and sea.

The author of the creation is God, so it is in the text, "God created." The world was created in time and could not be from eternity, as Aristotle³ thought. The world must have a maker; it could not make itself. If one should go into a far country and see stately edifices there, he would never imagine that these could build themselves, but that there had been some artificer⁴ there to raise such goodly structures. [Likewise,] this great fabric of the world could not create itself; it must have some builder or maker, and that is God: "In the beginning God created." To imagine that the work of the creation was not framed by the Lord Jehovah is as if we should conceive a curious landscape to be drawn without the hand of a limner:⁵ "God that made the world and all things therein" (Act 17:24).

¹ *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. 9; *Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 9, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² **perspective glass** – telescope.

³ **Aristotle** (384-322 B.C) – Greek philosopher and mathematician, pupil of Plato, tutor of Alexander the Great.

⁴ **artificer** – skilled craftsman or worker.

⁵ **limner** – water-color artist.

In the work of creation there are two things to be considered: first, the making [of it] and secondly, the adorning of it.

I. THE MAKING OF THE WORLD: Here consider,

(1) God made the world without any pre-existent matter. This is the difference between *generation* and *creation*. In generation, there is some matter to work upon; but in creation, there is no pre-existent matter. God brought all this glorious fabric of the world out of the womb of nothing. We see our beginning: it was of nothing. Some brag of their birth and ancestry, [but] you see how little cause they have to boast: they came of nothing.

(2) **God made the world with a word.** When Solomon had to build a temple, he needed many workmen [with] tools, but God wrought without tools: “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made” (Psa 33:6). The disciples wondered that Christ could *calm* the sea with a word (Mat 8:26-27); but, more, He *made* the sea with a word.

(3) **God made all things at first very good (Gen 1:31)—no defect or deformity.** The creation came out of God’s hands a curious piece: it was a fair copy without any blot, written with God’s own fingers (Psa 8:3). So, God’s work was perfect.

II. THE ADORNING OF THE WORLD:

(1) **God made this great lump and mass, then beautified it, and put it into a dress.** He divided the sea and the earth; He decked the earth with flowers [and] the trees with fruit. But what is beauty when it is masked over? Therefore, that we might behold this glory, God made the light. The heavens were [ornamented] with the sun, moon, and stars, so that the world’s beauty might be beheld and admired. God, in the creation, began with things less noble and excellent—vegetables and sensitives;⁶ and then the rational creatures—angels and men. Man was the most exquisite piece in the creation. He is a microcosm,⁷ or little world. Man was made with deliberation and counsel: “Let us make man” (Gen 1:26). It is the manner of artificers to be more accurate when they are about their masterpieces. Man was to be the masterpiece of this visible world, therefore God did consult about the making of so rare a piece. A solemn council of the sacred persons in the Trinity was called: “Let us make man in our image.” On the king’s coin, his image or effigy⁸ is stamped; God stamped His

⁶ **sensitives** – plants, herbs, shrubs, trees, whose leaflets fold together when touched.

⁷ **microcosm** – man viewed as a representation of the “great world” or universe; “little world” of human nature.

⁸ **effigy** – representation or likeness of a person.

image on man and made him partake of many divine qualities. I shall speak [then],

1. Of the parts of man's body: (1) The head, the most excellent architectonical⁹ part, is the fountain of spirits and the seat of reason. In nature, the head is the best piece, but in grace the heart excels. (2) The eye is the beauty of the face; it shines and sparkles like a lesser sun in the body. The eye occasions much sin, and therefore it may well have tears in it. (3) The ear is the conduit pipe through which knowledge is conveyed. Better [to] lose our seeing than our hearing, for "faith cometh by hearing" (Rom 10:17). To have an ear open to God is the best jewel on the ear. (4) David calls the tongue his glory (Psa 16:9) because it is an instrument to set forth the glory of God. The soul at first was a viol in tune to praise God, and the tongue did make the music. God hath given us two ears, but one tongue, to shew that we should be swift to hear, but slow to speak. God hath set a double fence before the tongue—the teeth and the lips—to teach us to be wary that we offend not with our tongue. (5) The heart is a noble part and [the] seat of life.

