

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)*

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.21.1: “We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God’s free mercy until we come to know his eternal election, which illumines God’s grace by this contrast: that he does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others. How much the ignorance of this principle detracts from God’s glory, how much it takes away from true humility, is well known. Yet Paul denies that this which needs so much to be known can be known unless God, utterly disregarding works, chooses those whom he has decreed within himself. “At the present time,” he says, “a remnant has been saved according to the election of grace. But if it is by grace, it is no more of works; otherwise grace would no more be grace. But if it is of works, it is no more of grace; otherwise work would not be work.” Romans 11:5-6.

If—to make it clear that our salvation comes about solely from God’s mere generosity—we must be called back to the course of election, those who wish to get rid of all this are obscuring as maliciously as they can what ought to have been gloriously and vociferously proclaimed, and they tear humility up by the very roots. Paul clearly testifies that, when the salvation of a remnant of the people is ascribed to the election of grace, then only is it acknowledged that God of his mere good pleasure preserves whom he will, and moreover that he pays no reward, since he can owe none. They who shut the gates that no one may dare seek a taste of this doctrine wrong men no less than God. For neither will anything else suffice to make us humble as we ought to be nor shall we otherwise sincerely feel how much we are obliged to God. And as Christ teaches, here is our only ground for firmness and confidence: in order to free us of all fear and render us victorious amid so many dangers, snares, and mortal struggles, he promises that whatever the Father has entrusted into his keeping will be safe [John 10:28-29]. From this we infer that all those who do not know that they are God’s own will be miserable through constant fear. Hence, those who by being blind to the three benefits we have noted [*ed. note: i.e. God’s free mercy, God’s glory, our sincere humility*] would wish the foundation of our salvation to be removed from our midst, very badly serve the interests of themselves and of all other believers.”

Calvin, 3.21.7: “As Scripture, then, clearly shows, we say that God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction. We assert that, with respect to the elect, this plan was founded upon his freely given mercy, without regard to human worth; but by his just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment he has barred the door of life to those whom he has given over to damnation.”

Calvin, 3.23.11: “Some, therefore, falsely and wickedly accuse God of biased justice because in his predestination he does not maintain the same attitude toward all. If, they say, he finds all guilty, let him punish all equally; if innocent, let him withhold the rigor of his judgment from all. But they so act toward him as if either mercy were to be forbidden to him or as if when he wills to show mercy he is compelled to renounce his judgment completely. What is it that they require? If all are guilty, that all together suffer the same punishment. We admit the common guilt, but we say that God’s mercy succors some. Let it succor all, they say. But we reply that it is right for him to show himself a fair judge also in punishing... Because God metes out merited penalty to those whom he condemns but distributes unmerited grace to those whom he calls, he is freed of all accusation—like a lender, who has the power of remitting payment to one, of exacting it from another.”

Calvin, 3.24.17: “Let this be our conclusion: to tremble with Paul at so deep a mystery; but, if froward tongues clamor, not to be ashamed of this exclamation of his: “Who are you, O man, to argue with God?” [Romans 9:20]. For as Augustine truly contends, they who measure divine justice by the standard of human justice are acting perversely.”