

Lesson 7: 2LCF Chapter 3: Of God's Decrees

Paragraphs 3-7

"⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace..."

Ephesians 1:5-7

Decrees Reviewed

William Ames defines God's decrees in this way: "The decree of God is His determinate purpose of effecting all things by His almighty power and according to His counsel."⁶⁷

Herman Bavinck: The counsel of God is to be understood as his eternal plan for all that exists or will happen in time."⁶⁸

Question 10 of the Baptist Catechism:

Question 10

Q. What are the decrees of God?

A. The decrees of God are his eternal purpose according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

In paragraphs 1-2, we considered God's general decrees of all events. In paragraphs 3-7, the confession shifts in its emphasis from God's general decrees to God's specific decrees, dealing particularly with God's election for salvation.

Paragraphs 1-2

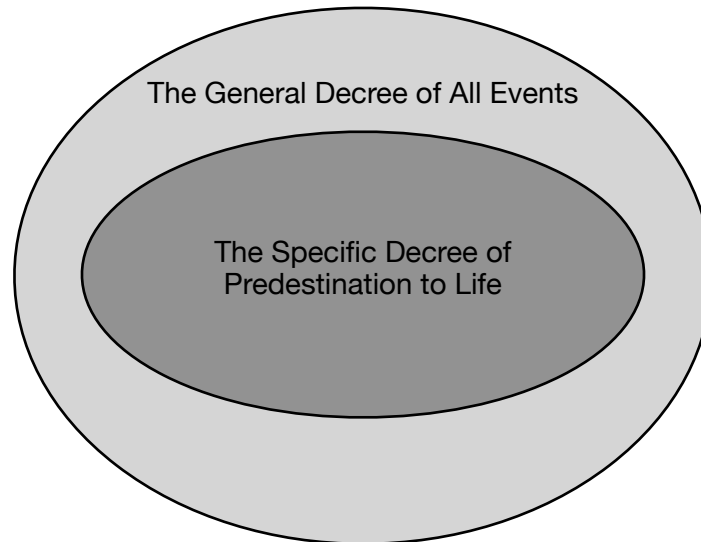
- I. The general decree of all events
 - A. Its universality
 - B. Its unconditionality

Paragraphs 3-7

- II. The specific decree of Predestination to life
 - A. Its major attributes
 - B. Its positive outworking: election of those predestinated
 - C. Its prudent handling

⁶⁷ William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity*. (London: Published by The Honourable House of Commons, 1639), 22.

⁶⁸ Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2003), 372.



Paragraph 3.

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ, to the praise of His glorious grace; others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of His glorious justice.

1 Tim. 5:21; Matt. 25:34; Eph. 1:5,6; Rom. 9:22,23; Jude 4

Paragraph 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.

2 Tim. 2:19; John 13:18

Exposition

In these paragraphs, we clearly see that our Reformed Baptist forefathers were thoroughly Reformed in their soteriology (doctrine of salvation), attributing the salvation of man to the definite and unchangeable will of God.

Here we see the election of man and of angels taught. Scriptural support for both forms election of election can be found throughout our Bibles.

Election of Humans

Romans 8:28-30

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Romans 9:11-13

though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

Ephesians 1:4-6

he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

John 13:18

¹⁸ I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'

2 Timothy 2:10

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

“Elect” Defined: ἐκλεκτός (*eklektos*). adj. **chosen.** Chosen or worthy of choice (excellent). This is an adjective derived from the verb ἐκλέγομαι (*eklegomai*, “to choose”) and means “chosen.” Like Greek adjectives in general, it can be used as a noun meaning “chosen one”; it is the usual translation in

the Septuagint of the Hebrew בְּחִירָה (*bāhîr*, “chosen one”). Outside the nt, *eklektos* can refer to things or people chosen by humans, but the nt uses it only for people (and angels) chosen by God; thus, in the NT it primarily refers to believers in Jesus (e.g., 1 Pet 1:1; Rev 17:14).

Election of Angels

1 Timothy 5:21

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.

Matthew 25:41

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Reprobation

Reprobation receives a very limited treatment in the confession. Here the framers of the confession deleted paragraph seven from the WCF:

WCF 3:7

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.

On the 2LCF’s deletion of this paragraph, Waldron comments:

“The deletion of paragraph seven of the Westminster confession serves to weaken the testimony of the Baptist Confession to the doctrine of reprobation... this doctrine is stated in a weak way... The Bible says more than the London Confession. Though the Baptist confession clearly assumes the doctrine of reprobation, its actual statement on the subject do not possess the clarity appropriate

to a creedal document. The Westminster Confession must be commended for its faithfulness to Scripture at this point.”⁶⁹

Nevertheless, there is Scriptural support for the doctrine of reprobation:

Jude 4

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Romans 9:22-23

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, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory

Yet, this doctrine of reprobation needs to be qualified biblically.

In his commentary on these paragraphs David Charles points out two truths that should be carefully observed:⁷⁰

- 1) God will be praised because of His glory known either in grace through Jesus Christ or experienced in justice.
- 2) There is a difference between “predestination to life” and being “left to act in their sin.”

On this point, Charles quotes’ Robert Letham’s work on the Westminster Confession: “We should note the disparity between election and reprobation. Election is by grace and is rooted in Christ; reprobation, or preterition (passing by), is in connection with sin and God’s justice. There is an asymmetry, not a parallel. Ultimately, both depend on the unchangeable, wise, holy, eternal will of God, but in themselves they differ considerably.”⁷¹

Charles adds: “God’s active grace in Jesus Christ unto redemption is not the same as his passing by those who are left in their sin and rebellion.”⁷²

Sam Waldron offer this helpful treatment on double predestination.:

Should we believe in double predestination? It depends on what you mean! If you mean that God’s decree includes reprobation, we must believe in it. God’s decree includes all that comes to pass. So in this sense the answer is yes! If you mean that God plays the same role in the working out of reprobation as He does in the working out of election, the answer clearly is no. God is not involved in reprobation like He is in election. So in this sense the

⁶⁹ Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 5th ed. (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2016), 85.

⁷⁰ David Charles, “Chapter Three: Of God’s Decrees,” in *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, ed. Rob Ventura (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2022), 93.

⁷¹ Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2009), 183.

⁷² David Charles, “Chapter Three: Of God’s Decrees,” in *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, ed. Rob Ventura (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2022), 93.

answer is no! If you mean that God's electing some men necessarily implies that he rejects and passes over other men, the answer of the Bible & confession is yes. So in this sense the answer is yes!⁷³

Paragraph 5.

Those of mankind that are predestinated to 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 other thing in the creature as a condition or cause moving Him thereunto.

Eph. 1:4, 9, 11; Rom. 8:30; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Thess. 5:9; Rom. 9:13,16; Eph. 2:5,12

Paragraph 6.

As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so He hath, 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, or effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Thess. 5:9, 10; Rom. 8:30; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:5; John 10:26, 17:9, 6:64

Paragraph 7.

The doctrine of the 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.

1 Thess. 1:4,5; 2 Pet. 1:10; Eph. 1:6; Rom. 11:33; Rom. 11:5,6,20; Luke 10:20

John Owen summarizes our duty:

The revealed will of God, containeth not his purpose and decree, but our dutie, not what he will doe according to his good pleasure, but what we should doe if we will please him: and this, consisting in his word, his precepts and promises, belongeth to us and our children, that we may doe the will of God...⁷⁴

⁷³ Sam Waldron, *Symbolics Lecture: Chapter 3*.

⁷⁴ John Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 41, 45.