2. The soul of man: This is the man of the man. Man, in regard of his soul, partakes with the angels; nay, as Plato¹⁰ saith, "The understanding, will, and conscience, are a glass that resemble the Trinity." The soul is the diamond in the ring. The soul is a vessel of honor. God Himself is served in this vessel. "It is a sparkle of celestial brightness," saith Damascene.¹¹ If David did so admire the rare contexture¹² and workmanship of his body, "I am wonderfully made, I was curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth" (Psa 139:14-15); if the cabinet be so curiously wrought, what is the jewel? How richly is the soul embroidered? Thus, you see how glorious a work the creation is, and man especially, who is the epitome¹³ of the world...

Use 1: Did God create this world? This convinceth us of the truth of His Godhead: to create is proper to a deity (Act 17:24). This convinced Plato of a deity, when he saw all the world could not make a fly. Thus, God proves Himself to be the true God and distinguisheth Himself from idols (Jer 10:11). It is written in Chaldee,¹⁴ "Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the

⁹ **architectonical** – having the function of control.

¹⁰ **Plato** (ca. 428-347 B.C.) – influential Greek philosopher.

¹¹ **Damascene** or **John of Damascus** (c. 675/6 – 749) – Syrian monk and priest.

¹² **contexture** – manner in which the parts of a thing are thus united.

¹³ **epitome** – something that represents another in miniature.

¹⁴ **Chaldee** – language of the ancient Chaldeans, who were skilled in occult practices.

earth, even they shall perish” (Jer 10:11). Who but God can create? The creation is enough to convince the heathen that there is a God. There are two books out of which God will judge and condemn the heathen, viz.,¹⁵ the book of Conscience, “Who have the law written in their heart” (Rom 2:15), and the book of the Creation, “The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead” (Rom 1:20). The world is full of emblems and hieroglyphics; every star in the sky, every bird that flies in the air, is a witness against the heathen. A creature could not make itself.

Use 2: Here is a mighty support for faith: God creates. He that made all things with a word—what cannot He do? He can create strength in weakness; He can create a supply of our wants. What a foolish question was that, “Can he prepare a table in the wilderness?” (Psa 78:19). Cannot He that made the world do much more? “Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Psa 124:8). Rest on this God for help, Who made heaven and earth. The work of creation, [which] is a monument of God’s power, is [also] a stay to faith. Is thy heart hard? He can with a word create softness. Is it unclean? He can create purity. “Create in me a clean heart, O God!” (Psa 51:10). Is the Church of God low? He can create Jerusalem a praise (Isa 65:18). [There is] no such golden pillar for faith to stay upon, as a creating power.

Use 3: [If] God [made] this world full of beauty and glory—everything very good—then what an evil thing is sin: [it] hath put out of frame the whole creation! Sin hath much eclipsed the beauty, soured the sweetness, and marred the harmony of the world. How bitter is that gall, a drop whereof can embitter a whole sea? Sin hath brought vanity and vexation into the world, yea, a curse. God cursed the ground for man’s sake (Gen 3:17-19).

There were several fruits of the curse: (1) “In sorrow shalt thou eat of it” (3:17). By that word *sorrow* is to be understood all the troubles and cares of this life. (2) “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (3:19). In innocence, Adam did till the ground (he must not live idly), but it was rather a delight than a labor. That tilling was without toiling. The eating in sorrow and the sweat of the brow came in after sin. (3) “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth” (3:18)...(4) The fourth fruit of the curse was the driving man out of paradise (3:24): “So he drove out the man.” God at first brought Ad-

¹⁵ viz. – from Latin *videlicet* = that is to say; namely.

am into paradise, as into a house ready furnished, or as a king into his throne: “Have dominion...over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen 1:28). Now, God’s driving Adam out of paradise signified His dethroning and banishing him, so that [Adam] might look [for] a heavenly and a better paradise. (5) A fifth fruit of the curse was death: “To dust thou shalt return” (3:19). Death was not natural to Adam; it came in after sin. Josephus¹⁶ is of the opinion that man should have died though he had a longer term of years added to his life; but out of question, death grew out of the root of sin. The apostle saith, “By sin came death” (Rom 5:12). See then how cursed a thing sin is: [it] hath brought so many curses upon the creation. If we will not hate sin for its deformity, let us hate it for the curse it brings.

