

# **THE DOCTRINE OF GOD**

## **(The Works of God)**

### **DECREES**

God's sovereignty extends to all things. It is not possible for anything to take place outside of His decrees. Although it is customary to use the plural rather than the singular, strictly speaking there is but one single act of God therefore only one eternal decree. However, it is more helpful to us to use the plural as will be the case in dealing with this subject.

#### **The Nature of the Decrees**

God's acts are classified by theologians as: (1) God's immanent eternal acts; (2) God's immanent and eternal acts regarding objects out of Himself; (3) God's transient acts. From the point of view of His original infinite prescience, there was only but one cause - Himself. All other causes and agencies however multifarious, derived their origin from Him the Uncaused. He is sovereign in cause and effect, and yet He does not violate the free agency of his rational creatures. His foreordination and their free agency is an area of profound mystery. This will be considered at a later stage.

The decrees are inseparable from the knowledge of God. But when we refer to His knowledge we have to be careful that we are not in any way generalizing. This knowledge which His decrees are inseparable from, is His necessary knowledge which is inclusive of the nature of things and the results. Everything that comes to pass rests on this knowledge. In order to make this difficult subject intelligible to us we are compelled to employ language more in keeping with time than eternity, in saying that His knowledge preceded His decrees. This is important to bear in mind because the Arminian view of predestination is based solely on God's foreknowledge - God foreknew who would believe, and hence such were elected to eternal life.

His decrees are effectuated in different ways, either by His immediate agency as in the work of creation, regeneration and inspiration, or by physical causes. But even the latter depend on their energy to come from God. The latter are normally called laws of material nature, but even in these agencies God effects the results. There is however another class which it is appropriate to mention here, namely, that of rational free agents. But even their energy is of God. Free agency can hardly be considered without taking into account God's permissive decree, because His rational creatures do not always act in a manner consistent with His preceptive (revealed) will. This even applies to those who love Him, even they fail at times to do what His preceptive will requires of them.

The decrees do not consist of a number of acts of the divine mind but one. This is the reason why at the beginning of this lecture we made reference to the singular, and that the plural is employed simply to aid our understanding. Not only is it one act but also one plan, however vast, yet it is one - it is like one single chain with many links. The decrees do not extend to the essential being of God, for He did not decree to be immutable, holy, or omniscient because He must be necessarily so to be the

Divine Being, therefore what is necessary to His being did not form part of the Decrees.

### **The eternity of the Decrees**

How can the decrees be eternal? It is true that in the order of production He existed before the decrees, but the comprehension of His purpose may be as eternal as Himself. It is objected to that some parts are consequent on other parts and therefore that they could not all have originated together. To this objection it is said that real sequence is only in the events as effectuated, not in the decree, which the following passages demonstrate: 2 Timothy 1: 9, *Who has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began;* 1 Peter 1: 20, *Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.*

### **Decrees and Free Agents**

The decrees embrace all things. The Arminians and Socinians exempted the acts of free agency from the decrees, and the latter even from His foreknowledge. They define His omniscience as His knowledge of all that is cognizable. But foreknowledge is founded on His foreordination. The Arminians regard the sin of a free agent as limited to His foreknowledge, and that the permitted act belongs to some part of the decrees. The absolute certainty of its occasion must rest on some ground, and that can be nothing else but His determinate counsel without doing any violation to the free agent. Here is another area of great mystery and remains difficult to understand. When we are faced with difficulties, and especially so when contradiction appears to the careless reader to be the logical explanation, we must not be ashamed to admit to our acknowledgment of an existing difficulty. *There is a point at which a reverent ignorance, rather than an irreverent speculation and theorizing, becomes us.* (Johannes Vos The Westminster Larger Catechism A Commentary). As finite sinful creatures we are not expected to understand all about God and His decrees. It is therefore necessary to draw a distinction between the decree and its execution. God decreed the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage, but that was not the same as the actual deliverance - the latter was the execution of the decree.

