

Colleyville Presbyterian Church

Westminster Confession of Faith: Week 12 - Of God's Eternal Decree

March 19, 2023

Chapter 3 - Of God's Eternal Decree

*I. God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; (a) yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, (b) nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established. (c)*

*II. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, (a) yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions. (b)*

*III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels (a) are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death. (b)*

*IV. These angels and men, thus predestinated and fore-ordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it can not be either increased or diminished. (a)*

a. John 13:18; 2 Tim 2:19.

Van Dixhoorn: "It may appear that even these brief statements are leaning towards one side of the story, giving more emphasis to election than reprobation. This is correct. The Westminster assembly selected passages of Scripture to support the theology of these statements, and the emphasis of these passages is on the assurance that God's plan gives to God's people. However, this selection of verses, and this emphasis, are not arbitrary. These verses reflect the dominant emphasis of Scripture itself, which celebrates the selection of God's own people more than his passing by a rebel people whom he does not plan to save. The main point in this section, following a main point of the Bible itself, is that God never sets his love on someone only to abandon him or her later. Our salvation is secure."

*V. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, (a) out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; (b) and all to the praise of his glorious grace. (c)*

a. Rom 8:30; Eph 1:4, 9, 11; 1 Thes 5:9; 2 Tim 1:9. • b. Rom 9:11, 13, 16; Eph 1:4, 9. • c. Eph 1:6, 12.

Van Dixhoorn: "This counsel is of secret; we cannot penetrate the sovereign pleasure of God in making his decisions, but we trust that it is good...God does choose each one of us, not in a mass, but individually, personally. But God chose all of us as his children *in Christ*—he is the chosen one of God, the foreordained one, and we are saved as we are united to him...All of this flows out of God's sheer, 'free grace,' a grace which is tinged—no, saturated with his love. Of course, the Lord sees all things. But he did not peer into the future in order to find sparks of faith that he could fan into flame. To think that we can do something that will make God then choose us is to construct a facade in the hope that God will add a real structure behind it. He did not predestine us to salvation because he predicted our good works, or knew we would persevere in the Christian life. There is nothing in us that motivated his choice. He set no conditions which he needed to foresee before he would choose us. All such notions need to be deconstructed before we can advance in the school of grace. There was no human cause that set God in motion toward our salvation."

**VI.** *As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, fore-ordained all the means thereunto. (a) Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, (b) are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, (c) and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. (d) Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only. (e)*

a. Eph 1:4-5; Eph 2:10; 2 Thes 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2. • b. 1 Thes 5:9-10; Titus 2:14. • c. Rom 8:30; Eph 1:5; 2 Thes 2:13. • d. 1 Pet 1:5. • e. John 6:64-65; 8:47; 10:26; 17:9; Rom 8:28-39; 1 John 2:19.

Van Dixhoorn: “When we think of election, we must talk of more than eternal life. We also need to discuss the way to life, because we shall not reach the end of our journey any way we please... We are chosen and predestined, Paul says, but this election will be tethered to a life of good works and increasing holiness within the context of our life in the family of God (Eph. 1:4-5; 2:10). God decides to save and sanctify us, but not without suffering and learning, not without preaching and prayer.”

**VII.** *The rest of mankind God was pleased, 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, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice. (a)*

a. Mat 11:25-26; Rom 9:17-18, 21-22; 2 Tim 2:19-20; 1 Pet 2:8; Jude 1:4.

Fesko: “The point the divines implicitly make with such a distinction, namely, the predestination of the elect and the preterition of the non-elect, is that God does not treat both groups in the same way. God positively and actively brings about the salvation of the elect, but he does not positively and actively bring about the reprobation of the non-elect. To do this would make God the author of sin, something the Confession 3.1 explicitly denies.”

Fesko: “For...the Confession, preterition was an absolute decree to pass by the non-elect; but considered relatively, or contingently, damnation was the result of the person’s freely chosen path of sin.”

**VIII.** *The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, (a) 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. (b) So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; (c) and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel. (d)*

a. Deut 29:29; Rom 9:20. • b. 2 Pet 1:10. • c. Rom 11:33; Eph 1:6. • d. Luke 10:20; Rom 8:33; 11:5-6, 20; 2 Pet 1:10.

Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly*: “This mystery [of predestination] is to be handled with great care. The aim of ministers of the gospel should be to proclaim so as to encourage assurance of salvation in the elect, so as to bring praise to God and humility to those who obey the gospel.”

J. V. Fesko: “Though many of the issues related to the decree, election, preterition, and human freedom are complex, the Confession breathes the air of a streamlined simplicity. In one sense, the ease with which the Confession states these issues is but the tip of the iceberg; many complex matters lie beneath the dark surface of the waters. Nevertheless, such is the nature of a confession of faith—it pins down key affirmations, denies false teachings, and does so in such a way that allows room for disagreement on some of the particular points of doctrine.”