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GOD'S  
ETERNAL  
DECREE

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W.E. BEST

# **GOD'S ETERNAL DECREE**

by

**W. E. Best**

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## INTRODUCTION

The decree of God appears first in the singular because God has one all-inclusive purpose, or plan. For the benefit of man's finite mind, God's decree may be explained by using the term "decrees of God." Nevertheless, they must be regarded as one complex decree: "But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth" (Job 23:13). "The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand" (Is. 14:24). The term "Divine decree" is an attempt to gather into one designation that to which the Scriptures refer by various designations, such as Divine purpose (Eph. 1:11), foreordination (I Pet. 1:2, 20), election (I Thess. 1:4), predestination (Rom. 8:30), the Divine will (Eph. 1:11), and the Divine good pleasure (Eph. 1:9).

A study of this subject is of utmost importance to every Christian. Serious questions cannot be set aside by appealing to the "simplicity" of the gospel. Simplicity implies that which is uncomplicated. The gospel, like every other Biblical subject, is complex. A simple gospel originates not with God but with the simple mind of man. God is the source of the gospel. He made provision for the gospel message and all the elements that go into the pure gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel includes not only the message of Jesus Christ, His Person and Work, but the entire Godhead. God the Father planned it; God the Son purchased it; and God the Holy Spirit applies it.

The message concerning the Person and Work of Jesus Christ is complex. It involves His whole Person. The atonement is a complicated subject. It includes the message that is sent forth in the power of the Holy Spirit. Conclusively, one cannot call anything simple that pertains to God. The diligent Christian applies himself to study God's word to know what He has revealed on any subject.

Men explain the order in God's decree differently. Some classify themselves as supralapsarians and others classify themselves as infralapsarians. Both appeal to Scripture for support of their theories. These are systems of men and have good and bad points. The Christian who diligently studies God's word desires to do the will of God, and he does not want to be tied to either the supralapsarian or the infralapsarian theory of God's decree. The child of God should desire all the truth regardless of religious beliefs, denominational persuasions, or theories of men.

Most of the difficulty that arises among men concerning God's decree comes from the failure to remember that the decree is eternal, but it is executed in time. Since the decree is eternal, all of its parts are in the mind of God as one intention. However, there is succession in its realization. Although succession is related to time, the idea of order in the eternal decree of God is not destroyed. As there is order in the Godhead, there is order in God's eternal decree.

## DEFINITION OF GOD'S DECREE

God has a purpose and that purpose is eternal. The apostle Paul called God's plan His "eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11). God's purpose includes a number of events which are not successively formed as the emergency arises. They are all parts of one all-comprehensive purpose, or decree. Since the happenings are mutually related, they may be called decrees to explain them to finite minds.

A decree is a determination or an edict of one who has supreme authority. God is sovereign and has the absolute right to do what He pleases. Decree is a technical term that has been adopted by theologians to convey a complex idea--a number of ideas by a single term.

That God works without a plan is inconceivable. A person would not think of constructing a house without plans (Luke 14:28). God is infinitely wise (Job 23:13). He purposed all, and all He purposed shall be accomplished. The purpose of God was drawn up before the foundation of the world. God's providence operates to fulfill His purpose which is accomplished in time.

God's purpose is founded in absolute sovereignty, ordered by infinite wisdom, ratified by omnipotence, and cemented by immutability. All things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). Everything God planned will come to pass. Every good and perfect gift comes from Him with whom there is no variableness (James 1:17).

The decrees of God may be regarded in one complex decree including all things. The extent of God's decree covers everything before time, through time, and subsequent to time. It is unchangeable. There is no alteration in the Divine intention. No new act will ever enter the Divine mind. Furthermore, there will be no reversion of the Divine plan.

The sovereign God does not create beings He cannot control. A common statement which is without Scriptural authority is "Let God be God." How can a created creature let God be God? From God's view, He has one purpose. Included in that purpose are all things pertaining to eternity and time: "The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand" (Is. 14:24). All will occur as He purposed: "...I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Is. 46:9,10). His counsel will stand forever: "The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11). His thoughts are beyond man's comprehension: "O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep" (Ps. 92:5).

Thoughts and purposes of the infinite God are coeternal with Himself. The eternity of God staggers the imagination of any finite person. God's thoughts and purposes are absolute. "His understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147:5)

He is omniscient; therefore, He knows all things at once and cannot be informed because all things are known to Him. Men often seek to instruct God concerning His word, ways, and their own

needs. Someone asked a well-instructed child: Does God know everything? Does He reason about anything? The child replied that God does not reason about anything because He knows all things.

God's thoughts are simultaneous. Since man's thoughts are successive, to attempt to vindicate eternal providence and justify the ways of God with men is a difficult task. One may more easily criticize than construct. Any child can tear a rose to pieces, but God alone can produce its exquisite texture and fragrance.

