

The Decrees of God (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] In our lesson last week, we opened up on the Ordo Salutis, Latin for the Order of Salvation. I listed as number one in that order the decrees of God. I gave a definition. Of the decrees of God it follows. God is the author and disposer of all things.

Everything that happens in this universe happens either because He wills it to happen or He permits it to happen. But neither in His will nor His permission is God ever the author or instigator of sin.

Men are the instigators of sin and responsible for them. We then begin to discuss some of the various aspects of these decrees, covering two of them.

The two we covered last time were, first, God's decrees are eternal, having been determined before the creation of time itself.

[1 : 18] And second, as God's decrees were made in eternity past, they are of necessity unconditional. So we're going to pick up our study today with the third aspect of God's decrees.

And with this comment, God's decree is immutable and therefore efficacious. Immutable is a fairly common word to us and means unchangeable, unalterable, not capable or susceptible to change. Efficacious means effectual, producing the desired effect intended, having power adequate to the purpose intended.

Now, obviously, when we're talking about God and His decrees as being efficacious, we are speaking of an infinite being with unlimited power to produce His desired effect.

And since God's decrees are rooted in eternity, and by the way, in eternity only God existed, nothing influenced Him in the details of whatsoever He decreed.

[2 : 44] Angels didn't object because they didn't exist. Humans didn't object because they didn't exist. Additionally, because God is immutable and efficacious, nothing in time that has happened since the decree was issued has caused God to alter any decree or change course.

There is no creature in the universe, whether angel or human, that can alter in the slightest what God has determined what will come to pass.

Now, let me put this in the language of the 21st century. And I said this last time, God acts, but He does not react. He doesn't have to react. He knows what's coming down the pipe.

And put it another way, there is no plan B. There is only plan A. God has never needed a backup plan in response to something we foolishly do.

The Holy Spirit had this to say through the psalmist. I'm in Psalm 33. The Lord brings counsel of the nations to nothing.

[4 : 05] He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever. The plans of His heart to all generations.

Listen to this quote from the book of Daniel. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing. And He does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth.

And none can stay His hand or say to Him, What have you done? Now, that's an amazing quote in Daniel.

Inspired by the Spirit of God, who is fully God, cannot lie. It's even more amazing when we discover that the person speaking there was a pagan and very humbled king by the name of Nebuchadnezzar.

He made that declaration. He had borne witness to the decrees of God and came to that conclusion.

[5 : 20] Now, God issued this taunt to the nations of the earth. They were fighting against Him. They wanted to thwart His decrees.

For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?

Isaiah 14. Now, we looked real briefly at the book of Job last time. And I gave you that assignment. There will be a test before we leave.

But I trust everybody read Job. So, starting in verse 38, I say verse 38, I believe I meant chapter 38, the Lord of hosts gives Job what is probably the most stinging rebuke in all the Bible.

When He said, where were you when I did all these things in eternity past? And then He goes through verse afterward. It's really worth reading. And Job finally comes to his senses, and he had this to say about the immutable decrees of God.

[6 : 29] Job 42. Then Job answered the Lord and said, I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

And it took Job a few chapters of a stinging rebuke from God Himself to come to that conclusion. Now, as men, we make plans every day.

And I've made plans all day today because I'm one of the leaders in the funeral Saturday. I'm delivering one of the messages. So, the two main reasons I alter my plans is I lack wisdom and I lack ability.

And I'm preaching to the choir. You all know that. And so frequently, I have to alter my plans. But God has infinite wisdom. He has infinite ability.

And He has infinite power to carry out all of His plans exactly as He has planned them. God is never required to adjust His plans along the way.

[7 : 50] Now, that ought to make us very happy. Imagine waking up in a world where God has come up with new plans during the night and now we have to figure out what He expects of us that is different from the day before.

That would be a frightening world indeed. It reminds me when Phyllis Petroleum Company moved into Kazakhstan and they had their financial people there and one morning the Kazakhs showed up and said, you owe us \$250,000 in back taxes.

And they said, we paid you our taxes yesterday. He said, yeah, but we came up with a new set of rules last night. And this wasn't the legislature. This was individuals in the tax office just decreeing, if you will, you owe us more taxes.

And this happened frequently. It was a circus. We finally, I think, threatened, look, we're just going to pull out. And they said, well, don't do that. There won't be any more taxes. It was an extortion, basically. Now, it goes without saying that the nations of the world reject Christ as King of the universe.