### **Decrees and Sin**

It is plain from the Scriptures that God is not the author of sin: Eccl 7: 29, *Lo, this have I found, that God has made man upright: but they have sought out many inventions;* 1 John 1: 5, *This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.* God's moral law which declares His character, forbids sin. The terrible judgments which fell on some in this present life, and the awfulness of a lost eternity, and especially the awful judgment which fell on the Son as the Surety of His people, clearly reveal how God hates sin and could never have been its author.

The origin of sin is a great mystery which cannot be explained. It is sufficiently clear from the Scriptures that the fall of some of the angels preceded the fall of man, but that does not lessen the mystery, but in some ways increases it. In the case of the angels there was no tempter. How therefore could holy beings become inclined

towards sin? In their fall God did not withdraw from them any power or grace which was bestowed on them when created. Supposing He had, the committing of sin would still remain a mystery. *Nothing that was given in creation was withdrawn from Satan until after he had transgressed. How the fall of a holy will can be made a certainty by a merely permissive decree of God is inexplicable. Nothing but the spontaneity of the will can produce sin, and God does not work in the will to cause evil spontaneity.* (Shedd. Dogmatic Theology.) When holiness is considered it is abundantly clear that God works in the elect will, ... *to will and to do of his good pleasure.* God is the efficient author of holiness, but not of sin. Therefore, the efficient decree is realized by positive action upon the creature, but the permissive decree whether in committing sin or in circumstances and actions leading to it, does not realize itself in this manner. It can be argued that if sin had not been permitted that divine attributes have been revealed which could not have been manifested otherwise, such as mercy and longsuffering to mention but some. Whilst acknowledging that all things were designed, created and permitted for the glory of God, yet the mystery of sin's origin remains and in all probability will remain so until God, if it pleases Him, unveils this most baffling of mysteries.

There are a number of objections raised. First, that God foreknew the fall of man, the pollution of the human race, and the grave consequences of sin, nevertheless He went ahead and created man. It is further objected to that God could have restrained man from sinning, but this He failed to do. Whilst acknowledging difficulties, the sinner is the one responsible for his sins - he commits them willingly. Objections are also raised regarding conditional promises, which makes God appear insincere and changeable as appears in a number of texts, and as an example Isaiah 1: 19, *If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land.* God is not changeable. His blessing rests on the obedient, and His displeasure on the disobedient - the promises therefore are conditional for only the obedient would see their fulfilment. In so far as free agents are concerned the means are also included. Take as an example free agency in the crucifying of the Lord. Those responsible for it carried out what was in their wicked hearts. They were voluntary in everything they did and hence wholly responsible. They also unwittingly fulfilled God's purpose. The death of Christ and the means were all in the eternal decree, but in the execution of the decree God was not the author of the sins committed. It is further argued that the decrees do violation to the freedom of man because he has the power of self-determination. Although God has decreed the free acts of man, yet man is still responsible. It does not follow because they are decreed that God will personally effectuate that which is evil in the case of his rational creatures, but what is holy and good.

The purpose of God cannot be defeated. A. A. Hodge says: *The decree itself provides in every case that the event shall be effected by causes acting in a manner perfectly consistent with the nature of the event in question. Thus in the case of every free act of a moral agent the decree provides at the same time (a) That the agent shall be a free agent; (b) That his antecedents and all the antecedents of the act in question shall be what they are; (c) That all the present conditions of the act in question shall be what they are; (d) That the act shall be perfectly spontaneous and free on the part of the agent; (e) That it shall be certainly future.* - Ps 33:11; Prov 19: 21; Is 46: 10. It is unchangeable. The fact remains that if there are those in the nations of the world decreed to be saved, then they must all hear the word of God.

## PREDESTINATION

‘From the Hebrew word *yada*, to know, or, to be the object of loving care, we have election. The Greek words *proginoskein* and *prognosis* strictly mean a selective knowledge regarding a person, so as to be the object of loving care. From this we have the idea of foreordination - Rom 8: 29, *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren;* 1 Pet 1: 2, *Elect through the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you and peace be multiplied.* However, the Hebrew word *bachar*, and the Greek word *eklegesthai*, emphasize the element of selection in the decree regarding the eternal destiny of His rational creatures with regards to His good pleasure, and their eternal happiness. ‘The Greek words *proorizein* and *proorismos* mean predestination to either a good or a bad end in time, which determines the eternal abode.’