Use 4: Did God make this glorious world? Did He make everything good? Was there in the creature so much beauty and sweetness? Oh! Then what sweetness is there in God? The cause is always more noble than the effect. Think with yourselves: is there so much excellency in house and lands? Then how much more is there in God that made these! Is there beauty in a rose? What beauty, then, is there in Christ, the rose of Sharon! Doth oil make the face shine (Psa 104:15)? How will the light of God’s countenance make it shine! Doth wine cheer the heart? O what virtue is there in the true vine! How doth the blood of this grape cheer the heart! Is the fruit of the garden sweet? How delicious are the fruits of the Spirit! Is a gold mine so precious? How precious is He who founded this mine! What is Christ, in Whom are hid all treasures (Col 2:3)? We should ascend from the creature to the Creator. If there be any comfort here below, how much more is there in God, Who made all these things! How unreasonable is it that we should delight in the world, and not much more in Him that made it? How should our hearts be set on God, and how should we long to be with God, Who hath infinitely more sweetness in Him than any creature!

From *A Body of Divinity*, in the public domain.

Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686): English Nonconformist Puritan preacher and author; possibly born in Yorkshire, England, UK.



Providence is the hand that turns all the wheels in the universe; it is the pilot who steers the ship of the creation.—*Thomas Watson*

¹⁶ **Titus Flavius Josephus** (A.D. 37 - c. 100) – first century Romano-Jewish scholar and historian.

PROVIDENCE

William S. Plumer (1802-1880)

PROVIDENCE is the care of God over His creatures. God's works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions.

To deny providence is as truly atheistic as to deny God's existence. One who neither sees, nor hears, nor knows, nor cares, nor helps, nor saves is no God at all. No right-minded man could worship such a being.

Both the Old and New Testaments declare with great frequency God's providence over the world. In the hand of the Lord is "the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:10). "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Act 17:28). "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Rev 19:6). Pious men of all ages have been very much agreed on the general doctrine of providence. They have felt that the world may as well be without a God as to have one who controls it not.

God's providence partakes of His own excellent nature. Because He is supreme, holy, just, good, wise, kind, and almighty, His government is irresistible, kind, wise, good, just, holy, and over all. Nothing escapes the divine notice. Living creatures invisible to the naked eye as well as the great sea monsters alike evince His presence and His power. He never slumbers nor sleeps (Psa 121:4). He calls the stars by their names (Psa 147:4). That which is to us chance is to Him a matter of exact arrangement. He makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder of wrath He restrains (Psa 76:10). His providence is not extemporaneous¹ and conducted by a plan formed from day to day, but by a plan fixed and settled according to a holy, wise, and eternal purpose (Eph 1:11, 3:11; 2Ti 1:9). God does not change His plan: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa 46:10).

Very remarkable is the long-suffering of God's providence. For their sins, God might justly and instantly cut men down; but His long-suffering prevails, and the guilty are spared so as to have time for repentance.

The Scriptures forewarn us that God's doings will often confound us: "Thy judgments are a great deep" (Psa 36:6). "Thy way is in the

¹ **extemporaneous** – done without preparation; done on the spur of the moment.

sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known” (Psa 77:19). God saves or He destroys, by few or by many, by the strong or by the weak, by friend or by foe. He is on the right hand, but we perceive Him not. None are more surprised than wicked men when God brings their conduct to its natural end. Nor does He give account of any of His doings. Often He does not even give us notice when He is about to effect His greatest wonders. He hangs the earth upon nothing. He often seems to hang the destiny of empires upon a thing of naught. Both His means and His instruments are commonly such as man would reject. God sees order where we see but confusion, and light where we see but darkness. He has as perfect control over invisible agents as He has over things seen by men. “His kingdom ruleth over all” (Psa 103:19). Many think it vastly strange that God takes the poor from the dunghill and sets them among princes and pours contempt on birth and blood, on prowess and on princes.

There is something very wonderful in God’s care of good men. They often speak of it here. They will oftener speak of it hereafter. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way” (Psa 37:23). There is a wonderful connection between the prayers of saints and the providence of God. For thousands of years, one good man after another has repeated the words of the Psalmist as applicable to himself: “This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles” (Psa 34:6). It does not at all diminish the wonder of God’s care of His people that He protects them without the interposition² of miracles.

All the argument brought against providence from the apparent confusion in human affairs is easily enough answered. In this world, nothing is finished; nothing is perfected. Let men wait until they see Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom and the rich sinner beyond the reach of hope, and they will not doubt that there is a God that judgeth in the earth.

In one respect, providence is a continual exhibition of creative energy. “Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth” (Psa 104:30). Every man on earth is as truly the creature of God as was Adam in the garden of Eden.