You know, what nation proclaims Him today as King of the universe? Only in the church is He proclaimed as King and dare I say, not in every church.

[9 : 19] Maybe not in the majority of churches when you consider every church that's on earth. I think this is what the psalmist had in mind when he quoted God in the second psalm.

I'm going to read the whole thing. It's short. Sort of. Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us. He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord holds them in derision. Then He will speak to them in His wrath and terrify them in His fury, saying, As for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill. I will tell of the decree. There's that word. The Lord said to me, this is a decree, You are my son. Today I have begotten you.

[10 : 31] Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Now therefore, O kings, be wise, be warned, O rulers of the earth, serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.

Kiss the Son lest He be angry and you perish in the way for His wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.

That last verse, that's several times in Psalms and I just cling to that verse. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him. This is a classic example of how man proposes and then God disposes of what man proposes.

And this is exactly what God meant when He quoted this to Isaiah in Isaiah 46. I am God and there is no other.

[11 : 42] 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.

I have spoken and I will bring it to pass. I have purposed and I will do it. That's powerful. And if it sounds familiar by the way, I quoted it in our first lesson. Well, let's go to another decree. God's eternal, unconditional, immutable, and efficacious decree is also exhaustive. It's exhaustive. It doesn't mean it exhausts us. It means it's thorough. It's complete. Let me give you a series of quotes from passages written by the Spirit of God who cannot lie that speak to this truth. Romans 8.28 And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. [13 : 00] Focus on those words, all things. All things work together. Now, He didn't say all things are good. And we sometimes really misquote that and then we say, well, that horrible thing happened and, you know, God promised that only good things would happen to me.

No, no, He didn't. All things work together for good. He's weaving this tapestry of our life. Another verse.

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.

Focus on those two words, all things. All things. Psalm 115.3 But our God is in the heavens. He does whatever He pleases. Focus on that word whatever. He does whatever He pleases. Reminds me of the Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes.

[14 : 08] I asked him his secret of success. He said, I learned at an early age I wasn't God. God does whatever He pleases. Whatever the Lord pleases, He does in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all the deeps.

Focus again on that word whatever. And then in Isaiah 46, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done saying, my purpose will be established and I will accomplish all my good pleasure.

Focus on those words. My purpose I will accomplish and my good pleasure. Now fellows, we live in a big universe.

So how does God accomplish all this? Well, my first answer to that is we worship a big God. Don't ever worship a little God. Okay? Because a little God doesn't exist.

We worship a really big God. I got in a lot of trouble one time. We had an old timer. Remember how we used to hold hands at the end of church? He wouldn't do it. He refused to do it.

[15 : 24] He said, I am not getting other people's germs. Well, he told me that and I said, oh boy, you're worshipping a little God, aren't you? And he got furious with me.

He said, well, God can't prevent germs from getting on you. I can tell you that. Okay. He went to a sister Baptist church where they don't hold hands. We worship a big God.

And it is, and I went to practice this word with Diane, antithetical? Yeah. To true Christianity, to picture God as small, and incapable of accomplishing all things.

Even down to certain things, but all things. But even more specific to this, God rules his universe and everything in it.

He rules. He hasn't advocated that. He's on the throne. I think sometimes people think, is he really there? Yeah. He's really there and he's ruling his universe.

[16 : 35] Now, how does he rule the universe? Well, primarily through his providential care. This leads to the necessity to find another word.

And to do that, I turned to our brother in Christ, Noah Webster, and his dictionary of 1828, Providence. In theology, the care and superintendence which God exercises over his creatures. He that acknowledges a creation, but denies a providence, involves himself in a palpable contradiction. The same power which caused a thing to exist is necessary to continue its existence. providence. Now, interesting, that word providence, contained in that word providence, is the word provide. And they're very closely related.

God is the great provider. And you may say, well, he really never provided me anything. Are you breathing oxygen? Are you drinking water, brothers?

[17 : 50] you know, he's the great provider. This concept of God being the provider was memorialized in the book of Genesis.

When Isaac went up on Mount Moriah with Father Abraham, specifically his father, Abraham, they were going up there to make an offering to the Lord.

Isaac carried the wood for three days up that mountain. There was one thing Isaac didn't realize until they got up there. He was the offering.

He was the offering. And Isaac asked his father, you know, we've got the wood, we've got the altar, we've got the fire, where is the sacrifice?

