

GOD'S DECREE

A person is what they believe. That's fairly well true, isn't it? What you believe determines your lifestyle. Down through the centuries we have all been split up into various groups. Whether you are a Protestant or a Catholic, a Jew or a Muslim, black or white, whether you speak English or whether you speak another language, whether you are educated or you're not ... the list is almost endless! It's how we survive, but our groupings identify to us who we are. ... And we are *comfortable* with our own kind!

Of course, when you become a Christian the 'groupings legacy' continues. You are either a Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Anglican, etc. etc. ... Even then, the groupings continue: are you an independent Baptist, or a Free Will Baptist, or a Reformed Baptist; are you a pre-post-a-millennial; do you believe the gifts of the Spirit are for today or not; are you a Calvinist or an Arminian; are you an infant baptizer? If you are a premillennial, are you pre-mid- or post-tribulationist? Even if you are what they call a Calvinist are you an Amyraldian, a preteritionist, an infra- or a supra-lapsarian. *Theologically mind-boggling!*

But the area of Christian doctrine is the most damaged field within Christianity today. Many 'upstarts' with little or no training wreak havoc with a little piece of knowledge they have conjured up into some system of *deformed* theology. Would you ever think of placing an unlearned person into the job of a nuclear scientist? No, you wouldn't. Well, the doctrines upon which our faith is founded require a more steady pursuit of Scripture than anything any other job or calling requires.

This is God's Truth and must be handled in the most careful and correct way. How do we ensure we handle it as such?

Firstly and most importantly, God has gifted us with the Scriptures and the miracle of their preservation. The Bible is the foundation of our system for belief.

Secondly, the history of the witness of the great Councils of the Church. I cannot think of a single heresy or issue that the old Councils have not confronted, in some form or other. Doctrine and social issues akin to our own today have been around for centuries under various disguises.

Thirdly, there is the faithful witness of tried and tested men of God. They have argued and articulated over the great points of doctrine ... and their unanimity on the foundational matters is all due to the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit.

So, the basis upon which the Reformed Faith is founded is solely upon the Word of God, as it has been passed down to us by faithful men of the Word.

It is a small chapter again in our *Baptist Confession of Faith (1689)*, so I'll read it all. ... **God's Decree.**

THE FAIRNESS OF GOD'S DECREE

- * Bishop J.C. Ryle of Liverpool said, "The believer who knows his own heart will ever bless God for election".
- * This doctrine is the basis of my faith. All that I believe is grounded in the doctrine of God's eternal decree.
- * Why wasn't I born in an African jungle with little or nothing to eat everyday? Why wasn't I born in a country where I would have been brought up as a Muslim or a Buddhist?
- * Why was I born into a family in which I would be brought along to an evangelical church and Sunday School and missions? Why was it that Christ should save me when I was only a young boy of eleven? Why has the Lord called me into the pastorate? Why is it He has me pastoring a church in Scotland, rather than in my own home country? *Why?*
- * ... *God saw to it* that I wasn't born in an African jungle, or in a Muslim or a Buddhist family.
- * ... God saw to it that I would be brought up where I would hear the Gospel ... and where I would come to a saving faith.

- * ... God saw to it that I would be called into the pastorate ... and God saw to it that He would use me in the work of His Church in Scotland
- * ... God saw to it all ... *for He planned it!*
- * What can I boast of? Can I boast that I chose to be born into a Christian family? Can I boast that it wasn't Muslim or Buddhist?
- * Can I boast that I chose to go along to the children's meeting where I was saved?
- * Can I boast that I studied so hard at College that the Lord had no choice but to use me?
- * Can I boast that I worked my way round you folk so that you would call me to be your pastor?
- * Can I boast that I chose a good wife?
- * No, I can boast in none of it. The Bible says, [Prov. 16:9 A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.](#) The Lord has led me to where I am today.
- * God is so good; aye, but then some people ask, is He fair? I believe God is *more* than fair. What ever *possessed* Him to look upon *anyone* stained and laden with sin that He would draw up a plan for their salvation!
- * Why would the holy, righteous, perfect God ever want to save anybody? Why would He pick you up in all your sin and wash you thoroughly with the blood of Christ? Why would He do it!?
- * Did He need to? Would He be missing out on something if He hadn't? Did He reach down and pick you up and begin dealing with your soul because you cried out to Him ... and He heard you?
 - * ... I'll tell you how the Bible says you were before He came along: you were dead in trespasses and in sins ... as dead as dead could be, spiritually speaking.
- * Dead people don't speak, dead people don't listen, dead people don't hear. You could shout at them, beat them, kick them ... and all you'll get is *no response*.
- * What happened then to save you? God, by the Holy Spirit, breathed into your heart and you were born again. *That's what happened.*

- * The devil hates the Truth, so he comes along and he tries to take some of the glory away from God; he tells you that God *knew* you were going to choose Him ... and that is how and why He chose you first.
- * No, God *knew* it before you knew it, because God decreed it! You and I love Him, because He first loved us.
- * God's decree is altogether **fair**, because without it *no-one* would ever be saved.

THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S DECREE

- * Many of you have children whom you brought along to church and Sunday School. Some of them have now stopped, and have no place for God in their lives.
- * Is it a matter of 'forcing' them back into church so that the preacher can press them into 'making a decision' which would only last for a time?
- * The Gospel contained in our *Baptist Confession of Faith* teaches otherwise.
- * Yes, by every means possible *constrain* them to come where they would hear the Gospel ... but in **the fullness of God's decree** He has stopped many a sinner in the workplace ... He has got them out of their bed at night ... He has interrupted them and saved them when there has been no church or no pastor!
- * It is not the pastor or the church or the preaching that saves ... but it is the eternal decree of Almighty God to enter into a person's life and bring them to Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit that saves and keeps them!
- * It is God's work, - all of it, every part of it. We can bring the person to church, we can tell them about Christ ... and still they would be hard; but it's the Holy Spirit who convinces them of their sin, convicts them and gloriously saves them.
- * These are the Elect whom He has appointed to Glory. These are the people for whom Christ died. Someone has said that in the election of man to salvation, God has the only vote! Yes, God makes the distinction.

- * Never lose heart that your loved one can be saved. God can save them wherever and whenever. His Spirit is most powerful than any preacher, and His presence enters into every situation.
- * The sinner whom God will save can run ... but they can never hide. *God will ultimately save all those whom He has eternally decreed.*
- * Not one drop of His precious blood was shed in vain, - every particle of His blood was expended to purchase the Redeemed of the Lord, chosen according to His eternal decree from before the foundation of the world.
- * Such was the fullness and the enormity of God's decree.
- * ... **The fairness of God's decree, the fullness of God's decree ...**

THE FRUIT OF GOD'S DECREE

- * God doesn't grow rotten fruit in His orchard! He doesn't grow fruit that becomes mouldy and dies. *All that God does, He does well ... and He does to last!*
- * The Bible describes Him sometimes as a 'husbandman'. Jesus described His Father in this way; James also (5:7), [Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it.](#)
- * When the husbandman sees anything starting to harm or eat into the fruit ... he's there tending it and looking after it.
- * Our God is a 'husbandman', He cares specifically for those who are His. Yes, of course, there are the winds and the rains and the storms ... but through them all He looks out for His own.
- * ... So that when it comes to harvest-time He gathers in the bountiful crop. (By the way, have you ever heard of a ripe apple in an orchard falling to the ground, seeing a box full of other apples, skipping along the ground, jumping up into the box, and altogether they carry themselves into the storehouse, - not at all, a daft idea!)
- * Of all the fruit, *He will gather in* that which is His. He won't pick from the tree of another, - only from His own tree! The tree that He has nourished and watched.

- * We've got to be careful though, the *Confession of Faith* warns us to be prudent as it describes "the high mystery of predestination". It needs to be handled with caution and care.
- * And look at something else it says that is being proven even in our own day, "... predestination will promote the praise of God, and reverential awe and wonder".
- * Where the doctrine of **God's decree** is not being preached there is an irreverence, and a disrespect in worship ... how can there be anything else when God's position has been toppled by a scurrilous doctrine of man's works!

Conclusion

- * What I am saying these evening is totally and firmly based upon Baptist doctrine, - this is according to our Confession of Faith. But also let me tell you what other great men of God have said:
 - * Martin Luther, "The saved are singled out not by their own merits, but by the grace of the Mediator".
 - * George Whitefield, "Let a man go to the grammar school of faith and repentance before he goes to the university of election and predestination".
 - * J.C. Ryle, "Those whom God chooses out of mankind, He chooses not only that they might be saved, but that they may bear fruit, and fruit that can be seen. All other election beside this is a mere vain delusion, and a miserable invention of man".
 - * John Owen, "Christ did not die for any upon condition; but He died for all God's elect, that they should believe".
 - * Thomas Watson, "God's call is founded upon His decree, and His decree is immutable".
 - * Richard Sibbes calculates it simply, "We had a Saviour before we were born".
- * **The fairness of God's decree, the fullness of God's decree, the fruit of God's decree.**
- * It's beautiful, then, what our *Confession of Faith* teaches, "[The doctrine of God's decree] will encourage humility and diligence, and bring much comfort to all who sincerely obey the Gospel".