

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

God's Decree (2)

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.

In the opening two paragraphs we see that God has decreed all things that come to pass and He has decreed all things before they come to pass.

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

The Confession then narrows its scope to the eternal destinies of men and angels in paragraph 3 and 4 of this chapter.

"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."

"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."

Here we are introduced to the doctrine of predestination.

The word 'predestine' means to decide beforehand or predetermine.

When you read the Bible you are confronted with this truth both implicitly and explicitly that God predestines some men and angels to eternal life for His own glory and praise.

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." (John 6:37)

"Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep." (John 10:25-26)

"For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him." (John 17:2)

"When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed." (Acts 13:48)

"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." (Romans 8:29-30)

"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 – to the praise of his glorious grace." (Ephesians 1:4-6)

What does predestination mean? What does it not mean?

B. God has chosen to save some people not all people from their sins

1. God decided beforehand that there would be people who would have eternal life.

"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."

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'" (Matthew 25:34)

God's predestination of these people ensured that they would be saved from their sins through faith in Jesus Christ.

In this, God's glorious grace is magnified as left to ourselves we would never choose God, in fact, we can't choose God. Salvation is by grace from first to last.

"I believe in the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him." (Charles Spurgeon)

2. God also decided beforehand that there would be angels who would have eternal life.

"I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ and the elect angels..." (1 Timothy 5:21)

God's predestination of these angels ensured that they never sinned.

3. Not every person and every angel has been chosen.

A vast number has been.

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9)

"Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand." (Revelation 5:11)

And this number is set and unchanging.

"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."

"Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his." (2 Timothy 2:19)

"I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen." (John 13:18)

C. God has chosen to leave some people not all people in their sins

1. God could have chosen to save all mankind, but if He only did this, He would have displayed only His grace and not His justice.

By saving some and leaving others in their sins, His grace AND justice is magnified.

"...others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of His glorious justice."

This is the doctrine of reprobation.

"Reprobation refers to God's eternal decree to refrain from providing saving grace to particular fallen individuals and to harden these in their wilful sins so that they might be justly condemned and God's glorious justice might be made manifest." (Richard Blaylock)

"What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory." (Romans 9:22-23)

"For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a licence for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord." (Jude 4)

2. There is a difference between the predestining of some to eternal life and the leaving of others to face judgment.

Sinners who are saved are those whom God actively gives faith to so that they can trust in Jesus Christ.

Sinners who are punished are those whom God does not give faith to and leaves to get what they deserve.

To be clear, God is not being unjust – those who receive His judgment are getting what they deserve for their ungodliness and sinful actions.

D. How then shall we lead?

1. With wonder at God's grace.

We should not be troubled by the truth that God does not save everyone.

We should be astonished that He saves anyone – that He save us!

2. With submission to God's Word.

The doctrine of predestination can be a hard truth to accept, but we have no choice if we are going to allow God's Word to be our rule.

3. With assurance because of God's plan.

God will save all that are His.

God will lose none that are His.

So, we preach the gospel and shepherd the flock in the knowledge that God is sovereign.