God's thoughts are very deep. His ways are not man's ways: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Is. 55:8,9). God is on the throne, and He controls all. Therefore, man must begin organizing truth by realizing the majesty of God.

All truth involves more than appears on the surface. One may look into the heavens and admire the stars. However, their significance is not the same to him as to an astronomer. That person cannot explain them as the astronomer who has gathered information by studying the stars through a telescope. Natural man may look upon the word of God in the same manner as a novice looking at the stars. He may read statements that to him are confusing and contradictory because he is unable to assemble Scriptures in their proper order.

A true theologian thinks over God's thoughts and seeks by the Spirit of God to bring them into God's order in his own mind. He seeks to gather the thoughts of God into systematic order. Satisfactory, effective witnessing for Christ is possible only through giving truth in its continuity. Theology is the science of God--facts plus relations.

Forming a plan and necessarily altering it or failing to execute it is one of the sad imperfections of finite beings. One may have good intentions, but he cannot foresee the future. As an illustration, a person may draw plans for a home requiring brick veneer. However, before he finishes his plans, brick becomes unavailable. Therefore, he must alter his plans. He may begin constructing his home, but before it is completed, his funds may become depleted. If he is unable to secure financial aid, he would be compelled to completely surrender his plans. Such illustrations cannot apply to the sovereign God. He not only knows all things but He is omnipotent and will bring into being everything to complete His plan.

## VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ORDER IN GOD'S DECREE

An orderly arrangement in the decree of God is necessary for man's comprehension of God's purpose. Men differ in their interpretations of the order of God's plan. Searchers of truth find areas of Bible study where they can take only the supralapsarian view and other places where they can take only the infralapsarian view. There are true and false assertions in each theory.

The word lapsarian comes from the Latin word *lapsus* which means the "doctrine of the fall." Every person who believes the truth of the fall of man is a lapsarian. Supralapsarians believe that God decreed to elect some and reprobate others before He decreed to create man and permit his fall. Infralapsarians believe that God decreed to create man and then decreed to permit his fall before He decreed to elect some and reprobate others.

Supralapsarian means above, or before, the fall of man. Infralapsarian means below, or subsequent to, the fall of man. Both views deal with the order in God's decree. The purpose of the Christian is not to pry into the Divine mind but to ascertain, to the best of his ability, the order of revealed truths concerning the plan of salvation.

In the original controversy, the supralapsarians believed that sin was included in God's purpose; whereas the infralapsarians believed that the fall was merely the object of God's foreknowledge. The latter group asserted that God knew about the fall, but He did not will it or do anything about it.

There are three stages to the controversy between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. The first stage began with the following question: Was the fall merely the object of Divine foreknowledge? Those who advocated the absolute sovereignty of God said--and rightly so--that the fall of man was predetermined by God. Some individuals objected and tried to tone it down.

The second stage of the controversy began with two co-workers, John Calvin and Theodore Beza. Theodore Beza was a supralapsarian, but John Calvin could be classified as neither infralapsarian nor supralapsarian. He leaned more toward infralapsarianism. However, the two men worked harmoniously. There was no basis for division because the two systems cannot be regarded as absolutely antithetical.

Immediately after John Calvin's death, Theodore Beza became a teacher of Jacobus Arminius. The third stage began with Arminius who refused to accept the supralapsarian theory taught by Beza. He rejected it and magnified the free will of man to the point of denying the sovereignty of God. All who identify with this thinking may be classified as Arminians. The error of magnifying the free will of man to the point of denying the sovereignty of God was brought into this country and is propagated among the majority of professing Christendom. This is known as the more developed stage, and it continues today.

**Supralapsarians give the following as the order in God's decree:**

- (1) God decreed to elect some to salvation and reprobate others.
- (2) He decreed to create both elect and nonelect.
- (3) He decreed to permit the fall.
- (4) He decreed to provide salvation for the elect.
- (5) He decreed to apply salvation to the elect.

**Infralapsarians give the following as the order in God's decree:**

- (1) God decreed to create all men.
- (2) He decreed to permit the fall.
- (3) He decreed to provide salvation for men--some say all men.
- (4) He decreed to elect those who do believe and leave to just condemnation all who do not believe.
- (5) He decreed to apply salvation to those who believe.

**An additional order has been brought into existence by Arminians:**

- (1) God decreed to create.
- (2) He decreed to permit the fall.
- (3) He decreed to provide salvation for all--some have inserted the phrase, to make salvation possible for all mankind.
- (4) He decreed to elect all who believe.
- (5) He decreed to condemn all who reject Christ.