It seems strange that any should limit or wish to limit the control of God over free agents. The Scriptures clearly show that God as much governs the free acts of malignant men as He does material causes. It is true that both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together; but it was for to

² **interposition** – intervention; intrusion.

do whatsoever God's hand and God's counsel determined before to be done (Act 4:27-28). No power had they against Jesus except as the Almighty lengthened their chain (Joh 19:11). "Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Psa 115:3). None can stay His hand (Dan 4: 35).

Sometimes our minds dwell on great affairs and the vastness of the universe until we almost doubt whether the Most High cares for little things. But when we take the microscope and look at the vast numbers of little creatures too small to be perceived by the naked eye, we find His wisdom, power, and goodness to them as manifest as towards creatures of the greatest size and beauty. And when we look at the Scriptures, the same doctrine is abundantly taught: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Mat 10:29-31). Some have said that the care of so many things, great and small, could not be expected of God. They forget that to create and neglect would be indeed a blot on the divine character, and that it is no labor to the Almighty to take infinite care of His creatures. "The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works...The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (Psa 145: 9, 15-16).

This doctrine of providence cuts up by the roots the spirit of self-sufficiency and vain-boasting. "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" (1Co 4:7). "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (Jam 1:17). "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phi 2:13).

In the Church below and in the Church above, the doctrine of providence fills pious hearts with joy and pious mouths with praise. "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom 11:36). "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Rev 19:6).

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William S. Plumer (1802-1880): American Presbyterian minister and author; born in Greensburg, PA, USA.



IF GOD BE FOR US

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?—Romans 8:30-31

AUGUSTINE,¹ in his notes upon the verses preceding our text, has very beautifully said that God is for us, according to the preceding words of the chapter, in four senses. Look back a verse or two, and you will find it. He is for us, for He hath predestinated us; He is for us, for He hath called us; He is for us, for He hath justified us; He is for us because He hath virtually glorified us and will actually do so. To the people of God, here are four very prolific subjects of thought:

God is for us because, according to the words of the apostle, He hath predestinated His people to be conformed to the image of His own dear Son. Now, if God hath predestinated us to eternal life, who can be against us? Must not the predestinating decree of God take effect? If God hath determined it, who shall disannul it? If God hath said it shall be, who is he that shall stay His hand or resist the omnipotent fiat² of the Most High? He said, “Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen 1:3). He bade the world spring out of nothing, and forth it came! All things obey Him; heaven adores Him; hell trembles at Him. No creature can resist Him. As the potter molds the clay according to his own will while it revolves upon the wheel, even so the infinite, the omnipotent Jehovah doeth according to His good pleasure in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of this lower world. “It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers...he taketh up the isles as a very little thing” (Isa 40:22, 15). Who then, out of these little things, can stand against or resist Him?

See, my brethren, the force of God’s decree of old in the case of Israel. The Lord had promised to Abraham that his seed should inherit the whole land of Canaan, from the river of Egypt unto the great riv-

¹ **Augustine of Hippo** (354-430) – early Latin church theologian and philosopher.

² **fiat** – decree; order issued by an authority.

er, the river Euphrates. See, amid the smoke of the brickkilns,³ Israel toils in Egypt. How was God's decree to be fulfilled? When God makes bare His arm, you shall see and wonder. Pharaoh and all his hosts cannot hold those captives whom God determines to set free! There they go, led forth like sheep by the hands of Moses and Aaron. They cross the desert until they come to the sea, even to the Red Sea. See, the mighty stream rolls before them, and their ferocious enemies are behind; but the Lord hath determined that they shall inherit the land. Therefore, neither can the sea refuse to divide nor can Pharaoh save himself when he goeth down into the depths thereof.

They are in the wilderness: famine shall destroy them! No, the heavens drop with manna! Thirst shall scorch them! No, the rock follows them with its living stream! The serpents shall surely bite them! Nay, but the brazen serpent is lifted up, and whosoever looketh shall be healed. The Amalekites attack them; but while Moses holds up his hands, Joshua puts the foe to the route.

