

Divine Decree

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD
&
FREE CHOICE

RELATIONSHIP OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD TO THE DECREE

1. God's knowledge can be divided into two or three categories, depending on one's view of human free agency. Theological systems that reject libertarian agency commonly distinguish God's knowledge into two species: necessary or natural knowledge and free or consequent knowledge. Some who hold to libertarian agency, and currently a few compatibilists, posit a third species, middle knowledge, between the aforementioned categories.
2. The decree was eternally formed when God chose, out of His natural knowledge, by an act of His perfect will, based upon his wise counsel, what He wanted to bring into realization, and, thus, formed His eternal purpose
3. The decree is the foundation of God's Free Knowledge.
4. God's knowledge and providential governance is certain. (Is. 46:8-11; Acts 2:23)

TYPES OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

1. Necessary or Natural Knowledge

- a. *Definition:* Absolute, unbounded, unqualified knowledge that God has necessarily according to His nature and by which God perfectly knows Himself and the whole range of possibilities.
- b. It is an *antecedent* knowledge that logically precedes the eternal decrees.

2. Free or Consequent Knowledge

- a. *Definition:* Free knowledge is knowledge of all actual things brought freely into existence by the divine will operating within the range of possibility perfectly known to God.
- b. It is a *consequent* knowledge resting on the divine will.
- c. Nothing is outside of God's knowledge because all things rest on the divine will.
- d. Contingent events belong in the realm of the permissive willing of God and the providential concurrence of God.

TYPES OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

1. *Middle Knowledge*

a. *Selected Definitions*

- (1) Middle knowledge is conditioned and consequent knowledge of future contingents by which God knows of an event because of its occurrence. It is a type of knowledge that is consequent on, and causally independent of, events in the created world. The results of free choice condition the divine will and God's activities in the creation (*opera ad extra*).
- (2) Middle knowledge is the knowledge God has of what every free creature would freely do in every possible situation.
- (3) Middle knowledge is divine knowledge of conditional future contingent events, that is, of what persons will freely do under any possible set of circumstances. On this, God can arrange for human acts to occur by prearranging the circumstances surrounding the choice without determining the human will.
- (4) Middle knowledge is the kind of knowledge where God knows what each creature would do in each situation of libertarian free choice in which it could possibly find itself.

THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL AS IT RELATES TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

1. The Nature of Practical Freedom—Two Key Elements

- a. The first element is the absence of absolute or hard determinism, which holds that all events are the inevitable consequences of antecedent sufficient or efficient causes. Hard or Absolute Determinists deny the possibility of free will or free choice.
- b. The second element is that the free choices and acts are those of the agent, that is, that the free agent is the efficient cause of the movement of the will.

2. The Various Views of Free Choice

a. Determinism (Hard or Absolute)

- (1) One event *determines* another if the latter is a consequence of it or necessitated by it.
- (2) Every event or state of affairs is brought about by antecedent events and states of affairs in accordance with universal causal laws that govern the world.

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(3) Determinism implies that the future is fixed and there is no possibility of alternative development.

(4) Hard Determinists hold that since human choices are causally determined by antecedent, external causes, including the immediate efficient causation of the will by external causes, genuine freedom is an illusion.

(5) Hard Determinists explicitly reject the notion of free will or free choice.

(6) Hard Determinists reject the idea of secondary free causes.

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b. *Libertarianism*

- (1) Free choice is determined or efficiently caused by an agent who is not caused by an external efficient cause.
- (2) The idea of the counterfactuals of freedom is affirmed in this view as necessary to preserve genuine freedom.
- (3) Regarding the definition of counterfactuals, the definition employed in the theological discussion of the free will or free choice question is “an action is free only if the agent could or would have done *otherwise* if he had wanted to.”
- (4) Thus, the subjunctive (possible) becomes the indicative (reality) based on the free operation of the self-moved will. And the agent could always choose otherwise.

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a. *Compatibilism (Soft Determinism)*

(1) In agreement with Libertarianism, Compatibilism affirms that practical freedom means being able to do what one desires without external causation (i.e., immediate, efficient causation) of the will. Thus, what one wants—as expressed by one’s personality, character or antecedent and concurrent circumstances and conditions—is determined by external events such as genetics, culture, or upbringing, but as long as the agent is able to act consistently with the choices made and the will is self-moved or self-caused, not caused by an external efficient cause, the agent is free.