**The *Encyclopedia Britannica* summarizes the chief points of the Remonstrants (Arminian protestors):**

- (1) The decree of predestination is conditional and not absolute--that is the point that divides those who believe in free grace from those who believe in free will.
- (2) The atonement is universal in intention.
- (3) Man cannot of himself exercise faith--there are differences of opinion on this point among them.
- (4) Although the grace of God is a necessary condition of human effort, it does not act irresistibly in man.
- (5) Believers are able to resist sin, but they are not beyond the possibility of falling from grace.

Some questions resulting from the controversy between supralapsarians and infralapsarians have been raised:

- (1) Does not the problem of order presuppose a transposition of temporal succession into the eternity of God's counsel?
- (2) Is not the concept of succession in the Divine decree a clear form of the humanization of God?

Some believe that if God is conscious of events as they occur in sequence, He must be continually adding to His knowledge. Hence, He cannot be regarded as omniscient. Such an inference is untrue. A person may have in his memory a certain place he has visited. On the way to a

return visit, he describes it to his companion because it is in his anticipation or imagination. The sight of the place he had described and anticipated became actually experienced. His memory and anticipation were imperfect, but his knowledge was increased by experience. However, his knowledge could not have been increased if his memory and imagination, or anticipation, were perfect.

Man's wisdom can be increased and decreased. God's knowledge is perfect and complete. His understanding is infinite. He knows perfectly and completely what He will know when tomorrow becomes yesterday. He knows the end from the beginning. Nothing imperfect is in His wisdom. Everything described in His plan will be executed in time. God's eternality is such a perfect, independent, and unchangeable comprehension that the Divine constancy embraces all things at once.

Deistic conception arises from an ill-balanced and unhealthy overconcentration of only one aspect of eternity. The eternal decree is alive and relevant today, tomorrow, and yesterday. God's decree precedes, accompanies, and follows its fulfillment. It cannot be regarded as lifeless foreordination.

If God does not know the difference between today, yesterday, and tomorrow, He does not know as much as man. If there is no future in God's thought, the message that God chose His own before the foundation of the world is false: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world..." (Eph. 1:4). Moreover, God's saving and calling His own "...according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Tim. 1:9) would be null and void. The very words pre-destination and fore-ordination signify a future in God's thoughts. If there is no past in God's thoughts, the saved are yet in their sins, and Jesus Christ has neither come nor ascended back to the Father.

Systematization is important not only in man's thinking but in the purpose of God. The Divine decree so far transcends the finite mind that none can comprehend it after the manner of men. Such statements as "before" and "after" the fall of man are not in the Divine understanding as they are in man's understanding. To man there is a succession of acts, one following the other. However, with God one single act ordered all things.

More than the mere order of decrees is involved in the dispute between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. One of the most serious questions raised concerns whether or not God is the author of sin. Christians must be careful to justify the justice of the sovereign God before men in their explanation of the order in God's decree.

There is controversy between the two groups concerning election. A correct interpretation of the order in God's decree is necessary to understand election and reprobation. The word predestination may be equated with election in some places. Is God's election absolute or conditional? It is absolute.

Arminians offer several objections to election. Seven of these objections and answers to them are listed below:

**FIRST:** Arminians say that election is unjust to the nonelect. They do not understand that all men are sinners. Election does not deal simply with creatures, per se, but with sinful, condemned creatures. The question is not whether a father will treat his children alike but whether the sovereign must treat rebels alike. God loves His own without cause (Rom. 9:13). The governor of a state is not bound to pardon all prisoners. The sovereign God has the right to do what He will with whom He will.

**SECOND:** Arminians assert that election represents God as partial and a respecter of persons in His dealing with mankind. However, there is nothing in men that determines God's choice of one rather than another. Their objection is invalid, and they do not understand partiality and the meaning of respecter of persons. Partiality indicates injustice (I Tim. 5:21; James 3:17). Since all sinners deserve no favor, God cannot be unjust to manifest favor to some. Respect of persons is to look upon some with respect to their external privileges without concern for their internal state: "...having men's persons in admiration because of advantage" (Jude 16). Men of lower rank look upon those of higher rank for advantage. However, God looks upon none for benefit because He is above all.

**THIRD:** Arminians attribute arbitrariness to men in their choice of God but deny God's arbitrariness in election. However, there is no standard above God. He is His own standard; therefore, He chose whom He would.

**FOURTH:** Arminians contend that election tends to immorality. They believe that election allows one to live as he pleases. The only persons who advocate that are ignorant that election is "to" holiness of life (Eph. 1:4). The elect who have been regenerated are practically holy.

**FIFTH:** Arminians assert that election inspires pride. Whereas, it has the opposite effect. Recognition of God's saving grace and the doctrine of election leads one to humility. He knows that apart from God's grace he would be like all others outside the ark of safety. The Jews of Christ's day were lifted up with pride and boasted of their national election. They claimed Abraham as their father. The Lord showed them that they would not seek to kill Him and they would do the works of Abraham if they were his spiritual children (John 8:33-40). Anyone who boasts of church affiliation, works, or election may be classified with those unsaved Jews of Christ's day.