They come to the banks of the Jordan: what ailed thee, O Jordan, that thou wast driven back? The priests go through dry-shod,⁴ and all the people of God march after them. Then the Canaanites, with their chariots of iron, came against them in battle. The kings of mighty cities anointed the shield and laid hold on sword and buckler; but which of them prevailed? Did not Jehovah destroy them all? As He had given them Og, king of Bashan, because "his mercy endureth for ever" (Psa 136:20), and Sihon, king of the Amorites, "because his mercy endureth for ever" (Psa 136:19), so not a man could stand against them until they possessed the land.

The right hand of the Lord fulfilled His own decree. His own right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory. As with a rod of iron, He dasheth His enemies in pieces like a potter's vessel (Psa 2:9). None could withstand the hosts of Israel: the walled cities were cast down and the people of God dwelt in the fat of the land. See, beloved, the result of God's decree! The sons of Jacob were feeble and weak, but yet the Lord made them strong enough to drive out the Anakim, who were men of gigantic stature; for His purpose shall stand, He will do all His pleasure. Let us beware of fighting against one who has God in league with him, for it is in vain to fight against God. It was a good remark of the soothsayers to Haman of old: they said, "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall,

³ **brickkilns** – furnaces for baking bricks.

⁴ **dry-shod** – having one's shoes dry; without wetting the feet.

thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him” (Est 6:13).

So if any man be of the company of the elect, if he be one of those whose names are written in the book of life, his enemies may contend, but they shall never prevail against him. He *must* stand whom the Lord ordains to hold; and if God determines his salvation, neither mortal nor infernal power shall prevail to destroy him. On this account, we may boldly say with the apostle, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” You cannot believe in a disappointed God; you cannot imagine the imperial decree from the throne of heaven treated as waste paper! It would be far from us so to blaspheme God as to think that any power, known or unknown, can *ever* overcome Him. “Hath he said, and shall he not do it?” (Num 23:19). Hath He commanded and shall it not come to pass? If thy soul be written upon the palms of Jesus’ hands and graven on His heart, “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue which riseth against thee in judgment, thou shalt condemn” (Isa 54:17).

But in looking back, you observe the second thing: God is on our side, for He has *called* us. In the Word of God, much stress is laid upon *calling*. When Abraham left the land of his forefathers and went forth, not knowing whither he went, he was quite safe, though in the midst of implacable⁵ enemies, because God had called him. “Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings?” (Isa 41:2). Who but the God that called him? On that memorable occasion, when Abraham returned from the slaughter of the kings, you remember Melchizedek met him. At that time, Abraham was in great peril; for there was every probability that the defeated kings would gather again their troops, would form alliances with other kings, and would certainly come up to cut down so insignificant a person as that wandering shepherd, Abraham. But what does God say to him? “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Gen 15:1). This became his comfort—God had called him. He was a called man, and where God calls, He will not desert His chosen. “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Rom 11:29). He does not reverse the call that He has given; but having once called His children, He remaineth faithful to the call He has given.

To use the illustration, we have had before: when God called His son out of Egypt, when He fetched Israel from the furnace, who could

⁵ **implacable** – cannot be satisfied, pacified, or made peaceable.

stand against the called Israelites? Plague after plague ravaged the land: the cattle died; the crops were blasted; frogs came up into the king's chamber; lice covered all their borders; at last, the firstborn of Egypt died, and they besought Israel to go forth; for when God called them out, who could hold them in? When He said to His prisoners, "Go forth," what bolts of iron or what gates of brass could keep them captives?

Let the Lord call by the effectual voice, who is he that shall stand against Him? Many of us, I trust, have heard the sacred call—we have made our calling and election sure (2Pe 1:10). You know how you were called from darkness to light, from sin to holiness, from self-righteousness to spiritual faith in Jesus. Now, He Who hath called you is faithful, and He will not forsake the work of His own hands. He has not called you in order to put you to shame! He has not quickened you, preserved you, and brought you thus far to deliver you over to the hands of your enemies. "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart" (Psa 27:14). Wait upon the Lord still, for His call will give thee comfort. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

But again: God proves that He is for us by having *justified*⁶ us. All the people of God are wrapped about with the righteousness⁷ of Christ, and, wearing that glorious robe, the eye of God sees no fault in them—Jehovah sees no sin in Jacob, neither iniquity in Israel (Num 23:21). Christ is seen and not the sinner. Christ being therefore perfection's own self, the believer is seen as perfect in Him. God regards His people with the same affection as that wherewith He loves His only-begotten Son. He hath pronounced them clean, and clean they are. He hath proclaimed them just, covered with the righteousness of Christ, and just they are.