Predestination is ‘.....His purpose concerning the everlasting destiny of His rational creatures.’ This is a most solemn doctrine which must be handled with the greatest of care. The authorship of predestination is attributed to the Father in passages such as John 17: 6, 9, Rom 8: 29, Eph 1:4 and 1 Pet 1:2. It ought not however to be overlooked that this doctrine does involve all three Persons in the Trinity. It includes both election to eternal life of some angels and human beings, and the reprobation of the fallen angels and the rest of mankind. The principal end of election is the glory of God. Without election none could be saved. All mankind fell in Adam. Even all the angels would have fallen had some not been kept. As a consequence of the Fall, the sinner is indisposed towards God, for he is guilty and totally depraved and in bondage to sin. It is not a case of having a desire to be freed from that bondage, but lacking the power to do so without help from God - there is simply no desire to be freed. The sinner does not see himself in bondage but free. In his judgment those in bondage are all who profess to be justified for they are not at liberty to do as they please. Without the sovereignty of God being exercised in mercy towards some sinners, the whole human race would have perished, and if they had, they would have received only what they deserved. Those who are opposed to the doctrine of election to eternal life accuse God of being unjust. This of course betrays a gross ignorance of human depravity, and that it is the sole prerogative of an offended God to deal with the offender according to His good pleasure and justice.

The election of human beings to eternal life is different from the election of angels, because the latter were enabled to persevere in holiness when the rest of the angels fell, but man is elected from a state of depravity to that of holiness.

The decree of election, according to Shedd, originated in compassion. This he bases on Romans 11: 22, *Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.* He argues that God sees no holiness in either the elect or the non-elect and therefore feels no complacent love towards either, but compassion towards both. However, there are many who regard the love of God as the

moving cause of salvation and hence the election of the sinner to eternal life, and among many passages cited, chief among them, is John 3 :16, *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Surely those elected to salvation were loved in Christ from eternity, because the wrath of God abideth on those out of the Son because sin and the offender cannot be separated as long as the sinner is out of Christ, and God will always hate sin. Nevertheless, that does not take anything away from the compassion of God – He is *good unto all men.....and ..not willing that any should perish.....* Not only is the entrance of sin a mystery but so also is the election of grace. It appears strange that God should be compassionate towards all men and yet not manifest His saving grace to all of them. Saul of Tarsus persecuted the believers and he was saved, whilst others were left in their sins. But of course the mystery is somewhat lessened when we remind ourselves that God does not owe salvation to anyone. However, to each believer his own salvation remains a great mystery whereby he asks continually whilst in this world “ why did God love me?” The decree of election is unconditional and depends on the sovereign good pleasure of God

Not only did God predestinate some to eternal life, but He also provided the means of grace for them. Where there are no means of grace it is obvious that the people will perish in their ignorance. There is an exception to this rule in the case of elect infants who die in infancy, and maybe all infants who die in infancy are elect, God however has not revealed that to us. The Arminians maintain that all infants who die in infancy go to heaven, but Reformers do not deny nor admit that they do, but are more careful and say that elect infants who die in infancy are saved. What we do know with absolute certainty is that even the infant who dies in infancy cannot go to heaven without being regenerated, because guilt is contracted within the mother’s womb, Ps 51: 5, *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

God’s decree is possessed of unity, eternity, immutability, wisdom and efficacy, and is part of His predestination. If it were not immutably efficacious Christ would not be able to see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. Indeed he would have laboured in vain. According to the Arminians, it is possible for one who is saved to fall away and be lost, and in such a case Christ shed His blood in vain. But if salvation, as they claim, rests partly on the work of Christ and that of the creature then it cannot be regarded as certain but possible. This demonstrates how an erroneous understanding of the doctrines of Scripture, and the denial of God’s sovereignty over all things, lead to endless confusion and contradiction.