**SIXTH:** Arminians oppose unconditional election, or absolute predestination, saying that it discourages effort for the salvation of the impenitent whether on their part or the part of others. They also say that election discourages missions. Contrarily, Divine election is secret so it cannot discourage or hinder effort. Election remains secret until its fruit is reflected in the life of one who has been saved by God's grace. The truth of unconditional election does discourage the idea of propagating a social gospel, and that is something that should be discouraged.

There is a Divine circle in the salvation of a sinner. It proceeds from God and ascends back to God in praise. Election is first in order. It is followed by positional sanctification; then, practical sanctification and one's knowledge of his election. All who were ordained to eternal life will believe (Acts 13:48). Believing is the fruit of Divine ordination. Ordination is in the secret counsel of God. A person does not know who will believe the message when it is proclaimed. Practical sanctification precedes one's knowledge of his election. Therefore, he must diligently study God's word to make his calling and election sure to himself (II Pet. 1:10). The person who is positionally sanctified is

regenerated. He is a new creature in Jesus Christ. As he grows in grace and knowledge, he becomes progressively sanctified and comes to the knowledge of his election in Christ. Instead of discouraging witnessing, election is the ground of encouragement and a stimulus to effort. Without election all would be lost. A person who is one of God's elect and unsure of his relation to God will be driven by the proclamation of God's absolute sovereignty, unconditional election, and absolute predestination to the dust of the earth and will cry, "...if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean" (Luke 5:12).

Instead of discouraging missions, election makes the believer dependent on God. It caused the apostle Paul to say, "Therefore, I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (II Tim. 2:10). God's promise in Acts 27 to save all aboard the ship did not obviate the necessity of their abiding in the ship. When the truth is preached, some will respond. Therefore, the truth of unconditional election encourages witnessing.

**SEVENTH:** Arminians claim that election implies a decree of reprobation. Scripture proves that reprobation is the antithesis to election, but negative and positive reprobation differ. Reprobation is not on the ground of God's foreknowledge of man being a sinner. Sin did not enter the world through reprobation. Reprobates are ordained to condemnation not because of God's foreknowledge but because of their sins. God's election is an act of mercy, and His reprobation is an act of justice.

## COMPARISON OF THE SUPRALAPSARIAN AND INFRALAPSARIAN THEORIES

Supralapsarians and infralapsarians differ in their opinions concerning the order in God's decree. Supralapsarians proceed on the assumption that in God's purpose His thoughts proceed from the end to the means in a retrograde movement; so that which is first in design is last in execution. Whereas, infralapsarians suggest a more historical order. The infralapsarian view of the order of history is correct. The events of the creation, fall, incarnation, cross, resurrection, and pentecost are found in succession in history.

Supralapsarians are correct to magnify God's sovereignty. That which is first in intention is last in execution, and that which is last in execution is first in intention. God's purpose is eternal. The first thing in God's mind was the manifestation of Himself. He decreed to reveal Himself by manifesting His glory through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus stands first in the counsel of God. He is the firstborn of every creature (Col. 1:15), the firstborn from among the dead (Col. 1:18), and the firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29). He is the first because election is in Christ. Therefore, according to God's purpose, the Lord Jesus Christ preceded the elect in God's plan. In that sense, the supralapsarian view is correct. God decreed to manifest Himself--His glory--before He decreed to create man, decreed the fall, decreed to elect some, decreed to pass by some, etc. The last thing in the execution of His plan is the glory of God. The glory of God is His chief intention. Everything is for His glory: salvation of the elect, passing by the nonelect, displaying and bestowing grace, and the kingdom.

Infralapsarians correctly appeal to Scripture for support of some beliefs. Pharaoh already existed when the Lord declared His purpose for raising him up. He was a fallen creature whom God used to manifest His power to the world. The Lord will have mercy on whom He will and will harden whom He will (Rom. 9:18). The potter has power over the clay. The clay refers to the fallen mass of mankind. The apostle indicated a mass of people already created and fallen. From that mass, God elected some and passed by others.

Supralapsarians and infralapsarians both admit that the fall of man was included in the Divine purpose. However, they differ in their explanations of God's permission of sin. Supralapsarians assert that God permits sin, but He decreed to permit it. Some infralapsarians say that He merely permitted it.

The fact of God's permissive decrees according to the will of His counsel propagated by supralapsarians and the erroneous doctrine of mere permission propagated by some infralapsarians vastly differ. The supralapsarians emphasize the positive element to the extent that those who follow the system accuse God of the authorship of sin. Some infralapsarians overemphasize the permissive character of the decree of God until it is reduced to a mere permission.