(2) This position is called Compatibilism or “Soft Determinism” because it, like hard determinism, acknowledges that all events, including human free choices, have causes and are certain to occur and cannot be otherwise. However, soft determinism allows for free actions when the actions are self-caused by one’s own choices rather than external causes (i.e., an external, immediate efficient cause).

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(3) Thus, in this view the idea of practical freedom and responsibility is consistent or compatible with the concept of determinism, which is understood as every event being caused and rendered certain to occur in advance. Here, liberty is the power of doing or refraining from doing an action according to what one wills, *so that by choosing otherwise, one would have done otherwise*. Agents fail to have liberty when either prevented from acting as one chooses or compelled to act in a manner contrary to what one wills.

(4) Regarding compatibilism and causation, Reformed theologians such Richard Muller define free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) as the will being “free from external constraint (*coactio*) [i.e., co-action] and from an imposed necessity” and the “will itself [i]s the sole efficient cause of its choice.” Thus, the choice is efficiently caused by the agent choosing and not by any external agent acting upon the one choosing as the immediate, efficient cause of the choice.

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1. Additional Theological Considerations for a Free Choice Analysis

a. *Seven Factors*: The free choice question regarding how one is to distribute liberty and necessity is often divided into six or more theological sub-categories or headings, that is, one considers the question with regard to:

(1) External Agents

(2) Material and Internal Causes

(3) God

(4) The Practical Intellect

(5) The Goodness or Evil of the Object

(6) The Event Itself

(7) Existence

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- b. *Clarifying the Type of Cause:* Some theologians and philosophers use the term “cause” without a qualifying adjective, such as “efficient,” “impelling,” “proximate,” or “material” and can leave the reader perplexed about what the author intended to communicate. These notions require clarification. Specifically, one needs to clarify who or what is the “efficient cause” of a choice and the role of the external agent in the choice.

- c. *Coaction:* Finally, an important theological issue in the discussion regarding practical freedom is the notion of liberty and necessity of coaction by an external agent.

DEFINITIONS OF CONTINGENCY & NECESSITY COMMONLY EMPLOYED IN FREE CHOICE ANALYSES

1. A **Contingency** is a thing or event that is neither impossible nor necessary.

2. Necessity can be distinguished in a number of ways, including:
 - a. **Absolute Necessity (*necessitas absoluta*)**
 - (1) A thing is absolutely or simply necessary if its opposite or denial is self contradictory.
 - (2) Thus a thing is necessary if it is impossible to be otherwise.

 - b. **Necessity of the Consequent (*necessitas consequentis*)**
 - (1) This is also a type of absolute necessity.
 - (2) A necessity of the consequent arises out of the connection of necessary causes with the effects that must follow.

DEFINITIONS OF CONTINGENCY & NECESSITY COMMONLY EMPLOYED IN FREE CHOICE ANALYSES

c. Necessity of the Consequences (*necessitas consequentiae*)

(1) This is a necessity brought about or conditioned by a previous contingent act or event so that the necessity arises out of the contingent circumstance.

(2) This is also called Conditional Necessity or Hypothetical Necessity.

d. Necessity of Nature (*necessitas naturae*)

(1) This is a limit of thought and action grounded in the being itself.

(2) It is not an externally imposed type of necessity.

(3) This means *no being can act against its own nature*.

e. Liberty of Nature (*libertas naturae*)

(1) This is the *freedom that is proper to a being given its particular nature*.

f. Necessity of Coaction (*necessitas coactionis*)

(1) This is a necessity imposed on a thing, agent, or event by an external cause not in accord with the will of the thing or agent on which it is imposed.

(2) The type applies only to created beings.

DEFINITIONS OF EFFICACY & CAUSATION COMMONLY EMPLOYED IN FREE CHOICE ANALYSES

1. Definitions

- a.* A *cause* is that which brings about motion or mutation, that is, an effect.
- b.* *Power* is the capacity or ability to effect motion or mutation.

2. Types of Causation

a. Material Cause

(1) This is the substantial basis for the motion or mutation. It is the material on which the efficient cause operates.

b. Efficient Cause

(1) This is the productive or effective cause which is the agent productive of the motion or mutation in any sequence of causes and effects.

c. Deficient Cause

(1) This is a kind of causation employed by Augustinian theologians. They reason that since God created all things good, there can be no evil thing that exists as an efficient cause of sin. Thus, sin must arise out of a deficiency of willing, rather than an efficiency of willing, that is, a willing of something not as it ought to be willed.