Some of the angels, as already referred to, have also been elected to eternal life. God in His sovereignty preserved some from falling and are thus kept by His power. There are a number of passages which refer to the elect angels, such as, Matt 25: 31; Matt 25: 41; 1 Tim 5: 21; 2 Pet 2:4 and Rev 12: 7 to identify but a few. The rest of the angels fell by voluntarily sinning against God - this God permitted. Unlike humans the angels did not have a federal head and therefore fell as individuals, whereas humans all fell in Adam their federal head: but through the federal headship of the last Adam some are saved. There is no salvation for the fallen angels. They were left to the determination of their own will in sinning against God. The elect angels are not chosen in a Mediator. There are those who claim that their confirming grace is

mediated to them by Christ, and that this is referred to in Col 2: 10, Heb 1: 6 and 1 Pet 3: 22. This remains unclear to us. Nowhere in the Scriptures is it said of Christ that He is the Mediator of angels, but it is stated: *For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.* 1 Timothy 2: 5; and in Hebrews 2: 16: *For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.*

### **Reprobation**

Some of mankind God was pleased to pass by, and in His sovereignty to withhold His saving grace from them. He left them to continue as sinners. It is wrong to say that reprobates are void of common grace. They are partakers of it in some degree whilst they are in this world. What they are denied is regenerating grace. It is with this in view that the apostle Paul says, *Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth* (does not soften) Romans 9: 18. He demands that the punishment of sin be borne by them. There is a distinction between reprobation and preterition. The latter is a sovereign act, but condemnation is a judicial act. God does not condemn because it is His good pleasure to do so, but because the sinner is guilty, and every sin deserves God's wrath and curse. Preterition on the other hand is a permissive decree. In simple language it consists of letting things stand as they are in the experience of the sinner. There was individual preterition when there was a national election. This is evident from Romans 9: 27, *Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved.* Before the resurrection of Christ there was a national preterition because the means and privileges until then, with the exception of few cases, were strictly confined to Israel, but after His resurrection this was suspended and the privileges and means of grace were sent into the whole world. The decree of reprobation consists of passing by a certain number and refusing to elect them to eternal life, and to treat them on the principles of strict justice. In all this they receive no more than they deserve. Therefore reprobation can be viewed as judicial because God has determined to deal with them according to their deserts. Too often it is objected to that reprobation reveals injustice on God's part that some are lost all because they are not elected. That is untrue and unscriptural. If that were true, then reprobation would be grossly unjust. The truth is that no one is lost because he/she is not elected - a person is lost, and punished accordingly, because of personal guilt and sin. Those saved, were equally deserving of God's wrath and curse. Were it not for His sovereign grace all would have perished.

### **Supralapsarianism**

Since the time of the Reformation the doctrine of predestination has had a twofold presentation, or at least there emerged two different conceptions of it, and were called Supralapsarianism and Infralapsarianism. The crucial point involving these two positions is focused on the entrance of sin into the experience of man. Was the sin which constituted Adam's fall predestinated, or was it the object of foreknowledge? To the former the Supralapsarians adhered, and to the latter the Infralapsarians. So then the Supralapsarian order is to place the decree of election and preterition before the fall, instead of after it. The order is basically as follows: The decree to elect some and leave the rest to perdition. To create man and permit the fall. To justify the elect and condemn the non-elect. Turretin says, *Man as created and fallible is not the*

*object of predestination but man as created and fallen.* It appears that Supralapsarianism is in total agreement with all those passages of Scripture where the absolute sovereignty of God is stressed. The following are only a few of many passages: Ps 115: 3; Prov 16: 4; Is 10:15; Matt 11: 25, 26; Rom 9: 17-21. They are in a position to explain why the universe was created, and why the fall was permitted, thereby doing full justice to God's sovereignty. This is also extended by them to the fall of the angels. It was the good pleasure of God to grant the grace of perseverance to some, and withhold it from the rest. However, the answer to the origin of sin remains a mystery. Whilst some of them had no difficulty representing the decree as the efficient cause of sin, yet they were afraid that this would be interpreted as God being the author of sin. The majority of them much preferred to regard the entrance of sin as that which God permitted.

The objections are raised against this position that man appears in the divine decree not only certain to be brought into being, but his fall was equally as certain. It was after this that humans were brought into being. It is also objected that the punishment of the reprobates, and the eternal salvation of others, are objects of the divine will, and that sin is the means to eternal damnation just as Christ is the means to eternal life. This makes the decree of reprobation as certain as that of election, and hence the former is seen as an act of His good pleasure and not that of punitive justice.

