

The Decrees of God (Part 1)

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Preacher: Tom Holland

[0 : 00] Music Well, we're kicking off the 21st year of Fat Boys.

! I'll remind you that's faithful, available, teachable.! We covered a variety of topics last year entitled, The Rescue of the Gospel.

And I told you in May that we would continue those lessons in September. And that was partly true. Everything we did last year for nine months was an introduction to what we're going to do this year. So that was your introduction. I trust you'll remember it all.

And one way to put that is we're continuing our study from last year. In other ways, this is the first lesson after a rather lengthy introduction of some nine months.

[1 : 16] And those radio recordings of last year's lessons are on the church computer. So you can certainly find them there.

Another point I want to make as we get started. I don't know if this was an advisory or a warning, but in our study this year, we're going to go deep.

The title for the whole year is going to be Salvation, God's Way. And the truth and the topic of salvation is way too important not to be thorough with it.

So that's my intentions. As we start on the next several weeks, there's something that will serve as a guide for us as we progress through our study.

It is called the Ordo Salutis, which is Latin for the order of salvation. And that is my entire vocabulary in Latin, by the way.

[2 : 24] There are a great many variations of the order of salvation. It depends on which theologian you're reading, which seminary or which denomination published it.

For instance, John Wesley's version is different from, say, a John Calvin or a Jonathan Edwards. But all of them, as evangelicals, do have common ground in the list.

Two that I've studied in detail for some years and used on previous occasions were authored by Dr. John MacArthur and the other by Dr. Wayne Gruden.

And even those have differences, but a lot of common ground also. With a little help from some of the big guys here, I'd like to hand out a copy of what I refer to as the order of salvation.

I want you to notice something, though, on your sheet of paper there. We call these dot points for a reason.

[3 : 35] There's a dot. But you'll notice there's a dot at the top that doesn't have anything. Dr. Gruden, in his version, he lists most of what is here, but he's also inserted down toward the bottom, death.

And then a parenthesis is going to be with the Lord. I didn't put that in there, but that is still true. And if you want to follow Dr. MacArthur's version, you're obviously going to be in tall cotton.

But I'm going to do something quite unusual, a little intimidating. I hope Dr. MacArthur doesn't show up tonight. I wouldn't want to debate him publicly as to whether his version or mine is correct.

I'm going to insert something that I didn't find in any of them. And hence, there's a little space there at the very top with a dot and no writing.

And this is what I'm going to write in there. I don't know if you can write it in or like Mike, just memorize it. We call it the decrees of God.

[4 : 52] And I have to be honest with you, I've riddled quite a bit in my life, my Christian life, which started about age 30.

I've never studied these. I came across this for the very first time in a book that I read or was reading this past summer. I guess summer's past.

It doesn't feel like it. The book was entitled, What is Calvinism or the Confession of Faith in Harmony with the Bible and Common Sense in a Series of Dialogues Between a Presbyterian

Minister and a Young Convert?

It was written by Reverend William D. Smith, a doctor of divinity, and published in 1854. That's seven years prior to the American Civil War.

And one thing that struck me is they sure knew how to come up with book titles in those days. That is a mouthful. And until I had read that book, and it's a little bitty, thin thing, but I had never come across a reference to the decrees of God.

[6 : 06] Now, maybe I'm the only one in here. I don't know. If I did come across them, I didn't remember them. And this leads to our first step tonight. What do we mean by the decrees of God?

And we're going to define that. And by the way, I want to add something here. And I meant to do this at the start. We're going to have questions come up in this whole thing. And I've been thinking about that.

If you've got a question, write it down. Let me have it. If we get three or four really good ones or more, we'll spend a night or half a night going over those.

So let's do it that way, if you don't mind. Let's define the decrees of God. The decrees of God are His eternal purpose according to His will whereby He has foreordained whatever comes to pass. His decrees do not negate the responsibility of people for their sins, nor does it mean that God is responsible for sin.

[7 : 27] It's a pretty good definition. And I'm going to be giving you guys a handout at the end. I believe it's a very sound and significant definition. Here's one a bit longer but equally sound.

The decrees of God are His eternal, unchangeable, holy, wise, and sovereign purpose, comprehending at once all things that ever were or will be in their causes, conditions, successions, and relations, and determining their certain fruition.

The several contents of this one eternal purpose are because of the limitation of our faculties, necessarily conceived by us in partial aspects and in logical relations, and are therefore styled decrees.

The decree being the act of an infinite, absolute, eternal, unchangeable, and sovereign person, comprehending a plan, including all His works of all kinds, great and small, from the beginning of creation to an unending eternity, the decrees of God are efficacious.

We'll be defining that next week.

[8 : 52] As they respect those events, He is determined to bring about by His own immediate agency.

Or, they're permissive, as they respect those events, He has determined that free agents shall be permitted by Him to effect.

This doctrine ought to produce in our minds humility in view of the infinite greatness and sovereignty of God, and of the dependence of man, confidence and implicit reliance upon the wisdom, righteousness, goodness, and the immutability of God's purpose.

That's one we're going to memorize for next time. Now, I want to put this all very simply and concisely to those of us from Oklahoma, like myself, so we can understand it.