DEFINITIONS OF EFFICACY & CAUSATION COMMONLY EMPLOYED IN FREE CHOICE ANALYSES

d. Formal Cause

(1) This is the essence (*essentia*) of the thing and determinative of what the thing caused is to be.

e. Final Cause

(1) This is the ultimate purpose for which a thing is made or an act is performed.

f. Impelling or Impulsive Cause

(1) This kind provides and opportunity for the efficient cause. It is a cause that precedes and prepares, but is not efficient. For example, human misery is an external impelling cause of divine mercy.

g. Proximate Cause

(1) This, generally speaking, refers to a closely related cause.

DEFINITIONS OF EFFICACY & CAUSATION COMMONLY EMPLOYED IN FREE CHOICE ANALYSES

h. Proximate Cause

(1) This, generally speaking, refers to a closely related cause.

i. Remote Cause

(1) This is a cause not closely related to an effect.

j. First or Prime Cause

(1) This is a description of God as the cause of all things. Specifically, God is the uncaused cause or noncontingent, necessary Being whose causal activity sets in motion all contingent causes and their effects.

k. Secondary Cause

(1) This is the effecting of the divine will in and through the finite order of creation.

(2) Generally, God acts mediately through secondary and instrumental causes.

l. Instrumental Cause

(1) This is the means used to bring about a desired effect.

DEFINITIONS OF EFFICACY & CAUSATION COMMONLY EMPLOYED IN FREE CHOICE ANALYSES

a. Free Cause

(1) This is a cause that operates not out of necessity or compulsion, but freely.

(2) For example, God is the cause of man's salvation insofar as God is not compelled by necessity to be gracious to His fallen creatures

b. Meritorious Cause

(1) This is an instrumental cause that contributes to a desired effect by rendering the effect worthy of taking place. For example, the death of Christ is the meritorious cause of salvation.

2. Agent Causation & Efficacy

a. Regarding free choice, God effects the decree by permitting the free operation of secondary causes.

b. In each instance of free choice of His creatures, God upholds the efficiency of the decree and the freedom of his creatures by decreeing the circumstances and conditions of the event. For example, to have a particular instance of free choice, God decrees the following:

(1) The agent's volitional faculty shall be free, but limited by the nature of the agent.

(2) The antecedent conditions and circumstances shall be what they are.

(3) The present conditions and circumstances shall be what they are.

(4) The choice of the free creature shall be spontaneous and free.

THE *LOCUS* OF THE DECREE IN THEOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

1. Theology Proper

2. Soteriology

BIBLICAL TERMS FOR THE DECREE

1. Old Testament Hebrew Terms for the Decree

a. Etsah (h'x`u@)--Counsel (Job 38:2)

b. Sod (dos)—Deliberate, Counsel (Jer. 23:18, 22)

Chaphets (Jp#j@)—Will or Good Pleasure (Is. 53:10)

BIBLICAL TERMS FOR THE DECREE

2. New Testament Greek Terms for the Decree

a. Boule (boulhv)—Purpose or Counsel (Acts 2:23; 4:28)

b. Thelema (qevlhma)—Will (Eph. 1:11)

c. Prothesis (provqesi")—Plan, Intention, or Purpose (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 3:10-11)

d. Prohorizo (proorivzw)—Activity of Predestination (Acts 4:27-28; Rom. 8:30; Eph. 1:4-6; 11-12)

SELECTED DEFINITIONS OF THE DECREE

1. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*

- a. “His eternal purpose according to the council of His own will, whereby He has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.”

2. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*

- a. “[T]he comprehensive plan for the world and its history which God sovereignly established in eternity” (p. 302).

3. *Dictionary of Latin & Greek Theological Terms*

- a. From the Latin *decretum aeternum* meaning “an eternal decree according to which God wills and orders all things” (Muller, 88).

THE DIVINE FACULTIES & THE DECREE

1. The Divine Intellect, Will & Affections

a. Substantive Theological Psychology

b. Intellect

c. Will

d. Affections

2. The Decision & The Decree

a. The operation of the divine intellect

b. The operation of the divine will

THE DIVINE FACULTIES & THE DECREE

3. The Various Uses of the Phrase “The Will of God” in Theological Literature

- a. The Divine Faculty of the Will (Volition)
- b. The Divine Choice (The Operation of the Will)
- c. God’s Immutable Constancy Towards Holiness & Righteousness (Desire)
- d. God’s Declared Normative Moral Will (Law & Holiness)
- e. God’s Permissive Will (Permitting Evil)
- f. The Hidden Will of God
- g. The Revealed Will of God
- h. Others?