And God told him this, he said, God, will provide a sacrifice. And in Hebrew, some people say, God said, God himself will be the sacrifice.

[18 : 56] But God will provide a sacrifice. And we know the story, right? As Abraham was obedient to God and was going to kill his son, God grabbed his hand. I saw that depicted in the movie once I said, oh, please don't let the knife slip out of your hand when God grabs your hand.

But he stopped him. He stopped him. He stilled the hand of Abraham before allowing him to sacrifice his son.

And Abraham lifted up his eyes and he looked. And behold, there was a ram caught in a thicket by his horns.

And I once read that ram had a crown of thorns on his head because he was a type of Christ. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

So Abraham called the name of that place, the Lord will provide. And it is said to this day, on the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided.

[20 : 02] Now when Abraham spoke, he said, Jehovah Jireh, or more specifically in their language, Yahweh Yireh, and I have no clue if I'm pronouncing those correctly.

But that means in Hebrew, the Lord will provide. And of course, that's the sacred name of God.

That's the most sacred name of Christ, Yahweh. It's the same person that spoke to Moses out of the burning bush.

And he said, who shall I tell him to send me? He said, I am that I am. Tell him I am sent you. Tell him Yahweh sent you. And again, I say to you, God is the great providential provider.

Here are a few examples found in Scripture. God causes the sun to shine on the just and the unjust. God causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

I live up on a farm. My pastor got a good soaking rain, but the guys down the road that are not believers, they got a good soaking rain at the same time. I was a little jealous. I got more rain than I did.

[21 : 18] But it rains on the just and the unjust. God brings forth produce from the earth. You know, seeds can sit on your shelf forever and they don't do anything.

You put them in dirt and they sprout. That's amazing. God does that. He provides that. So God brings forth produce.

The scriptures say that God determines the lifespan of even the smallest of birds. Isn't that amazing? And guess what?

He determines our lifespan. Fellas, we're not going to die one second early. My lieutenant that died a few days ago, he died Sunday morning, about nine o'clock.

I was actually at a VOM meeting and I was praying for him at that time. He said, God, please take care of Rob. And he did. But he determines our lifespan.

[22 : 19] God directs the individual steps of men. God provides food to all his creatures on the earth. By the way, we'll get into this weeks from now, but a lot of this is general grace.

There's general grace, there's specific grace. We'll talk about that down the road. God determines the boundaries of nations. God rules over the nations.

And he's a lot more benevolent than I am on some nations. Let me just say, it is God who sets up kings. It is God who removes kings.

And he does it in his time schedule. And then the scripture says, God turns the heart of the king in any direction he chooses.

I mentioned Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon. God so disciplined him once that for seven years he went out and ate grass, grazed like a beast of the field and ate grass.

[23 : 32] Until God brought him back back and he said, surely there is a God. Acknowledged God. I love this.

One of the prophets of the old. God holds our very breath in his hand. Fellas, I've said this before. You and I can't take another breath without the grace of God.

Every time you breathe, say grace of God. Every time your heart beats, say grace of God. What's the heart? It's a pump. It's a pump.

When it does it, that's the grace of God. Paul gave a great doxology that speaks to this as he closed out the book of Romans chapter 11.

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways.

[24 : 41] For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

What a way to close out the great book of Romans with that pantheon of praise and that beautiful doxology.

Nothing escapes the providential governance and care of God. I remember years ago Dr. R.C.

Sproul who is now with the Lord. He and his wife were returning to Florida on a train.

Some of you might remember this. And they were toward the last car. And he said we felt a pretty violent bump.

[25 : 44] And we came to a stop pretty quickly but we didn't really think a lot about it. and then we kind of smelled smoke and they would start getting people off the train.

Do you remember when a barge was going down a river in Alabama and it hit the concrete pier and the tracks went over about four feet when it hit that pier and that train was coming and it missed

those tracks by four feet and went right into the river killed all the crew killed people in the first couple of cars injured a lot of people Dr. Sproul and his wife were in the rear of the train uninjured.

And he said the only explanation he could come up with was the providence of God. He had no other explanation but it was God's providence that they would be spared.

on that fateful night. So nothing escapes the providential governance of God. That includes eternal life with God for those who are being saved and eternal life separated from God for the lost.

That's all part of God's wise providence.

[27 : 15] Thank you.