### **Infralapsarianism**

According to this view, in the thought of God the fall of man preceded election of some to salvation, and makes the order of the divine decrees more natural than that of Supralapsarianism. It certainly avoids the danger of God being perceived as the author of sin, and pretending to know the answer to the entrance of sin into the world. It was viewed by Dabney as more logical than the former. The Reformed Churches adopted this standard although the Supra position was never condemned by them. The Infralapsarian position is that God decreed to create man in holiness and blessedness. That He permitted man to fall by self-determination, to save a definite number and to leave the remainder to self-determination. Therefore the decree of preterition does not necessitate perdition though it makes it certain. The final sentence will not be founded on God not acting positively to save the lost, but on the sinner's positive act of sinning. From this it must be concluded that whilst election is the efficient cause of salvation, preterition is not the efficient cause of perdition. It appears that there are but two agents that can bring about conversion, the human will and God. However the will is in bondage and incapable of freeing itself from it and be thus inclined towards God, and if God does not incline it towards Himself perdition is inevitable.

In avoiding the danger of making God the author of sin, it creates another danger, and that is being exposed to being seen as undermining the sovereignty of God. This is especially so in the area of sin. Rather than say that God willed it, they prefer to say that He permitted it. This can be understood to mean that its entrance was left unhindered so that the fall is seen as frustrating God's plan. To avoid becoming Arminian on this point, most of them admit that the entrance of sin formed part of the decree, and call it a permissive decree which did render the entrance of sin into the world certain. They strive to make reprobation an act of God's justice rather than that of His good pleasure, but this leads to being seen as a conditional decree and

becoming again exposed to Arminianism. 'Supralapsarianism focuses attention on the ideal, and Infralapsarianism on the historical order of the decrees.' There are points of strength and weaknesses in both, and both have Scriptural support.

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## CREATION

The Babylonian story of creation has its supporters, and they are not slow to highlight the number of similarities between it and the narrative of the work of creation in Genesis. The supposedly points of similarity are, the account of primeval chaos, the dividing of the waters below and above the firmament, and the creation of man. It is obviously a corrupted account of the narrative in Genesis, and is both polytheistic and mythological.

The Hebrew word for create is *barah*, which strictly speaking means 'to cut' or 'to carve' and the idea is to separate, so as to fashion something - to give it order and meaning. The verb *yashar* carries the idea of using existing material out of which something is made, as in the case of the potter and the clay. The Greek word *kridzo*, according to authorities, has the primary meaning of 'to found' or 'to build' hence 'to make' or 'create.' The Scriptures are sufficiently clear that God did not work with existing material but that the universe was brought out of nothing: Gen 1: 1-2, *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.* These words, out of nothing, of course are not to be found in the Scriptures. It was alien to the ancient minds to conceive of anything being brought out of nothing. The text closest to the words, that all things were made out of nothing, is Heb 11: 3, *Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.* The other text that conveys similar information is Col 1: 17, *And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.* Returning then to the opening verses of Genesis, it appears that the work expressed by *barah* in the opening verse, is the chaos mentioned at the beginning of verse 2. It is not expected of finite creatures to be able to comprehend how something is brought into existence out of nothing. This is grasped by faith.

Creation *ex nihilo* is the very first work God does *ad extra*. Only the eternal activity of the divine essence which results in the Trinitarian persons preceded it. In the work of creation 'entity was brought from nonentity.' The cynics say that, nothing comes from nothing, but this can never apply to an omnipotent God to whom all things are possible.