God does not decree actions that are sinful as sin. Decreeing actions as sinful is not the same as decreeing them for the sake of the sinfulness of the actions. God wills to permit sin because He does permit it. No one can say that God does what He does not will to do. To say that sin exists

when God did not will it to exist would be a denial of the sovereignty of God. The supralapsarian correctly says that God decreed to permit the fall.

Supralapsarians are weak in their explanation of the problem of sin. Some say that God created the evil of sin. Every Arminian will agree that God permits evil, but few want to believe that God decreed to permit evil. Men see and experience evil every day. God does permit evil, but it is not a mere permission. He permits evil not in a passive sense but because He decreed to permit it. How can that be interpreted without making God an accomplice to sin? How does sin come into the world? God is not the author of sin. It comes into the world not directly by God but by secondary causes. To explain it otherwise brings reproach on God.

God's decree to act is not the act itself. God's will of purpose and His will of command differ. He has one will with two parts--secret and revealed. The Lord sees the sphere, but man sees only the hemisphere. Part of it is revealed and part concealed for man's benefit. God's decree is founded in Divine wisdom. It is eternal, efficacious, immutable, absolute, all-comprehensive, and permissible with reference to sin. God does not positively work in man to will and to do that which is evil. Nevertheless, He did purpose to permit that man himself would do evil. One must admit that God's relation to sin remains a mystery.

Men delight in blaming the Creator for their sin. The average view is that man's primitive state was no more than that of a brute; and as the victim of his environment, he sinned inevitably. They say that if perfection will be man's at all, it must lie in the end of his development. They declare that in the terms of the theory of evolution perfection could not be the point of departure.

The Christian message directly opposes the message of the secular and the religious world. Adherence to the average view would destroy human responsibility. According to the wisdom of the world, man does not sin responsibly. Those who preach a social gospel advocate that man cannot help himself because he is a victim of his environment. Hence, they seek to bring about social change. In the final analysis, they blame the Creator with the sin of His creation, and that is blasphemous.

The supralapsarian concept leads to God making eternal punishment and eternal life objects of His will in the same sense. Sin is willed and determined by God but not in the same manner as grace and salvation. There is a relation between sin and the counsel of God, but the relation is not causality. God has allowed sin, but He would not have permitted it if He had not been able to absolutely and sovereignly rule it.

Does God merely permit sin, or did He decree to permit it? Some contend that God simply permitted it as though He could do nothing about it. However, God is on the throne; and whatever takes place in providence occurs by the determinate counsel of God. The death of the Lord Jesus Christ leads one to that conclusion. It cannot be denied that God willed the death of His Son by the hands of wicked men. God was not passive in that. There is what is known as mere permission, but it will not stand the test of Scripture. Therefore, distinction must be made between God merely permitting something and determining in His purpose to permit it.

Supralapsarians and infralapsarians differ concerning the extent of predestination. Supralapsarians include the decree to create and the decree to permit the fall in predestination. Whereas, infralapsarians include the decree to create and the decree to permit the fall in the purpose of God in general, but they do not embrace double predestination. According to the supralapsarian view, man appeared in the decree of predestination not as created and fallen but certain to be created and fallen. According to infralapsarians, man appeared in the decree of predestination as already created and fallen.

Some supralapsarians believe in double predestination. They mistakenly say that God is the chargeable cause of the loss of the lost. Hence, their view makes God the author of sin. Neither the text nor the context of Isaiah 45:7 justifies the view that God created sin. The word sin does not occur in the text or the context of Isaiah 45:7--"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things." The Lord creates not the evil of sin but the evil of punishment for sin. Evil in this verse is used for punishment. As darkness is the privation of light, the evil of punishment is the privation of peace. The contrasted word to evil is not good but peace. This interpretation harmonizes with the text and context. God punishes sin by sending evil to punish sin. Sin is not found among God's creatures in Genesis 1. Nevertheless, the Lord suffers sin and overrules it for the good of His people and for His own glory. Job spoke of God sending the evil of punishment: "...shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil..." (Job 2:10). Amos proclaimed that God brings the evil of punishment on sin as a punishment for sin: "...shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6).

God did not make man to damn him. He is not the chargeable cause of the loss of the lost. God is by no means the origin of moral evil: "...God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (I John 1:5). As darkness does not come from God who is light, the evil of sin does not come from God who is holy. As night is not due to the presence of the sun, sin is not due to the presence of God. As the stench of a dunghill does not come from the sun, the evil of sin does not proceed from the holy God. He tempts no man to evil (James 1:13-14). God does not find men wise, good, and tender and make them foolish, wicked, and hard. He takes men as they are in their depravity and excites them as they are.