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.

[10 : 06] 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 before a holy God for them.

Now, in regard to the fact that God is not the instigator of sin, and man alone is responsible for his sins, we need only to look at the cross.

Just look at the cross. When you have any doubts, look at the cross. It was God's will that Jesus go to the cross. Jesus went to the cross willingly.

He laid down His life. He said, no man takes my life. I lay it down. Jesus' death was prophesied extensively in the Old Testament.

But what about the men who played a leading role in the death of the Savior? There was Judas Iscariot, Annas, Caiaphas, and the Roman Pontius Pilate.

[11 : 18] Their scheme to kill Christ was the basis of sin. It was rock bottom.

Horrible sin. Those sins were conceived in their own hearts by their own volition and they were solely responsible for them.

God prophesied it would happen. But they were accountable to God for that sin. Did God know what they were going to do?

Of course. He knew in the minutest of details. Did God manipulate them into taking the actions they took? Absolutely not.

He didn't need to. Their darkened hearts were quite willing to participate in this darkest of schemes. [12:16] And we can say of these men, it would have been better if they had never been born. Now, I cannot understate this fact. The Bible is very clear that God's overruling providence extends to all events.

Both Matthew and Luke tell us that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the knowledge of God. When I was writing that, it reminded me, when I was about seven, I would go up to the farm where I live now.

And I just had free run. I knew every square inch. I wasn't hunting, although I used to do that up there. I'm walking around over by my pond, what's now my pond. Here came a blue jay, about 30 feet from me.

And he kept getting close. He was 20 feet over my head. He kept getting closer and closer. And all of a sudden, he folded his wings. And he fell and landed about three feet in front of me and he was dead.

That's the first time I ever saw an animal just die on its own in creation. I mean, I've shot some birds in my life. But I've never seen anything like that. I have no idea why I put that in there, but I wanted to put it in.

[13:29] Not even a sparrow falls. And I'm assuming not even a blue jay. There are billions and billions of sparrows. And they are in 140 separate species.

I would imagine thousands fall to the earth every hour. Heck, maybe every minute. God knows when they fall. He knows where they fall.

God also knows the number of hairs on our head. And it's easier for him to know some than others. I'm trying not to look at a few of you guys.

And me. But he knows the number of hairs. That's really drilling down. I think we have a graphic example of how the Lord knows all things.

In John's Gospel, chapter 1. The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, Follow me.

[14:31] Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law, And also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Nathanael said to him, Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit.

Nathanael said to him, How do you know me? Jesus answered him, Before Philip called you, When you were under the fig tree, I saw you.

Nathanael answered him, Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel. He saw him. How can he do that?

He's the omnipotent God. He's omnipresent, omnipotent, all-powerful. He's God. Now what can we say about the character of God's decrees?

[15:43] I'm going to highlight four things, two tonight, two next time. And I'm sure there's a lot more we could talk about.

The first thing I want us to discuss or mention is this. God's decrees are eternal, having been determined before the creation of time itself.

This all happened in eternity. Eternity passed. Now you need to hear that. That's a real major point that we're going to return to during our study this year.

So let me repeat it. God's decrees are eternal, having been determined before the creation of time itself. Let me offer a few verses of Scripture to support this truth, and I discovered they're everywhere.

Old and New Testament. In Psalm 139, David offers praise to God because God had ordained each of his days.

[16:51] These days were written down in a book by God before any of them came to pass. In Psalm 139, 16, he says this, Your eyes saw my unformed substance.

In your book were written every one of them. The days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

All that happened before there were days. There wasn't any sun. There wasn't any universe. It all happened in eternity past. Paul taught on the eternity of God's decrees. In Ephesians 3.11, he tells us that God's plan for saving the Gentiles was from eternity, and thus in accordance with God's eternal purpose.

And he also tells us that there was a mystery that God decreed this before the ages. That's 1 Corinthians 2.7.

[18:03] So before the ages, God had decreed to save Gentile people. The Jews couldn't believe it, although it's in the Old Testament. The Gentiles?

Yeah. Paul was very clear that the children of God were chosen by the Father before the foundation of the world.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 1.3-4. In 1 Timothy 1.8-9, let me read this. 5.34. 5.34.

5.34. 5.34. 5.34. 5.34. 5.34. 5.34. 5.34. 5.34. 5.34. 5.34. 5.34.

[19:03] 5.34. 5.34. 5.34. 5.34. 5.34. 5.34. 5.34. Listen to this.

Before the ages began. Before there were ages, all that was going on with God. God decreed to give His chosen vessels to His Son before time began.

Now, all of that perfectly agrees with the very words of Christ in Matthew's Gospel, verse 25. And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on His left.

Then the King will say to those on His right, Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

That goes way back. He was building a kingdom before the foundation of the world was laid. But before time began, before there was a universe, God decreed to prepare a kingdom for His select vessels.

[20:28] That kingdom was prepared before the foundation of the world for the elect of God. He decreed every person that was going to enter into that kingdom. Concerning God's decrees, we read this in Isaiah, which is the fifth gospel.

It's all about Jesus. This is in Isaiah, chapter 46. 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.