THE DIVINE FACULTIES & THE DECREE

4. *Divine Omniscience & The Decree*

a. *Definition of Omniscience*

- (1) Omniscience is the attribute of God by which God knows all things, all events, and all circumstances of things and events perfectly and immediately in his timeless eternity.
- (2) Omniscience is described as absolutely true, absolutely clear, simultaneous, and immediate or intuitive.
 - (a) It is *true* because it is all encompassing, complete, and without defect.
 - (b) It is *clear* because it lacks no detail, either concerning things possible or things actual or concerning which possibilities will be actualized and which will not.
 - (c) It is *simultaneous* because the eternal God is free from succession, not only in being, but also in knowing, and therefore knows all things at once, including the order and temporal succession of things.
 - (d) It is *intuitive* because it knows all things by immediate apprehension rather than by discourse or demonstration.

b. *Select Biblical Proofs for Omniscience*

- (1) Job 37:16
- (2) I Sam. 16:7
- (3) Matt. 10:29-30
- (4) Heb. 4:13
- (5) Acts 2:23

THE NATURE OF THE DECREE

1. *The Decree is a Single, Eternal Decree.*

a. *Definition of God's Eternality*

(1) Eternity is the existence and continuance of God without beginning or end and apart from all succession and change. Minimally, this means God never began to exist and will never cease to exist.

(2) Many Protestants hold Boethius's (*circa* A.D. 480–524) definition that eternity is the simultaneous and perfect possession of endless life. Thus, eternity transcends not only limited time, but also any possibility of infinite temporal succession, that is, time itself.

(3) The classic view of the church has been that God is a-temporal in His Being. The dividing issue is how God relates to time after the creation of time.

(4) Perfection indicates a transcendence of mutation and the fulfillment of all potency.

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b. Biblical Proof of God's Eternality

(1) Ps. 90:2

(2) Ps. 102:12

c. The Eternality of the Decree

(1) The Triune God formed the Decree as an essential internal (*ad intra*) work. It is an eternal work of the Godhead.

(2) The divine decree should be understood as *a single, eternal act of God*. The noun in the singular number is commonly used when Scripture refers to the divine essence or the divine intellect or will.

For example:

(a) Rom. 8:28: “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*.”

(b) Eph. 3:11: “. . . in accordance with the eternal *purpose* which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

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(3) Thus, God *simultaneously*, eternally decrees all that will occur in created space and time; but the results of the decree occur *successively* and *temporally*, not simultaneously. Some examples:

(a) Eph. 1:3: God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,” yet there were thousands of years between the creation of the first human beings and the salvation of believers who are alive today.

(b) Heb 4:3: “. . . His works were finished from the foundation of the world.”

(c) I Pet. 1:20: “For He [Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you.”

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d. The Logical Sequence of the Eternal Decree

- (1) Just as God's eternal knowledge may be distinguished into its logical moments, such as Natural and Free, the decree, considered internally (*ad intra*), may also be distinguished according to its logical sequence.
- (2) The external execution (*ad extra*) of the Decree in Creation and Providence may be distinguished both logically and temporally (chronologically).
- (3) For example, the decree to create Adam, the first human being, necessarily preceded and the decree that Christ would be born in Bethlehem, that is, that the Logos would assume human nature and personalize it.

(a) The Order of Salvation (Ordo Salutis)

- i. An example of attempts to understand the logical order of the decree can be seen in the Order of Salvation. Christian systems of theology arrange the events of salvation differently according to the emphases in each system in an attempt to establish and present a more coherent picture of God's saving plan. For example:

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(i) Limited Atonement Views

(ii) Supralapsarianism (Limited Atonement View)

(iii) Election and Reprobation occur before the Fall.

(iv) The Order: Election – Reprobation – Creation – Fall – Death of Christ

(v) Infralapsarianism (Limited Atonement View)

(vi) Election and Reprobation occur after the Fall, but before the death of Christ.

(vii) The Order: Creation – Fall – Election – Reprobation – Death of Christ

(viii) Both views here are “limited” atonement views in the sense that God already has the elect (limited group) in mind before He decrees the death of Christ to *secure* the salvation of the elect.

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(b) Unlimited Atonement Views

i. Amyraldianism (Unlimited Atonement View)

(i) Election and Reprobation occur after the Death of Christ.