There are two aspects of reprobation--negative and positive. When God elected some to salvation, He passed by others. Passing by is negative reprobation. He did not positively condemn those He passed by. In positive reprobation, God condemns a person to punishment for his own sin. Therefore, sin is taken into account in positively reprobating a person.

Pharaoh illustrates positive reprobation. God's action in hardening Pharaoh's heart was His reaction to Pharaoh's action of self-hardening (Ex. 4:21-14:8). Every Scripture reference to God hardening an individual is always associated with the sin of mankind. An illustration is given in Romans 1. God gave people up because of what they had previously done. They had "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things" (Rom 1:23). God reacted to their self-hardening and gave them up to follow their wicked ways. Positive reprobation is always associated with committed sin. God did not predestinate men to hell to the exclusion of their association with sin. To say that God created man to damn him, one would have to ignore the fall, sin, etc. Therefore, double

predestination--in that sense--will not stand the test of Scripture. Reprobates are ordained to condemnation, but they are ordained thereto because of their sin.

Reprobation is not on the ground of God's foresight that man would be a sinner. If it were, all would be reprobated because God saw all men dead in trespasses and sins. Sin did not enter the world from the act of reprobation. If sin came only by reprobation, reprobates alone would have been tempted and fallen. However, Scripture teaches that Adam sinned, and all men sinned in him. Therefore, all fell in Adam (Rom. 5:12).

The temptation and fall were universal. Since all sinned and fell in Adam, universally, all men are sinners by nature. However, the act of reprobation was particular. God selected some and passed by others. Hence, the elect and the reprobate are all under sin. Every person is by nature a child of wrath until he is rescued by grace. Both elect and reprobate are branded as sinners.

Knowledge of those who are elected and those who are reprobated is bound up in the secret things of the Lord. Consequently, the gospel must be preached indiscriminately. It should be preached to sinners as sinners. When God rescues a person by His grace and sets him free, that one rejoices in what the Lord has done for him and manifests through his practical sanctification that he is one whom God elected (I Thess. 1:3-4). Not until then can anyone know who the elected ones are.

Man fell by sin and not by reprobation. Adam did not sin by reprobation. Conversely, he sinned by disobeying God. Adam was not reprobated. If he were, all men would be reprobated in him. Men became sinners in Adam, but they were not reprobated in him.

God's act of passive reprobation is the negative of election. It does not make man a sinner any more than election makes a man a Christian. Election is not salvation. It is to salvation. God created man upright (Eccl. 7:29). He cannot be condemned for His selections. Moreover, He cannot be accused for His rejections. No sinner deserves favor. God is obligated to none. God's election is an act of mercy and not of merit. His positive reprobation is an act of justice. The elect are saved by grace, and the reprobate are lost to justice. God does not wrong one person by showing mercy to another.

The strict supralapsarian view involves a contradiction in the area of reprobation. In that theory, man is not seen as a fallen, sinful creature. Hence, God's primary goal would not be connected with sin. However, one's election in Christ presupposes grace. God decreed to manifest His glory and to elect His own Son to be the Savior of the elect before they were elected in Him. Election in Christ presupposes a need for Christ. A need for Christ presupposes grace. Grace presupposes guilt. Guilt presupposes sin. Sin presupposes the fall. The fall presupposes God's decree to permit the fall. Whatever is executed in time was in order in God's eternal plan.

The following arguments refute the strict supralapsarian view:

**FIRST:** In order of thought, the purpose to save or condemn must follow the purpose of decreeing to create mankind. The latter is presupposed in the former. God neither elects nor passes by nonentities. God will have mercy on whom He will, and He will harden whom He will (Rom. 9:18). Moses exemplified mercy and Pharaoh exemplified hardening. Therefore, both existed in the

mind of the Lord when the decree was formulated in His eternal plan. God was not contemplating nonentities in either those on whom He will have mercy or those whom He hardens.

**SECOND:** Where there is no sin there is no condemnation is a clearly revealed Scriptural principle. There can be no ordination to wrath which does not contemplate its objects as already sinful. Negative and positive reprobation must be distinguished.

**THIRD:** A clearly revealed fact is that Romans 9:9-21 depicts the mass of fallen mankind in a state of depravity out of which some are chosen and others are left in the mass of depraved men. Mankind, which already existed in the purpose of God, was fashioned into vessels of honor and dishonor.

**FOURTH:** Paul's argument concerning God giving men up (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28) proves that positive reprobation is founded on the sinfulness of its objects. God's hardening of an individual is reactionary to man's self-hardening.

**FIFTH:** God's original creation is never presented in the Bible as a means of executing the purpose of either election or reprobation. That does not disprove Proverbs 16:4--"the LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." God did not create sin, but He does not cease to form and multiply the nature that has been defiled by sin. Men continue to be born physically. Regardless of planned parenthood, every person that God ordained to be born will come into the world. He has elected some and passed by others. His designated number of each will be born.