Creation was an act of the Triune God, but economically it is ascribed to the first Person of the Trinity. Creation was a free act of God, although some insist on it being a necessary act. It was not necessary. What was necessary was the eternal generation of the Son, and the spiration of the Spirit. The Scriptures attribute the existence of things to the will, word and spirit of God. Theologians distinguish between *creatio prima*, first creation of elementary things *ex nihilo*, and the *creatio secunda* or second creation, that is bringing order to the chaos and the creation of everything else. It is attributed to God in Gen 1:1; to the Father 1 Cor 8:6; through the Son Heb 1:2; and through the Spirit, Ps 104: 30. This work was for His own glory, Col 1: 16, *For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in the earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him.* Some divines view earth in Gen 1: 2, as the

whole material system connected with it both solar and stellar, and that the ensuing account of God's work upon that part of the universe called earth, shows that the sun, moon and stars belong to it. Augustine held the view that in time prior to the six days God created the angelic world or "the heavens," and chaotic inorganic matter, or earth. Then in six days formed the latter into a cosmic system, solar, stellar and planetary, and upon the planet earth created organic vegetation animals and humans. This interpretation was to a great extent received by the Patristics and Schoolmen. Kimchi follows a similar interpretation. On the length of days Augustine insisted on long periods. He based this interpretation on Gen 1:14 that they are God divided and not sun divided days. Anselm, many centuries later, says that there was a difference of opinion in his day on this matter, and that the opinion of the majority was that angels and man were created at the same time. However there is absolutely nothing to suggest that the days were anything else but twenty four hour days

There are objections raised, that to create out of nothing is inconsistent with the axiom *ex nihilo nihil fit*, but this is ambiguous and can mean no effect without a cause, or that nothing can produce nothing. The doctrine of creation does not claim that the universe came into being without a cause – the One who gave it being is the Uncaused. It was the difficulty of grasping how the non-existent could pass into the existent that led Plato and other Greek philosophers to adopt the eternity of matter. It is intriguing how they could accept the eternity of matter rather than God being from eternity. Others objected that the doctrine of creation in time is inconsistent with the true idea of God: that it draws a distinction between will and power, and efficiency and purpose, in the divine mind. This was the common doctrine of Scholastic thinking which denied any distinction in Him between essence and attributes power and acts. The following are some of the theories in attempting to explain the existence of the universe.

### **Theories About the Existence of the Universe**

First, we have the **Theory of Democritus** which is known as the Atomic Theory which is basically the eternity of matter in the state of ultimate atoms '.....endued by the necessity of nature with these three attributes, motion, a perpetual appetency to aggregation, and diversity of ultimate form, and you have all that is necessary to account for universal organization.' Second, the **Platonic Scheme** which starts with the maxim, *ex nihilo nihil fit*. It supposes two eternal substances and these substances are regarded as the sources of everything that exists. From the former emanates the spiritual God, the spirits of demi-gods, and humans; and from the latter the material universe. Third, **Dualistic Theory** and according to this theory the world is a necessary emanation out of the being of God – God and the world are essentially one. This being so God is not transcendent and separate from the world. Fourth, the **Theory of Evolution**, and according to this theory all the kingdoms of nature issue out of each other without any intervening creative agency. 'The homogeneous mineral develops into the heterogeneous vegetable, and the homogeneous vegetable into heterogeneous animal and the homogeneous animal into heterogeneous man.' Fifth, the **Theory of Theistic Evolution** tries to harmonize the narrative of creation with the theory of evolution. They regard evolution as God's system in the development of nature. It admits that the absolute beginning could only be with God. But they have to

admit that for things to evolve it would take many millions of years. And finally the **Hexameron View**: Some of the early Church Fathers maintained that the whole work of creation was completed in a moment of time, and that the days are merely a symbolical framework. Others viewed the days of creation as long periods. The reasoning behind this was to harmonize the narrative of creation with the geological period. It is further argued that the Hebrew *Yam* (day) does not always represent a twenty four hour period. The argument is also raised that the days represent indefinite periods, because the sun was not created until the 4th day so that previous days could not be determined. It is also claimed that the days referred to are God's days - the archetypal day. But God is not governed by time. We believe that the days were ordinary twenty four hour days and that this is how days are to be understood in the fourth commandment of the moral law: .....*for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested , the seventh day and hallowed it.*

### **CREATION OF ANGELS**

When were the angels created? Some of the Reformers believed that the creation of angels took place on the second day of creation, and their warrant for it is that they are included in the creating of heaven as its inhabitants. To this view Dabney adheres. Calvin, whilst acknowledging that the angels were created before man, yet accepts that this is not revealed. Others tend to associate their creation with the past eternity to which the Scriptures refer, as before the foundation of the world.