Come on, thou accusing devil—come on ye who lay a thousand things to our charge; but if our Jesus pronounces our acquittal, who is he that condemneth? If He mounts the chariot of salvation, who is he that can be against us? Is it not a mysteriously blessed thing to wear upon one's soul the mark of complete justification?...Oh! What a seal is this to wear—what a mark of the Lord Jesus, to go about this world a perfectly justified man! God looketh upon common men with anger—they are not reconciled unto Him; but towards His people, He looketh always with eyes of love: no anger is in His heart to them, not a jot of wrath. All this has been put away through the great sacrifice.

⁶ See FGB 187, *Justification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁷ See FGB 191, *Imputed Righteousness*.

Towards them His whole heart goeth out: “The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry” (Psa 34:15). Being justified, they have peace with God, through Jesus Christ their Lord (Rom 5:1).

O dear friends, if God be at peace with you, it matters not who is at war with you. If your Master acquits, it little matters who condemns. If Jehovah absolves, your name may be cast out as evil, you may be ranked among the vilest of the vile, your name may be a byword and a proverb, only fit to be wrought up into the drunkard’s song⁸—but who is he that can be against you? What are all these things, if put into the balance, but lighter than vanity, if Jehovah Himself hath justified you?

And yet again, another sweet reflection comes here: He hath also glorified us. Remember the four golden links of the chain—“Whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” Now, in one sense, God’s people are glorified even now, for He “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6). Mark, it does not say, “He hath promised that we shall sit there,” but He “hath” made us sit there. We do sit there at this hour, for Christ is the representative⁹ of every soul for whom He shed His blood;¹⁰ and when Christ took His seat in heaven, every elect soul took His seat in heaven representatively.

Remember, beloved, that the glorification of God’s people is a certain fact; it is not a thing that *may* be, but it is a thing that *must* be. What does Jesus Christ say to His people when He gathers them at the right hand? “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mat 25:34). Do observe that. Do you think God has prepared a kingdom and that He will not bring His people there? Moreover, it is said, “Prepared for *you*”—for *you*, the chosen people of God; and do you imagine that the covenant wisdom of God would prepare a kingdom for men who would not ultimately get there? Would He plan and arrange how to make them eternally blessed, and yet suffer them to perish by the way? “Prepared for *you*,” remember, “from the foundation of the world.” There is a crown in heaven that no head can fit but mine! There is a harp there that no fingers must ever touch but mine. Child

⁸ See FGB 185, *Persecution*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁹ See FGB 214, *Union with Christ*.

¹⁰ See FGB 207, *Substitution*.

of God! There is a mansion in heaven that will never be rightly tenanted if you do not get there, and there is a place at God's right hand that must be empty—it will be said, "David's seat was empty," unless you shall arrive there (1Sa 20:25-27). Will it be so? Will there be empty mansions in heaven? Will there be crowns without heads to wear them? Will there be harps without hands to strike them? No; the muster-roll¹¹ of the redeemed shall be read, and not one shall be found absent! As many as were written upon the breastplate of the great High Priest shall be securely found there...

This gives a fourth reason why God is for us. But, O my brethren, though this brings in the context, I cannot—it is impossible for any human speech to bring out the depth of the meaning of how God is for us. He was for us before the worlds were made. He was for us, or else He never would have given His Son. He was for us even when He smote the only-begotten and laid the full weight of His wrath upon Him—He was for *us*, though He was against *Him*. He was for us when we were ruined in the fall—He loved us notwithstanding all. He was for us when we were against Him, and with a high hand were bidding Him defiance. He was for us, or else He never would have brought us humbly to seek His face. He has been for us in many struggles; we have had to fight through multitudes of difficulties; we have had temptations from without and within—how could we have held on until now if He had not been with us? He is for us, let me say, with all the infinity of His heart, with all the omnipotence of His love; for us with all His boundless wisdom; arrayed in all the attributes that make Him God: He is for us—*eternally and immutably for us!* For us when you blue skies shall be rolled up like a worn-out vesture; for us throughout eternity. Here, child of God, is matter enough for thought, even though thou hadst ages to meditate upon it: God is for thee. And if God be for thee, who can be against thee?

From a sermon delivered on Sunday morning, July 17, 1864,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK.



¹¹ **muster-roll** – formal gathering of troops, especially for inspection or display; therefore, a gathering of people for a special occasion.