**SIXTH:** The five golden links mentioned in Romans 8:29-30 prove that foreknowledge precedes predestination. God's purpose is executed in human history.

**SEVENTH:** The strict supralapsarian position is inconsistent with the character of God. The authorship of sin must never be charged to God. Therefore, one must be careful not to dishonor the Lord with statements concerning reprobation that will not harmonize with all Scripture.

Men see through a glass darkly (I Cor. 13:12); consequently, the problem of sin cannot be absolutely solved by man. Although God permits sin, that does not answer the problem of sin. He allowed sin to come; and through its coming, He controls it and makes it work for His own glory. Joseph is a Biblical example of God using sin to His own glory. Joseph's brethren thought they were bringing evil on him, but God meant it for his good (Gen. 50:19, 20).

The truth that God controls sin to make it work for His glory and yet He is not the author of sin can never be understood on a horizontal level. Its comprehension cannot be attained through one man reasoning with another. It can be perceived only on a vertical relationship with God through Christ. The wicked hands that nailed Jesus Christ to the cross were moved by the evil in their own hearts. Nevertheless, God turned that evil act into good for His elect and glorified Himself thereby. Only in the context of faith can that be understood, in a vertical relationship with God through Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ was made a sin offering that the elect might be made the righteousness of God in Him (II Cor. 5:21).

## ORDER IN GOD'S DECREE

Order in God's decree does not refer to chronological but logical order. Although God thinks simultaneously, His thinking is orderly. Order in the Godhead does not indicate that any one of the three Persons in the Godhead is inferior to the others. They naturally follow the order of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God formulated His thinking into one orderly plan. For instance, the Father decreed before the foundation of the world to send the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was born and lived on earth 33 years. Many events occurred in systematic order during that time. He was born of the virgin, grew from childhood to manhood, walked among the sons of men, spoke to the people, performed miracles, went to the cross, died, was buried, arose from the dead, and ascended to the right hand of the Father. There were progressive stages in His life; nevertheless, in the mind of the infinite God, all was simultaneous in the order mentioned.

God decreed all things harmoniously. In God's decree, order is the natural consequence. When God decreed to create the earth, He decreed to create man to inhabit the earth. When He decreed to elect some to salvation in Christ, He decreed their calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification. When God decreed to answer prayer, He decreed that people pray. When He decreed the preaching of the gospel, He decreed to convert some by means of the gospel.

Thinking and purposing are attributes of rational beings. Unless order prevails in an individual's life, confusion will prevail. Confused individuals are either minus grace or they are uninformed in God's word. Confusion over gifts in the assembly at Corinth resulted from improper instruction. The apostle Paul warned them against the confusion and reminded them that God is the God of order, not of confusion (I Cor. 14:33,40).

There is order in God's purpose and in His execution of it. The fulfillment of God's purpose manifests the beauty of all His perfections. The completion of God's intention in providence often seems to run contrary to His purpose. Nevertheless, like a watch with its wheels running contrary to one another and yet fulfilling the intent of the watchmaker to show the time, some men go one way in the power of grace and others go the other way in the power of natural depravity to accomplish God's will.

One who believes the Bible must embrace the truth that God predestinated the fall of man. Those who believe that God is absolutely sovereign believe, teach, and preach because they embrace the truth that God predestinated the fall of man. If He had not decreed it, man's fall could not have occurred. Nothing happens that God did not plan. To deny that is to deny some of God's attributes. He could not be omniscient if everything is not happening as He planned. Those who want to tone down the truth that God predestinated the fall raise the question, Was the fall merely the object of Divine foreknowledge? They distinguish foreordination in reality from foreknowledge and predestination.

The fall could not have occurred if God had not decreed it. He created man morally correct. Man fell by his own disobedience. Sin came into the world of mankind not by God's direct, creative

act but by secondary means--Adam's disobedience in the garden of Eden. Whatever God creates must be inferior to Himself. Consequently, man's uprightness was not absolute.

There is a decree that precedes the order of decrees in the salvation and reprobation of men. Some believe that God decreed to choose some to salvation and reprobate others before He decreed to create man and to permit the fall. However, that assumption will not harmonize with all the Scriptures. Even before the foundation of the world God decreed to manifest His glory. The means by which He would manifest it would be by creating the heavens, the earth, and man. He then decreed to permit the fall.

God's decree to manifest His glory teaches men how much in the decree of predestination should be considered before and after the creation and fall of man. God's decree is not that one precedes another in the order of time because all are from eternity (Job 23:13). However, man must form an idea of one preceding another inasmuch as God decreed one thing out of respect to another decree. One decree becomes the foundation of another. God's decree to manifest His glory became the foundation for the decree to create man. His decree to create man became the foundation of placing man in the world. Placing man in the world became the foundation of His decree to permit the fall, etc.