(ii) The Order: Creation – Fall – Death of Christ – Election – Reprobation

ii. Lutheranism (Unlimited Atonement View)

(i) Same as Amyraldianism

iii. Arminianism (Unlimited Atonement View)

(i) Same as Amyraldianism

iv. All views here are “unlimited” atonement views in the sense that God decrees the death of Christ to make salvation *possible* for all (unlimited) of Fallen Mankind.

(4) Other Considerations

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7. *The Decree is Grounded in God's Wisdom.*

a. *Definition of God's Wisdom (Omnisapience)*

- (1) Omnisapience means having all wisdom and being all-wise; specifically, the wisdom of the divine counsel by virtue of which God knows all causes and effects and ordains them to their proper ends and by which he ultimately accomplishes his own end in and through all created things.
- (2) Hence, omnisapience can be defined as the correspondence of God's thought with the highest good of all things.
- (3) Since God is the *greatest good* toward which all things ultimately tend, the definition can equally well read, the correspondence of God's thought with God's essence considered as the greatest good.
- (4) Omnisapience can be distinguished from Omniscience.
 - (a) Whereas *Omniscience* refers to the knowledge that God possesses as the first efficient cause, *Omnisapience* refers to God as final cause or goal.
 - (b) Thus *Omniscience* indicates a pure or theoretical understanding, while *Omnisapience* denotes a practical understanding, a wise knowing that directs the ordering of ends and goals.

b. *Application to the Decree*

THE NATURE OF THE DECREE

1. *The Decree is Efficacious or Efficient.*

a. *Definition of Efficacious*

- (1) The efficaciousness of the decree means that everything God decrees will certainly come to pass.
- (2) The decree renders certain the occurrence of the things decreed.
- (3) *Ex Nihilo* Creation and Divine Providence must be considered in this analysis. The Decree is the plan, while creation and providence are the execution of the plan.
- (4) Is. 14:27—“For the LORD of host has planned, and who can frustrate it?”

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b. Agent Causation & Efficacy

- (1) One way God effects the decree is by permitting the free operation of secondary causes.
- (2) In each instance of free choice of His creatures, God upholds the efficiency of the decree and the freedom of his creatures by decreeing the circumstances and conditions of the event. For example, He decrees:
 - (a) The agent's volitional faculty shall be free, but limited by the nature of the agent.
 - (b) The antecedent conditions and circumstances shall be what they are.
 - (c) The present conditions and circumstances shall be what they are.
 - (d) The choice of the free creature shall be spontaneous and free.
- (3) Biblical examples of decreed free choices can be seen in the following passages:**
 - (a) Eph. 2:10: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."
 - (b) II Tim. 2:25: ". . . If perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth."

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(1) Creation as an Illustration of Fourfold Causality

- (a) God is the *Efficient Cause* as the agent who produces the creation.
- (b) The Prime Matter or First Material, the formless earth of the first act of creation, is the *Material Cause* of creation.
- (c) When the Prime Matter is informed with its Substantial Form in the second act of creation, the result is “Secondary Matter,” which is the individuated species of the created order. Thus, the Substantial Form is the *Formal Cause*.
- (d) The *Final Cause* is the glory of God.

b. Sin, Agent Causation & Efficacy: The Permissive Attribute of the Decree

- (1) God permits His free creatures to choose imperfectly regarding God’s righteous commands. Thus, God permits His creatures to choose what He morally forbids.
- (2) This attribute of the decree should be understood as the decree not to hinder the sinful self-determination of the will.

Acts 14:16: “And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways.”

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(3) However, in God's sovereignty He also decreed to regulate and control the results of the sinful self-determined choice. So while God permitted His free creatures to sin, the Righteous Sovereign also purposed to overrule it and the evil that results from it.

(4) Selected Biblical Examples

(a) Ps. 76:10: "For the wrath of man shall praise Thee."

(b) Genesis 50:20: "And 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."

(5) The Example of the Crucifixion of Christ as an Illustration of the Sovereignty of God, the Efficiency of the Decree, the Order of the Decree, and Permissive Agent Causation Regarding Sin

(a) The eternal divine decree is seen clearly in the death of Christ, and we can trace this decree through Scripture.

