

# UNIT 1: The Attributes of God

## Section 15: God's Decrees and Freedom

*Assigned Reading:*  
A. W. Pink – *The Attributes of God*  
*The Decrees of God*

### Introduction:

Having discussed God's Supremacy and Sovereignty as outworking of God's "Infinite," we now turn our attention to God's Decrees or more properly said God's Decree. By this we mean to emphasize that God has determined from all eternity all that will come to pass in one comprehensive eternal plan. As **Culver** aptly notes, "Nothing in the scheme of Christian doctrine is so offensive to the secular spirit or so preposterous to the unbelieving mind as to propose that God has a plan for the whole universe down to such minute details as the hairs on one's head or the death of a sparrow and is unfailingly executing the same." As we looked at last week, **Spurgeon** declared sinful people will tolerate God being everywhere except His throne. We look a little more to the outworking of God's Supremacy and Sovereignty, looking specifically to God's decisions!

Possibly it might be best for us to begin by contemplating what would be the case without a thoroughgoing confidence that God has decreed all things. Were this the case, what confidence would we have that God will emerge victorious? Would we have any foundation for hope? As **Pink** rightly explains, "To deny the Divine decrees would be to predicate a world and all its concerns regulated by *undesigned* chance or blind fate. What peace, what assurance, what comfort would there be to fly to in the hour of need and trial? None at all." So, from the outset, we ought to praise the Lord for having so ordered all of Creation. All events and occurrences are rightly understood as products of God's decree. Far from being merely some intellectual exercise which we find difficult to comprehend, it is here that we have true peace, comfort, and hope! As **Rom 8:28** states, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose."

**Q1:** *What do we mean by God's Decree?*

**Q2:** *What are rightly objects of God's Decree (how far does God's Decree extend)?*

**Q3:** *How do we understand God "willing" things?*

### Outline:

#### **I. Defining Terms...**

##### *A. God's Decree*

1. **Pink**, "The decree of God is His purpose or determination with respect to future things. We have used the singular number as Scripture does (**Rom 8:28, Eph 3:11**) because there was only one act of His infinite mind about future things. But *we* speak as if there had been many, because our minds are only capable of thinking of *successive* revolutions, as thoughts and occasions arise, or in reference to the various *objects* of His decree, which being many seem to us to require a distinct purpose for each one. But an infinite understanding does not proceed by steps, from one stage to another: 'Known unto God are *all* His works, from the beginning of the world' (**Acts 15:18**)"

2. **Grudem** speaks of this as God's Will and defines it as "the attribute of God whereby He approves and determines to bring about every action necessary for the existence and activity of Himself and all creation."
3. **Erikson** makes a distinction between "foreordain" and "predestinate" – using foreordain to mean "God's decisions with respect to any matters with the realm of history" and predestinate to refer to "the eternal condition and destiny of moral agents." He defines God's Plan as "God's eternal decision rendering certain all things that will come to pass."
4. **Culver** explains (1) God planned the world (2) God created the world (3) God sustains the world and (4) God governs the world. – *this is where our assurance stems from!*

### B. God's Freedom

1. **Grudem**, "the attribute of God whereby He does whatever He pleases."
2. **Nothing in all creation can hinder God from doing what He wants!** He is under no authority or restraint from any external force.
3. Some theologians speak of God's *necessary will* and *free will*
  - a. By necessary they mean: everything that God must will according to His own nature – for example, that "God wills Himself" – He eternally wills to be...
  - b. God's "free will" includes all things that God decided to will but had no necessity according to His nature – this includes God's decision to create and all the particulars of that creation... In other words, there were not any "necessary causes" for God's creation or redemption! God is truly free to create or not, redeem or not.
4. **What is the reason God created all and redeems some?** It was God's totally free will (working in a way consistent with His character) that was the final reason why He chose to create the world and to save sinners.
5. **There was no external or internal compulsion forcing God's decisions...**
  - a. **Ex) Just because God is All-Powerful does not mean He must do all He can!**
  - b. **God is not "enslaved" to His attributes in this sense... He freely chooses!**

## II. The Witness of the Scriptures...

### A. Decree:

1. **OT**
  - a. **Isaiah 14:27** "For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate *it*? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?"
  - b. **The building of reservoirs: Is 22:11** And you made a reservoir between the two walls For the waters of the old pool. But you did not depend on Him who made it, Nor did you take into consideration Him who planned it long ago.
  - c. **The destruction wrecked by the King of Assyria: Is 37:26** "Have you not heard? Long ago I did it, From ancient times I planned it. Now I have brought it to pass, That you should turn fortified cities into ruinous heaps.
  - d. **Coming destruction for Babylon: Isaiah 46:10-11** Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; <sup>11</sup> Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned *it*, *surely* I will do it.
  - e. **Prov 16:33** The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.
  - f. **Prov 19:21** Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand.

