

The Decree, Election and the Problem of Evil

MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD'S DECREE:

1. It is eternal before time began. Eph 3:11, 1 Cor 2:7, Eph 1:4, cf 2 Tim 1:9, Matt 25:34
2. It is unconditional, without influence, for his "good pleasure." Isa 43:10, 44:24, Gen 1:1, John 1:1-3, Phil 2:13, Ps 115:3, 135:6; Isa 46:10, 48:14
3. It is immutable and efficacious. Ps 33:10-11, Dan 4:35 cf Isa 14:27. Job 42:2 - "I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."
4. It is comprehensive. Isa 46:10, Rom 8:28, Eph 1:11, Ps 115:3, 135:6

He governs all things: weather (Job 37:12-13, Ps 148:8, controls the sun (Matt 5:45), and causes plants to grow (Ps 104:14). He determines the life spans of birds (Matt 10:29) and humans (Job 14:5, Ps 139:16), the boundaries of nations (Acts 17:26), seemingly to us random events (Prov 16:33). He removes and sets up kings (Dan 2:2; cf Prov 21:1). "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things" (Rom 11:36).

ELECTION: The free and sovereign choice of God, made in eternity past, to set His love on certain individuals, and, on the basis of nothing in themselves but solely on the good pleasure of His will, to choose them to be saved from sin and damnation and to inherit the blessings of eternal life through the mediatorial work of Christ. Ephesians 1:4-5, Romans 8:29-30; 9:11-13, 2 Thess. 2:13:

The New Testament also calls certain individuals "the elect" specific objects of God's saving choice. (Col. 3:12; Titus 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:4; Rom.8: 32-34; Lk 18:71; Matt 24-22, 31; Mark 13:20, 27; 2 Timothy 2:9-10)

The New Testament makes the relationship between election and salvation explicit.

God's foreknowledge and predestination are linked with the effectual call, justification, sanctification, and glorification (Rom. 8:29-30).

Of the Gentiles Luke notes, many who "were appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48)- that is, they believed because they were appointed to eternal life.

Paul declared of the Thessalonians that God had "destined [them] .. to obtain salvation" (1 Thess. 5:9).

And he explicitly proclaimed, "God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation"(2 Thess. 2:13 NASB).

In the case of the nation of Israel, though the majority had rejected the Messiah and were hardened, "the elect obtained" salvation by the grace of God (Rom. 11:7).

The Arminian Doctrine of Conditional Election is not Biblically accurate. God cannot look ahead and learn things. Furthermore, what God would see as "He looked ahead" is the outworking of his own sovereign decree. God "works all things according to the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:11; of. Pss. 115:3; 135:6; Isa. 46:10; Dan. 4:35). Also, conditional election undermines the doctrine of salvation by grace alone (sola gratia). By grounding God's electing purpose in man's foreseen faith and not in God's sovereign will, this view makes man (and his choice to exercise his free will to trust Jesus) the determinative cause of salvation, rather than God.

THE DECREE OF REPROBATION

The decree of reprobation is the free and sovereign choice of God, made in eternity past, to pass over certain individuals, choosing not to set his saving love on them but instead determining to punish them for their sins unto the magnification of his justice.

Few will enter the narrow gate that leads to life but many will travel the broad way to destruction (Matt. 7.13-14). In Matthew 25, Jesus teaches there will be both sheep and goats -those who inherit eternal life, and others who go away into eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46).

Reprobation is often mistaken with the doctrine of equal ultimacy - that God is equally as active in working unbelief in the heart of the reprobate, as he is in working faith in the heart of the elect. This is a completely inaccurate view of the biblical doctrine of reprobation, a direct opposite to the love and justice of God, and a great deviation from historic Calvinism.

The Vindication of the Doctrine: The doctrine of reprobation is taught in the Bible, and we are obliged to reverently submit our minds and our emotions to the infinite wisdom of God's revelation, trusting that what he says and does is right and just (Rom. 3:4). Reprobation is a necessary implication of the biblical teach-ins concerning election.

The very existence of a category of persons called elect (Matt. 24:22; Luke 18:7; Rom. 8:33; 11:7; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:1) necessarily implies a category of persons who are non-elect. Since God inviolably determines the destiny of both the saved and the lost (cf. 9:11, 16), Paul anticipates this objection: "You will say to me then, 'Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?'" (9:19). Paul answers those who would reproach God by reminding them that mere mortals are in no position to call God to account: "But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?'" (9:20).

Boettner, pg 129, "Many people talk as if salvation were a matter of human birthright. And, forgetful of the fact that man had lost his supremely favorable chance in Adam, they inform us that God would be unjust if He did not give all guilty creatures an opportunity to be saved?"

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND THEODICY: The Christian response to the problem of evil is called theodicy, which comes from the Greek words *theos* and *dike*, which combined mean "judicial hearing of God," or the "justification of God." Theodicy is the vindication of God's justice against the charge that the presence of evil proves him to be unjust, impotent, both, or nonexistent.

Biblical Theodicy: God provides his own theodicy in his Word. God does not explain his actions; rather, he asserts that he is to be trusted. Genesis 3 records the beginning of moral and physical evil, yet God does not explain the origin of evil in Satan.

A Biblical Perspective on Evil: God gives perspective on the past. God has always vindicated his ways with his people by bringing periods of suffering to an end through acts of mercy and grace.

Second, God gives perspective on the present. Scripture shows us that God has always used and is now presently using evil to fulfill his purposes for good.

Third, God gives perspective on the future. Scripture promises that God will finally be vindicated, and believers fully delivered from evil.

COMPATIBILISTIC THEODICY

Compatibilism holds that, when properly defined, human responsibility and divine determinism are complementary ideas; that is, it is both logically consistent and biblically necessary to affirm that God decretally determines the free choices of human beings.

God works all things according to the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:11), no one has the freedom to choose contrary to God's decree. One's will is genuinely free so long as that person is not coerced but acts according to his own desires and inclinations. It is the lack of compulsion that makes an action free (cf. Philem. 14), not the ability to choose contrary to God's predetermined plan.

MEMORY VERSE:

Ephesians 1:3-5: 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, 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.