

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

God's Decree (1)

A. Introduction

1. Two things we are commanded to do as elders are to watch and to hold.

We are to watch what we believe, to make sure we are believing what God's Word says.

"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." (1 Timothy 4:16)

We are to hold firmly to the truths taught in God's Word.

"He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." (Titus 1:9)

It is vital we do these two things, not just for our own sake, but also for the members of this church and in fact those who live in the community God has placed us in.

To help us to watch and to hold, we are spending our elders' meeting working through the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith a paragraph or so at a time.

2. In Chapter 3, the Confession's focus is God's Decree.

What is God's Decree? It is simply His plan or His purpose.

The opening two paragraphs read as follows:

"God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears His wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing His decree.

Although God knoweth 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."

B. God has decreed all things that come to pass

1. Everything that has and is and will take place happens because God has decreed it.

This includes all the details of our lives; the affairs of the nations; both the good and the sinful actions of human beings; chance or random occurrences; evil and tragic events; and the final destruction of wicked and the salvation of His people.

"God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass."

"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." (Isaiah 46:10)

"In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." (Ephesians 1:11)

Nothing that exists or takes place is outside of God's decree.

Nothing can stop God's purposes from being accomplished or frustrate God's plan.

2. Does this mean that God is the author of sin?

"...yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein..."

The author of sin is the person who actually commits the sin.

The Confession, like Scripture, makes it clear that God is not the cause of sin – He is not to blame for our sin.

"When tempted, no-one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone." (James 1:13)

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5)

While God's decree includes sin, He does not create sin.

3. Does this mean we are not responsible for our actions?

"...nor is violence offered to the will of the creature..."

God never forces a person to choose contrary to what they desire.

In every way, we are responsible for our actions – so when we sin, we sin freely and willingly.

4. Does this mean our choices and actions do not matter?

"...nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears His wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing His decree."

God has decreed not only what will happen but also how it will happen.

"Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." (Acts 4:27-28)

Everything we choose and do does matter because they are the means by which God brings about what he had decided in eternity past will happen.

So, we preach the gospel, and it is vital we do, because this is the means by which God has decreed that sinners will be saved by Jesus.

5. All the truths contain in this first paragraph are a remarkable display of God's wisdom and power and faithfulness.

C. God has decreed all things before they come to pass

1. God's decree is not based on what will happen in the future – it decides what will happen in the future.

"Although God knoweth 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."

"Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Romans 9:11-13)

God knows the future because He has decreed the future.

Everything that happens is because God has decided in eternity past that it will happen.

2. God did not chose us because He knew in the future we would respond positively to the gospel.

It is because He chose us that we put our trust in Jesus.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.” (Ephesians 1:3-5)

D. How then shall we lead?

1. In the face of rising opposition to the cause of Christ in this land, we should take comfort that God will accomplish all that He has purposed.
2. In the face of rising opposition to the cause of Christ in this land, we should remain faithful to the task God has given us knowing that this is ordinarily how He brings about what He has planned.