- g. **Read Ps 121 – confidence in the Lord’s goodness, provision and protection!**
  - h. *For all these reasons: the prophets could speak w/ boldness – God had revealed what He had planned from all eternity!*
2. **NT**
- a. *Fall of Jerusalem: Luke 21:20-21* "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. <sup>21</sup> "Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city;
  - b. *Betrayal by Judas: Matt 26:24, Mark 14:21, Luke 22:22, John 17:12*
  - c. *Paul’s Calling: Gal 1:15* But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased

### B. Freedom:

1. **Psalm 115:3** But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.
2. **Proverbs 21:1** The king’s heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.
3. **Daniel 4:35** "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'
4. **Isaiah 46:10** Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';
5. **Isaiah 48:14** "Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he will carry out His good pleasure on Babylon, And His arm *will be against* the Chaldeans.
6. **Philippians 2:13** for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

## III. Discussing God’s Decrees...

### A. Types of Willing...

1. Revealed vs Secret
  - a. **Deuteronomy 29:29** "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.
  - b. Even in our own experience we are able to will some things secretly and only later make that will known to others... at times we speak of our intentions before the event occurs, while at others not until the event has happened.
2. **Revealed Will or Will of Precept/Command**
  - a. This is that part of God’s will that He has declared to us...
  - b. It includes statements clarifying what God has done in the past as well as prophetic statements of what God will do in the future, but is most often associated with God’s will of what we should do or what we are commanded to do.
  - c. This is most often concerned with the “moral will” ... what God desires!
3. **Secret Will or Will of Decree**
  - a. By this we mean to describe God’s hidden decrees by which He governs the universe and determines all that occurs.

- b. Besides in the event of prophetic revelation, these events are unknown to us, and are therefore “secret/hidden.” We know them as they actually happen.
- c. This includes “sinful actions” – all events that actually occur...
- 4. **NOTE:** The Bible does not speak of the “individual will of God” in the sense of trying to find the mystical thing that God wants me to do, without explicitly telling me to do it...
- 5. **Grudem** gives excellent examples of these “types of willing” in interpretation:
  - a. **Jesus in the “Model Prayer”**
    - (1) **Matt 6:10** 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.
    - (2) Certainly, Jesus is praying that God’s revealed will be followed by men on earth, as it is followed by the elect angels in heaven, for certainly the “secret will” is going to be accomplished. If speaking of the “secret will” this prayer could be reduced to “may what is going to happen, happen.”
    - (3) Also, since the “secret will” is not revealed to us, we do not know how to pray according to this... therefore, our prayer would lack content. On the other hand, praying that God’s revealed will be followed on earth is full of content!
    - (4) This “example” provides us with every impetuous for praying in accordance with what we find in the scriptures. We are to pray in line with the revealed will .
  - b. **Jesus in speaking of those “Entering the Kingdom of Heaven”**
    - (1) **Matt 7:21** "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*."
    - (2) **Again**, obviously this is not speaking of God’s secret will of decree, for everyone in this sense does the “will of the Father.” Jesus is referring to those who live in accordance with Gods’ revealed will of precept.
    - (3) **Other Examples:**
      - **Eph 5:17** So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
      - **1 John 5:14** This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.
  - c. **Scriptures describing God’s “desire” that men be saved...**
    - (1) **1 Timothy 2:4** who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
    - (2) **2 Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.
    - (3) *We know that not all will be saved... there will be a final judgment... Again, Jesus’ words, Matthew 7:13* "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. <sup>14</sup> "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."
    - (4) So certainly these verses are not speaking of God’s will of decree, but instead of His revealed/moral will – His command that men repent and believe in Jesus! **Acts 17:30** "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, <sup>31</sup> because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

- d. **On the other hand:** There are passages best understood as describing God's secret will – will of decree...
- (1) **James 4:15** Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." – *Trusting God's "secret will" is a statement of humble dependence upon God over against arrogant pride and presumption.*
  - (2) **1 Corinthians 4:19** But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power. – *Paul submits his plans to the secret will of God... He knows that it is in accordance with God's revealed will...*
  - (3) **1 Peter 3:17** For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. – *suffering as part of God's decree for Christians – see Phil 1:29*
  - (4) **Matthew 11:25-26** At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.<sup>26</sup> "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight (your gracious will). – *The Father willed by decree who would understand the truths of the Kingdom of God...*
  - (5) **Romans 9:18** So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. – God's secret will of decree...
  - (6) **See God's choice: 1 Corinthians 1:26-30** For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;<sup>27</sup> but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,<sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,<sup>29</sup> so that no man may boast before God.<sup>30</sup> But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, - *More on this element of "God's will" when we speak of Soteriology.*