They are first mentioned in Genesis 3: 24, *So he drove out the man; and placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.* This was something which Adam could see, which among other things was a reminder of the dire consequences of having sinned. He was not dismissed from the garden in utter despair of ever being redeemed – he left with a promise, *I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

The Sadducees in the days of Christ's humiliation did not believe in the physical resurrection, spirits nor angels. The angels were regarded as good thoughts and motions. Rationalists and Universalists regard angels as impersonations of divine energies or of good or bad principles. The Scriptures attribute to angels the properties and acts that are attributed to persons. They were created by God through the agency of the Son; Gen 2: 1; *Thus the heavens, and the earth were finished, and all the host of them:* Ex 20:11, *For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that bin them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it:* and Col 1:16, *For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.*

We have already mentioned that they were not created as a race with a federal head, for if they had then when one fell all would have fallen. They have natures

because the Scriptures remind us that Christ took not upon Him the nature of angels, Heb 2:16, *For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.* They are in two groups, good and evil, although it was not so at the beginning. They were all holy angels when created. How long did they all remain holy we do not know. Those who continued in holiness did so because they were kept by the power of God from sinning. For reasons known to Himself, he permitted some of them to rebel, and be cast out of heaven. We read about the ministry of the holy angels throughout the Old Testament, and in the New Testament there are many references to them in the following selected passages: Lu 15: 10, *Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.* They have desires, according to 1 Pet 1: 12, *Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.* They talk, according to Zech 1: 9, *Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will shew thee what these be:* and also in Lu 1:13, *But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.* To them belong intelligence, spirituality and great power. They are also numerous - Christ referred to twelve legions of angels which could be sent to help him if he were to require that kind of help, which of course He did not, because He had to suffer the just in the room of the unjust.

There are evil angels and the most infamous of them is Satan, which means adversary. He is their chief., and described in Scripture as..... *the prince of the power of the air and the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.* Eph 2:2: also Rev 12:9, *And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels cast out with him.*

There are those who do not believe in the real personal existence of Satan, but that he simply personifies evil. Modern liberal theology regard him as just a name for sinful tendencies and desires in the heart. But this is not how he and the rest of the fallen angels are brought before us by the Scriptures, but are referred to with the utmost realism. What is meant by Satan being the god of this world? World of course has a number of meanings. The world as the creation of God, and hence His property has God as its Ruler and no one else. But there is also the world of fallen humanity, depraved and in rebellion against God. He is the god of this world, for this is manifested in the spirit of disobedience. But even things which are lawful and useful can be used by Satan to his advantage. This he can manage with no opposition from the unregenerate. The flesh, when it is employed regarding the saints, means the remaining corruption in them. This Satan can take advantage of with numerous temptations. Hence the believers have to contend with the world, the flesh and the devil fighting against their spiritual interests.

The evil angels have the same properties of personality attributed to them as the holy angels, but there the similarities end. Satan is super human but he is not supernatural. The question arises, is Satan directly and personally present whenever God's people are tempted? We have to be mindful that millions of people throughout the world are

tempted at the same time, but Satan is not omnipresent and cannot be in all different places at the same time. Obviously he must be employing multitudes of demons to carry out this task. In all probability when it is something of great magnitude he takes the matter in hand himself in such instances as Adam's temptation, Job's trials, David's numbering the people, Paul's thorn in the flesh, and the greatest of all, the Saviour's temptations. These are just observations in the passing that merit a closer examination of this subject - Job 1: 6; Job 2: 7; Matt 4: 1- 11; and John 8: 44, to name but a few relevant passages.

Where there is reference made to the devil and his angels it is to be understood of his headship over them. He is the god of this world, 2 Cor 4: 4, *In whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* There is an unending conflict in time between Christ's kingdom and Satan's. Christ will eventually overthrow his kingdom. He is already a defeated foe but still capable of vehement opposition to Christ and His kingdom. It is the believer's consolation that although Satan is powerful that he is under God's sovereignty always.

