

THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF
FAITH
III. OF GOD'S ETERNAL DECREE

Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC

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I. GOD'S SOVEREIGN DECREE

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

I. GOD'S SOVEREIGN DECREE

Issues:

- Singular or Plural?
- Whatsoever comes to pass is decreed from Eternity
 - “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined” (Rom. 8:29).
 - “making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time” (Eph. 1:9).
 - “having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph. 1:11).
 - “Christ was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23).
 - “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father” (Mt. 10:29).
- The decree of God is *free, wise, eternal, absolute, and unconditional*.
 - “The execution of his decrees is not suspended upon any condition which may or may not be performed.” (Shaw, 84.).

I. GOD'S SOVEREIGN DECREE

Issues, cont.

- God is not “the author of evil.”
 - “For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you” (Ps. 5:4).
 - “God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5).
 - “You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong” (Hab. 1:13).
- God’s decrees do no violence to the will of individuals.
 - God’s will encompasses “secondary causes” and even “establishes them.”
 - God decrees both the ends and the means.
 - Under God’s decree, men and women make their own choices, without constraint.
 - Scripture insists on both divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

2. FOREKNOWLEDGE

Although God knows 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.

- Issue: Jesuit and Arminian denial of predestination states that God *foresees* who will believe and decrees in eternity that they (on the basis of their future belief) are elect.
 - “as many as were appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48)
 - “all that the Father gives me will come to me. . . . No one can come to me except the Father who sent me draws them” (Jn. 6:37, 44).

3 & 4. PREDESTINATION

3. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and other foreordained to everlasting death.

4. These angels and men, thus predestinated, and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

3 & 4. PREDESTINATION

Issues:

- The primary issue is God's glory
- Salvation or reprobation determined ultimately by God's election:
 - “even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will” (Eph. 1:4-5).
- Use of “predestined” for the elect and “foreordained” for the reprobate.
- Reprobation is decreed as *unconditional*.
 - “What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory” (Rom. 9:22-23).
- In Romans 9, the clear issue is not mere *service* or the fate of *nations*, but one's eternal destiny.

5. UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

Those of mankind that are predestinated until 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, 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; and all to the praise of his glorious grace.

Issue: Election/predestination is *unconditional*: not on the basis of our faith, works, or character but on the basis of God's eternal good pleasure.

6. NOT APART FROM MEANS

As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

6. NOT APART FROM MEANS

Issues:

- The elect are revealed through their faith.
 - All the elect believe; the elect always believe; and only the elect believe.
- Secondary causes are established.
- Limited atonement (or particular redemption): the elect are redeemed by Christ.
- Regeneration preceding faith: The elect “are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season.”

7. REGARDING THE REPROBATE

- 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 for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.
- Issues:
 - The reprobate are judged not for God's decree but for the guilt of their own sins.
 - "Pass by" – a recognition that all who are saved receive mercy, whereas the reprobate do not receive mercy. All are sinners: God ordains for the reprobate to receive what they have chosen and sought.

8. PRUDENCE AND CARE

- 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.

8. PRUDENCE AND CARE

Issues:

- Speculation and abstraction are to be avoided in teaching this doctrine.
 - Calvin: “Where God makes an end of teaching, let us make an end of learning.”
- Yet, predestination should not be avoided simply because it is challenging.
- Predestination is taught in Scripture primarily for two reasons:
 - To give glory to God
 - To grant assurance to believers.
- Calvin’s Deuteronomy 29:29 principle:
 - “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law”