

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

God's Decree (5)

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.

Having been shown from Scripture that everything that has taken place and is taking place and will take place happens because God has decreed it including specifically the salvation of sinners, and how those whom He has chosen to save will be brought to glory, this chapter of the Confession closes by looking at how these truths are to be taught.

"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."

How then should predestination be taught?

B. It is to be taught carefully

1. Predestination is to be taught carefully because the doctrine of predestination is difficult for many to understand.

That's what is meant by 'high mystery' in opening line of this paragraph.

"The doctrine of the high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care,

Just because it is difficult to understand does not mean it shouldn't be taught, but rather that wisdom and careful should be taken when doing so.

2. Predestination is to be taught carefully because it can lead to people responding in the wrong way.

It may cause some believers to worry about whether they have been elected and so never have assurance of salvation.

It may cause some believers to be careless in their pursuit of holiness because if they cannot lose their salvation it doesn't matter how they live.

It may cause some unbelievers to decide that they will not repent and believe until they are sure that they have been elected.

3. But when predestination is taught carefully it will be a source of assurance to those who have been saved by faith in Jesus Christ and who are seeking to follow Him.

"...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."

"For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction." (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5)

Those who are attentive and obedient to God's Word can be certain that they have been chosen by God and have been saved by Jesus.

4. How do we teach predestination carefully?

By not ignoring it.

By only teaching what the Bible teaches.

By choosing carefully who we teach it to – *"election and predestination were not preached to the unconverted in the evangelistic messages of Acts"*.

C. It is to be taught practically

1. When predestination is rightly taught, it will have practical effects on a believers' life.

"...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."

2. They will praise God.

How can they not!

God has chosen to set His love upon us and save us who deserve nothing but His judgment.

"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, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." (Ephesians 1:4-6)

3. They will revere and admire God.

God is sovereign over all.

"He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth." (Daniel 4:35)

This should lead to a healthy fear of God – seen in how we approach Him.

4. They will be humbled.

If salvation has nothing to do with us, there are no grounds for boasting and pride.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no-one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

5. They will be diligent.

"Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure." (2 Peter 1:10)

Diligent in working out our salvation because we are confident that God is working in us and will complete the good work He has started in us.

"continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Philippians 2:12-13)

"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

Diligent in evangelism because God will save those who He has chosen.

"Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no-one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." (Acts 18:9-10)

Diligent in self-examination to make sure we are not being self-deceived, because if we have been saved by God, there will be evidence of His work in our lives.

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Corinthians 13:5)

6. They will be comforted.

It will be a "*pillow on which the believer rests.*"

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purposes." (Romans 8:28)

How comforting it is to know that despite appearances, God will do everything that He has purposed and promised.

D. How then shall we lead?

1. We will teach the truths of this doctrine.

We won't shy away or be afraid to teach it because it is part of the whole counsel of God and vital for the faith of those in the church.

2. We will teach the implications of this doctrine.

We will practically apply the truths of predestination, showing how they should lead to praise, awe and wonder, humility, diligence and assurance in the life of those in the church.