

God's eternal plan

Introduction

Recap... and a question from last week: "Is it not unfair that God should love us?" – Romans 5:8
Now: how do we respond to the sovereignty of God?

Chapter 3 *Modern Language version – 1993 – OPC*

1. God, from all eternity, did—by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will—freely and unchangeably ordain whatever comes to pass. Yet he ordered all things in such a way that he is not the author of sin, nor does he force his creatures to act against their wills; neither is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

2. Although God knows whatever may or can come to pass under all conceivable conditions, yet he has not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future or as that which would come to pass under such conditions.

An eternal, wise and holy plan

Ordains / decrees... freely... not influenced...
and NOT because foreseen

"Whatsoever" – Ephesians 1:11; Isa. 45:7

Wise, holy, unchanging

BUT...

(i) God is not author of sin
Deep waters...!

(ii) We always do what we want
Freedom (of spontaneity, not indifference)...
not puppets

(iii) God employs second causes
He decides the beginning and the end... AND
how everything happens in the middle.

Key example: the Cross

Acts 2:23, 4:27-28

Summary:

"God stands behind good and evil asymmetrically. To put it bluntly, God stands behind evil in such a way that not even evil takes place outside the bounds of his sovereignty, yet the evil is not morally chargeable to him: it is always chargeable to secondary agents... On the other hand, God stands behind good in such a way that it not only takes place within the bounds of his sovereignty but it is always chargeable to him, and only derivatively to secondary agents. In other words, if I sin, I cannot possibly do so outside the bounds of God's sovereignty... but I alone am responsible for that sin... But if I do good, it is God working in me both to will and to act according to his good pleasure... If this sounds just a bit too convenient for God my initial response (though there is more to be said) is that according to the Bible this is the only God there is. There is no other."

D.A. Carson, *How Long O Lord*, p213]

3. By God's decree, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestined to everlasting life, and others are foreordained to everlasting death.

4. These angels and men, thus predestined and foreordained, are individually and unchangeably designated, and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or decreased.

5. Those people who are predestined to life, God—before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and unchangeable purpose and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will—has chosen in Christ to everlasting glory. He chose them out of his free grace and love alone, not because he foresaw faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of these, or anything else in the creature, as conditions or causes moving him to do this; and all to the praise of his glorious grace.

6. As God has appointed the elect to glory, so he has—by the eternal and most free purpose of his will—foreordained all the means to that end. Therefore, his chosen ones, all of them being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ and are effectually called to faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season. They are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power, through faith, unto salvation. No others are redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, except the elect only.

7. The rest of mankind God was pleased—according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extends or withholds mercy as he pleases—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.

8. The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, so that men, taking heed to the will of God revealed in his Word and yielding obedience to it, may—from the certainty of their effectual calling—be assured of their eternal election. Thus, this doctrine shall provide reason for praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and for humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all who sincerely obey the gospel.

Destinies of life and death

A plan for every human... and angel

Predestined to life... foreordained to death
John 13:18, Proverbs 16:4

Why? No full answer. But remember...

(i) We ALL deserve his holy judgement

(ii) The greatest wonder is his MERCY
Matthew 20:15, Romans 9:14-15

(iii) He does all things for His own GLORY
Romans 9:23

(iv) We cannot penetrate his secret will. But we can TRUST him.

(v) Scripture's EMPHASIS is on His selection of His own people, not the passing by of rebels

A fixed number... of individuals... chosen in Christ (Eph. 1:5)... by free grace not foreseen faith

Appointed for glory

God wills the END and the MEANS... all for His glory: i.e.

Christ's work, the Spirit's application, our holiness... suffering... means of grace (preaching, prayer, church)

Preview of later chapters

Only the elect – others passed by God in himself

God does not will to save everyone:
Jesus – John 6:64-65, 8:47, 10:26, 17:9

He does pass some by:
Matthew 11:25-26

Application:

Deep... handle with care... but don't avoid these scriptures

➔ Reminds us: God makes salvation a reality (not just a possibility) for his people – from eternity past to future glory. Romans 8:30.

➔ Assurance... holiness... humility... praise
Ephesians 1:3ff

Personal response: for what should we give thanks... confess... pray?