I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass. I have purposed, and I will do it. God issued decrees from ancient times, from eternity past.

Everything He decreed has or will come to pass. And by the way, the word God in that Isaiah passage is Yahweh, a sacred name for God.

[21:48] We know His name today as the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord will bring about all things according to His purpose and according to His good pleasure.

Paul makes a comment similar to that made by Isaiah. Listen to the words of Ephesians, chapter 1. Verse 11. 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.

So what is Paul saying? All that God has done and will do since the creation of time conform exactly to His purpose and decrees issued before time even began.

Everything there is about God precedes time. And yet He entered time in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He took upon Himself human flesh and dwelt among us, pitched His tent with us.

There is a second decree we want to mention this evening. As God's decrees were made in eternity to pass, they are of necessity unconditional.

[23:13] He decreed it and they are going to come to pass. They are truth. So they are unconditional. They are not dependent on us. They are not dependent on the weather or hurricanes.

He issued a decree and it will happen. And maybe this is a good place to plug this in. God acts. But He never reacts.

He didn't have to react to anything. Because He knows what is coming down the pipe. He already knows. God is eternal. God is self-existent.

You have to study that sometime. I read this guy one time. He said, God made men and women because He was lonely. God was never lonely, guys. Trust me when I say this.

God was never lonely. He had plenty going on. They were talking to each other. Who is they? The Trinity. The one true God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[24 : 15] He wasn't lonely. God is triune and exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God does not need anything to exist. It was not necessary for God to create a universe.

It was not necessarily for God to populate a portion of that universe with angels and humans in order to exist. In fact, those things have been around for a relatively short period of time when compared to eternity.

God was the only entity in eternity past. God spoke to Isaiah on this very point in Isaiah 44, 24. Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb, I am the Lord who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens and spread out the earth by myself.

He didn't need any assistance. He spread it all out by himself. I just have long loved the 38th chapter of Job.

God is speaking. This is a chapter which should be required of every evolutionist to memorize. God's talking to Job.

[25 : 41] I wish I could read the whole chapter, but it would take us a while. This is what God says. Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

Sounds like I was doing the talking to God and He interrupted. Who's talking to me without knowledge? Dress for action like a man.

I will question you and you make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding.

Who determined its measurements? Surely you know. Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk?

Or who laid its cornerstone? When the morning star sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy. Boy, this is a stinging rebuke to Job.

[26 : 48] And he goes on for a whole chapter. And he just nails him. You ought to read that tonight. Chapter 38. It's good. It is really good. That's your assignment tonight.

The point is this. Because God was the only entity in eternity, it was only God, it is impossible that anything external to Himself moved Him to decree one thing as compared to something else.

Does that make sense? God wasn't under any pressure by an external force. Well, I was going to do this, but I think I better do that. I've got to react to this over here. There wasn't anything to react to.

He was alone. There was only God. And He was issuing decrees among the Trinity. There was nothing external to God.

There were no angels. There were no humans. There weren't even any clouds as far as we know. There was nothing. As Genesis 1.1 says, In the beginning, God. How interesting.

[28 : 01] The Bible doesn't start with a philosophical discussion. Does God really exist? It presupposes that a person of average intelligence can go outside right now and look up and say, Boy, there's a God somewhere.

In the beginning, God. I read one guy. I think it might have been Schofield. He said, If you can get past those four words, everything else makes sense. We've just got to get past those four words. I don't buy into what one professor said in college, In the beginning, hydrogen. It's in the beginning, God. We read something similar in John's Gospel.

In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through Him. And without Him was not anything made that was made. Well, that Word, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ.

[29 : 05] The agent that carried out creation. He is the Creator. The Father gave Him that role. Without God, nothing exists.

Every decision that got made in decreeing anything was uninfluenced. There was no one or nothing around to influence Him. His decrees were uninfluenced and based solely upon what the Bible refers to as His good pleasure.

And that's in there a lot. Look at your concordance or strong concordance or something. Old and New Testament. That's in there a bunch. He did it for His good pleasure.

Everything that God did in eternity was done because it pleased Him to do it. The psalmist wrote of this, Our God is in the heavens and He does what He pleases.

Why, you think? God does what He pleases. Always has. Psalm 135, 6, Whatever the Lord pleases, He does.

[30 : 18] In heaven and on earth, in the seas, and all the deeps. He does it because it pleases Him.

It pleases Him. Paul spoke of this as well in Philippians 2, 13. For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work, for His good pleasure.

I really do ask you guys, look up that good pleasure this week. It's in there a lot. Well, I didn't realize we were going to end this quickly, so I apologize.

I'll go double next time. But we've seen two major points tonight. First of all, we see that God decreed to do what was done in eternity past before time began.

Second, nothing God decreed was contingent upon the influence of men or angels. All things that He decreed was done so in eternity past, and there was no one around to influence Him.

[31 : 37] Now, why am I stressing all that? I'm doing so because as we go through our study, the two truths we examine tonight, the two we will examine next time, play a major role in God's decree to save certain individuals.

That all took place in eternity past when God was issuing decrees. None of it catches Him by surprise.

Nothing we do catches Him by surprise. Thank you.