

Emmaus Essentials
The London Baptist Confession of 1689
Chapter 3 - Of God's Decree (Part 1 - Paragraphs 1 and 2)
For Distribution the Week of 12/22/2013

I. Introduction

- A. Why we must move slowly through this chapter
 - 1. It is here that the doctrine of predestination is presented
 - 2. A warning from the confession itself

II. Paragraph 7

"The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election; so shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel."

- A. High Mystery
- B. It must be *handled*, but with prudence and care
 - a) Prudence - cautiousness
 - b) Care - control and responsibility
- C. The end result should be that men and women following Christ will be:
 - 1. "Assured of their eternal election"
 - 2. "So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God"
 - 3. "And of humility"
 - 4. "Diligence".
 - 5. "Abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel."

III. Paragraph 1

"God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree."

A. Overview of the Paragraph

- 1. God's decree is real and universal
 - a) Plainly stated
 - b) Carefully guarded
 - (1) From impugning (calling into question) the holiness of God
 - (2) From implying the error of fatalism
 - c) Practically viewed¹

B. Analysis of the Parts

- 1. "God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass..."
 - a) God's Decree Plainly Stated
 - (1) "God hath decreed" - God has ordered, ordained, commanded (King)
 - (2) "In Himself" - Think about the Trinity (Chapter 2)
 - (3) "From all eternity" - before creation, in eternity past
 - (4) "By the most wise and holy counsel of his own will" - wise, holy
 - (5) "Freely and unchangeably" - God is free, his decrees unchangeable

¹ Samuel Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, p. 61-62.

- (6) "All things, whatsoever comes to pass" - All things that come to pass in history have been ordained by God
 - (a) Not just a general decree - specific
 - (b) Against moralistic, therapeutic, *deism*

[Now stop and think about this doctrine for a moment. While I hope you agree with this teaching in the end, I would be concerned if it did not cause you stop and think. This doctrine requires careful consideration, the very thing the confession goes on to provide.]

- 2. "...Yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein..."
 - a) Carefully guarded
 - (1) From impugning (calling into question) the holiness of God
 - (a) "Yet"
 - (b) "So as thereby is God neither the author of sin"
 - i) Is sin within the decree of God? Yes
 - ii) But God is not the author of sin
 - (1) Satan fell by his choice
 - (2) Adam fell by his choice
 - (3) And we sin by our choice
 - iii) Theodicy - A mystery that we cannot solve, but confess is true.
 - (c) "Nor hath fellowship with any therein."
 - i) "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." (James 1:13, ESV)
 - ii) "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5, ESV)
- 3. "...Nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established..."
 - a) Carefully guarded
 - (1) From implying the error of fatalism
 - (a) "Nor is violence offered to the will of the creature"
 - i) We act according to our will. We are not forced.
 - (b) "Nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established"
 - i) "Freedom may be defined as 'the absence of external coercion'. If a man is not forced by any power outside himself to do that which is contrary to 'what he wants to do', then we may properly say that he is 'free'. The wonder of God's predestination is that God leaves men free in this sense, even though he predestines everything that man will ever do."²
 - ii) Second causes
 - (1) Illustration
 - iii) Scripture Texts
 - (1) "And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, " 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'— for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate,

² G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, p. 31.

along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." (Acts 4:24–28, ESV)

- (2) ""Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." (Acts 2:22–23, ESV)
4. "In which appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree."
 - a) Practically Viewed
 - (1) "In which appears his wisdom in disposing all things"
 - (2) "And power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree"
 - (a) This prepares us for Chapter 5 - Of Providence
 - (b) God's providence is an expression of God's wisdom, power, and faithfulness
 - i) Q. 7. What are the decrees of God?
A. The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.
 - ii) Q. 8. How doth God execute his decrees?
A. God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence.

C. Key Scripture

1. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. **This was according to the eternal purpose** that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. (Ephesians 3:8–12, ESV)
2. "Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, **declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'** calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it. (Isaiah 46:8–11, ESV)
3. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the **unchangeable character of his purpose**, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. (Hebrews 6:17–18, ESV)
4. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the **purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will**, (Ephesians 1:11, ESV)

IV. Paragraph 2

"Although God knoweth whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything, because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions."

A. Overview of the Paragraph

1. God's decree is unconditional
 - a) Against the foreknowledge view

B. Analysis of the Parts

1. "Although God knoweth whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions"
2. "Yet hath he not decreed anything, because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions"

C. Key Scripture

1. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:29–30, ESV)
2. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you (1 Peter 1:20, ESV)

V. Implications

1. God is really God
2. God's decree is really a decree
3. There is purpose in everything
 - a) If you believe in God, what is the other option except *bear permission* - permission without purpose?