## B. The Quality of God's Decree:

1. **Comprehensive**
  - a. **Pink**, "The decrees of God relate to all future things without exception: whatever is done in time was foreordained before time began."
  - b. **It extends to all creatures and all events!**
  - c. **See Matt 6:24-34**
  - d. **Matt 10:28-32** "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.<sup>29</sup> "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And *yet* not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.<sup>30</sup> "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.<sup>31</sup> "So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.
2. **Eternal, Absolute, and Unconditional**
  - a. **Isaiah 46:10** Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'
  - b. **Psalms 33:11** The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation
  - c. **Lit** "of the Lamb, the one being slain from the foundation of the earth." **Rev 13:8**

- d. *In Salvation- Ephesians 1:4* just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love **1:9** He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him, **1:11** also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, **3:11** *This was* in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,
  - e. While events unfold in time, they have been planned in eternity!
    - (1) There was no temporal sequence to God's willing – one coherent simultaneous decision – *although discussion is had regarding the “logical order” of decrees...*
    - (2) There are no unforeseen events to God – He has planned all things from eternity!
    - (3) God is in no way ignorant – He perfectly knows of all things, including the actions executed by human decisions (see this repeatedly in fulfilled prophecy).
    - (4) God has decreed both “ends and means” – He not only decreed the salvation of the elect, but also the means by which they would be saved...
    - (5) **2 Timothy 1:9-10** who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, <sup>10</sup> but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel
    - (6) **2 Thessalonians 2:13** But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.
3. **Wise**
- a. God's decree is in no way “capricious”... All of His works manifest His wisdom!
  - b. **God's decisions are in no way arbitrary or haphazard!**
  - c. **Psalm 104:24** O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; The earth is full of Your possessions.
  - d. While we only observe and contemplate a small portion of what God has done, even the portion we observe is enough for us to be in awe and wonder of God's wisdom!
  - e. **Pink**, “He who perceives the workings of admirable skill in the parts of a machine which he has an opportunity to examine, is naturally led to believe that the other parts are equally admirable... When we reach the bounds of the finite and gaze toward the mysterious realm of the infinite, let us exclaim... **Romans 11:33** Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!
4. **Erickson notes:** God's decree “relates to His actions rather than His nature. He does not “decide” to be loving and powerful, for example. He is loving and powerful simply by virtue of being God.” – *God is His attributes!*
5. **God's plan renders certain that humans will freely act in ordained ways.**

### C. Does God's Decree Include Evil?

- 1. *Yes...*
  - a. **Amos 3:6** If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?
  - b. **Isaiah 45:7** The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.

- c. **Joseph: Genesis 50:20** "As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.
  - d. **Jesus' Crucifixion: Acts 2:23** this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. **Acts 4:27** "For truly in this city there and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod,<sup>28</sup> to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.
2. *Clarification*
- a. The Scriptures are emphatic regarding the following 2 clarifications:
    - (1) God is not the author of evil, performs no evil, and is responsible for no evil...
      - ***God Alone is purely good: Luke 18:19*** And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.
      - ***God does not delight in the death of the wicked: Ezekiel 33:11*** "Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'\
      - ***Pink***, "God's purpose was concerned with everything, whether great or small, whether good or evil, although with reference to the latter we must be careful to state that while God is the Orderer and Controller of sin, He is *not* the Author of it in the same way that He is the Author of good. Sin could not proceed from a holy God by positive and direct creation, but only by decretive permission and negative action.
      - ***To deny God's "permissive" decree in regards to evil is to believe that evil is independent of God – DUALISM...***
      - ***Culver***, "Why God permitted Satan to tempt Eve, why He allowed evil at all is, of course, never explained in the Bible, though the plain fact is that God not only did not prevent it, He put it in His plan. To allow sin *now* is only an extension of the decree to allow sin in the first place."
    - (2) Man is responsible for his sin
      - *You see in the Scriptures above (Gen 50:20, Acts 2:23, 4:27) that the Bible does not hesitate to explain that evil occurs by God's Decree, but in no way is He to be blamed for the sinful actions of human beings – they bear their own guilt before God for their sinful behavior.*
      - Elements of this may remain a mystery to us... But we must not lessen the Scriptural Proclamation of either God's Decree or Man's Responsibility!
      - People do the things that they desire and are responsible for those actions!
      - ***Culver***, "A person can be as free as the Bible says he is (not an absolute freedom by any means), and yet acting out God's decree, without introducing a conflict in the mind of Jesus or Peter. Who is he who supposes himself more rational or insightful or just than they?"

#### *D. Practical Importance:*

1. **Comfort for Christians (already noted above)**
2. **Foundation for Science: Culver**, "It was Christian thinkers (late Renaissance and Reformation times) with their roots in biblical revelation who gave science its theoretical support." – R. Hooykaas book entitled – *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science*
3. **God is over the history of nations! Acts 17:24,26**

4. **God exercises oversight and authority over all... *all is subservient to Him!***
5. **All of the Circumstances we undergo are by God's Sovereign Plan!**