The first of two ways in which Divine decrees may be said to be one after another is that the means of obtaining good precede the good. The Lord Jesus Christ was chosen, and the children of God were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). There is no time with God. The Lord Jesus Christ was first chosen to be the Savior and Mediator (Is. 40:1-11). He was chosen of God and precious (I Pet. 2:4). He was foreordained before the foundation of the world (I Pet. 1:20). In that sense, He became the foundation of God's choice of the elect in Him before the foundation of the world. Therefore, when some men were elected to be recipients of some good, the means by which they experience that good was first decreed.

The second way in which Divine decrees may be said to be one after another is that one thing decreed becomes the foundation of another. Hence, the significance of God's punishment of a reprobate person is determined by that man's sinfulness. The reprobate's sinfulness is the foundation of his punishment. When God elected some, He passed by others in His thought. That is negative reprobation. Men are positively reprobated because of their sin.

God's choice of some and reprobation of others differ. While punishment is grounded on sin, grace is not grounded on faith. Punishment presupposes sin, but grace does not presuppose faith. Many assume that they may attain blessing from God by their natural faith. However, faith that places one in the blessing of God is God's gift to the individual. It is not natural but supernatural faith. It is not the kind of faith that enables one to step on an elevator believing it will transfer him safely to another floor. No person can enter the blessings of God's grace through natural faith. Faith is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). Manifestation of faith by an individual is the fruit of God's work which was wrought in his heart when the Holy Spirit applied the redemptive work of Jesus Christ to his heart.

Today God's love is emphasized by men to the neglect of His other attributes. He is not only a God of love but of wrath. His is a holy hatred. God is as perfect in His wrath as He is in His mercy.

He so hates sin that He cannot look upon it. That is the reason the Father turned His back on His Son as He bore the sins imputed to Him on the cross.

Sin is willed by God but not in the same manner that He wills grace and salvation. As He permits it, sin cannot be contrary to His will. One cannot say that God permits what He cannot prevent. To say that God merely permitted sin does not answer the problem of sin. It only pushes the problem one stage further back. In relation to God, nonintervention and noninterference must be positive and not helpless, frustrated inaction. However, foreordination does not in any way make God the author of sin. The chargeable cause of sin is the sinner. Man sins responsibly. His environment does not cause him to sin. There is enough revelation of God in nature alone to make every person inexcusable before the Lord (Rom. 1:20).

The acts of time are the acts of God's plan decreed before time. The decrees must be understood in the same order in which they are executed in time. If that is not true with the cause of the acts, how can it be true of the acts themselves? The acts of God's will in time were purposed in eternity.

Each act in the execution of God's will is the basis for the act to follow. The order of the restorative acts of God (Gen. 1) shows that each prepared for that which followed. God created the heavens and the earth perfect. A great catastrophe occurred and the earth became formless and void. God called forth light. Then there were six days of restoration, preparing the earth which was created for man for his habitation. The vegetable and animal kingdoms were brought into existence for man. On the sixth day God created man to inhabit the place prepared for him.

Every act in the life of Israel prepared for the next. Joseph was sold into Egypt. Through famine the Lord drove Israel into Egypt. They suffered at the hands of taskmasters and cried to God for deliverance. Those things occurred in Israel's history to bring them to the end of themselves. No person desires the mercy of God until he has been brought to the end of himself. God delivered Israel. They then wandered in the wilderness and were finally brought to the land of Canaan. Each event in their lives was the foundation of the one to follow.

As God had a plan in creation and in the life of Israel, He has a plan for the salvation of the individuals He has chosen in Jesus Christ. One who experiences the grace of God must consider the preparation for that salvation. God the Father planned it, God the Son purchased it when He died on the cross, and the Holy Spirit applies it in time. The Lord provides righteousness which was wrought out by the death of Jesus Christ for the elect sinner. All those things were prepared for the time when the elect sinner would experience the grace of God.

In the life of the believer, there is saving and sustaining grace; and there will be glorifying grace (Rom. 8:28-30). God does not begin something He is incapable of completing. God's act of giving righteousness is followed by an act of rewarding righteousness. Both giving and rewarding presuppose God's provision of righteousness.

God spoke to Moses and gave him dimensions for the erection of the tabernacle with all its vessels to be used in ceremonial worship. After the plan was given, everything was built according

to God's specifications. Neither Moses nor the children of Israel were at liberty to change or omit one thing. The tabernacle with all its vessels must be as the Lord declared for Israel to be blessed.

God has a required order for worship. Anything added or subtracted prevents a person from worshipping. God must be approached in the order He has given. Man must embrace God's plan for worship and not try to formulate one of his own.

There is order in the plan that God decreed before the foundation of the world, and there is order in the execution of His decree. The order of execution is identical with the plan itself.