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(b) In the opening chapters of Genesis, God's plan (decree) of salvation begins to be revealed: God says to the serpent after the fall:

Genesis 3:15: *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”*

(c) Christ's crucifixion was prophesied in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 53:5—*“But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.”*

(d) Before Jesus went to the cross, Jesus said to the disciples:

Luke 22:22—*“For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed.”*

(e) The Apostle Peter told his Pentecost audience, concerning Jesus:

Acts 2:23: *“This Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.”*

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(f) Later a group of disciples confessed in their prayer that the ones who crucified Christ:

Acts 4:27, 28: “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do what ever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.”

(g) The three preceding passages clearly refer to those taking part in the crucifixion. The crucifixion was the most heinous crime in human history and those who participated in His death were guilty of sin.

b. Divine Concurrence

c. Divine Coaction

d. Summary & Conclusion: The decree provides that in every case the event shall be effected by causes acting in a manner perfectly consistent with the nature of the event.

THE NATURE OF THE DECREE

9. *The Decree is Immutable.*

a. **Definition of Immutability**

(1) *The Immutability* of God means God is free from all mutation of being, attributes, place, or will, and from all physical and ethical change.

(a) Immutability of *existence* or *being* indicates the immortality and incorruptibility of God.

(b) Immutability of *attributes* indicates the changelessness of divine perfections.

(c) Immutability of *place* refers to the omnipresence of God that fills all things.

(d) Immutability of *will* refers to the divine constancy in all that has been decreed and promised.

(2) Immutability also indicates the eternal and perpetual identity of the divine essence with all its perfections.

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(a) Immutability also indicates the eternal and perpetual identity of the divine essence with all its perfections.

b. Implications of Immutability for the Decree, Creation & Providence

(1) God does not Repent.

(a) Repentance is attributed to God in Scripture by anthropopathy and indicates, not a change in God, but rather a changed relationship between God and man.

(b) See Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29

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- (1) Creation does not imply a change in God and a denial of immutability.
 - (a) Theologians distinguish between the *effective principle* in creation, which is the divine essence itself, and the *produced effect*, in creation, which is the created order.
 - (b) In the produced effect there is clearly change or mutation. The creation is a movement from nonexistence to existence.
 - (c) But in the effective principle, God, there is no change or mutation since God eternally and immutably wills to produce the creation.
 - (d) The change that occurs in creation is external to God.

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a. Selected Biblical Proofs for God's Immutability & the Immutability of the Decree

(1)Ps. 33:11

(2)Ps. 102:27

(3)Prov. 19:21

(4)Is. 14:24

(5)Is. 46:9-10

(6)Mal. 3:6

(7)Heb. 6:17

(8)Heb. 13:7-9

(9)James 1:17

b. Conclusion

(1)Ps. 33:11—God's counsel stands forever.

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k. The Decree is Universal or Comprehensive.

(a) This issue is closely related to the efficaciousness of the decree and exhaustive, meticulous providence. The efficaciousness of the decree means that everything God decrees will certainly come to pass and that the decree renders certain the occurrence of the things decreed. In contrast, the issue considered in the universality of the decree is the extent of the decree and whether there are events that occur or things that exist apart from the decree.

(2) Biblical Proofs for the Universality of the Decree

(3) Eph. 1:11—All Things

(4) Eph. 2:10—Good Works

(5) Acts 2:23—Evil Works

(6) Gen. 50:20—Contingent Acts

(7) II Thes. 2:13—Means & Ends

(8) Job 14:5—Duration of Life

(9) Acts 17:26—Place of Habitation

THE NATURE OF THE DECREE

1. *Conditional v. Unconditional Decree*

A. The Knowledge of God

B. Prayer & the Decree

PREDICTIVE PROPHECY & THE DECREE

1. The universal, efficacious, eternal decree of God provides a theologically coherent explanation for predictive prophecy. Much of the decree regarding future events is occluded, but certain passages of Scripture reveal God's future plan for the ages.
2. A few people attempt to know future events by employing occultic practices, but the future is known only by God and God alone can declare it with certainty.

3. Biblical Proofs

a. Is. 46:10-11

b. Genesis 3:1 cf. Revelation 21:1, 4:

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. . . . He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

PREDICTIVE PROPHECY & THE DECREE

1. Biblical Passages Condemning False Prophets

- a. Deut. 18:9-13
- b. Is. 47:13-14
- c. Jer. 10:2-3
- d. Dan. 2:10

2. Biblical Prophecy, Open Theism & the Decree

COMMON OBJECTIONS TO THE DOCTRINE OF DECREES

1. It is Inconsistent with Man's Freedom.

2. It Removes the Motive for Human Exertion.

3. It Makes God the Author of Sin.