Amongst the many experiences a Christian has, there is the ongoing struggle with temptation, and the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. This is brought out in the Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 195, *What do we pray for in the sixth petition?* The answer is, *In the sixth petition ( which is, And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil), acknowledging.....that Satan, the world, and the flesh, are ready powerfully to draw us aside, and ensnare us .....This of course is explained by the existence now of a new spiritual life alongside the remnants of corruption. The latter are targeted by the world, the flesh and the devil so that there is immediate and constant opposition from the new spiritual life, because the new life is contrary to the flesh. Hence the encounter will last as long as the saint is in this world. But the unregenerate have not this conflict, all because their fallen nature responds to sin, and fights against the voice of conscience. But when Satan's dominion is challenged by the work of the Holy Spirit, as in the case of the believer, then the real struggle takes place.*

## **CREATION OF MAN**

Man was created on the final day of the work of creation, and was its crown and the object of God's care; *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth on the earth, So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.* Gen 1: 26-27. It is objected to that the above passages are not in harmony with Gen 2: 7, 21-23. There is no confusion here. In the first account, the narrative contains in accurate detail the order in which God created everything, but in the second account, that order is not adhered to for the simple reason that everything created is seen in relation to man.

The creation of man was a direct act of God, because there was no mediacy involved. In the case of everything else belonging to the world, they were brought from the earth, including Adam's body. His soul came direct from God, and he was created in God's image and likeness which will be expanded on at a later stage. Unlike every other descendant of Adam he alone was a federal head so that the human race stood in him or fell with him. This of course is a subject that will be dealt with under the heading, Origin of Sin.

There are other theories about the origin of man, such as that of Pyrelius that men preceded Adam, which has no Scriptural basis whatsoever. Winchell claimed that Adam was only the head of the Jewish race, and not that of mankind. However, it is an accepted fact that there was migration from a single centre which agrees with the narrative of Genesis. It is also accepted philologically that there was at first one common language.

## **Constitutional nature of Man**

What constitutes humanity? Is it to be viewed as a dichotomy or a trichotomy? According to the former, body and soul constitute human nature: but the latter regard it as constituted of body, soul and spirit., because according to this view body and spirit could not enter into fellowship with one another, and hence the soul as a third element was required. This view was well received by the Greek Fathers of the early centuries such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. However, it was handled in such a way that it undermined the true humanity of Christ, and was thus abandoned.

The nature of man is a unity. How could humanity be defined unless it was regarded as the unity of two elements, and to speak of the two elements as parallel as some do, is incorrect. Every act of man is seen as an act that involves the whole person. It is man that sins, rejoices and thinks. Suffering is ascribed to him irrespective of the nature of the suffering whether it be physical or mental. The point can be raised that a distinction is drawn in Genesis between body and soul, in that man became a living soul. By that is only meant that he became an animated being.

Trichotomists regard the Hebrew *nephesh*, and the Greek *psuche*, as representing the soul; and the Hebrew *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma* as representing the spirit. The problem with this position is that both are applied to the brute beasts: *Who knoweth*

*the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth.* Eccles 3: 21. *And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man; and every living soul died in the sea.* Rev 16: 3. Even the disembodied dead are called *pseuchai* in Rev 6: 9, and 20:4. The fact is that these words are all used interchangeably in the Scriptures. The following passages verify this : Lu 1: 46, 47 – soul and spirit; Matt 10: 28 – body and soul; Eccles 12: 7 – dust and spirit; Ps 31: 5 – spirit; Acts 7: 59 – spirit. The word spirit designates the spiritual element in man as the principle of life, and as that which controls the body. The soul is regarded as the subject of the action.

### **Origin of the Soul**

In the early church there were those who believed in the pre-existence of the soul, but acceptance of this view was confined to the Alexandrian school. Origen's view was that souls existed in a previous state, and that all irregularities in that previous state are seen in the moral punishment of sins which the person must bear in this life. These views are unscriptural. The two main views held by Reformed men are called Traducianism and Creationism.

### **Traducianism**

The Traducianists assert that the entire invisible substance of all the generations of mankind was created by that simple act of God in Gen 1:27, *God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.* The Creationists assert that only a part of the invisible substance of all the generations of mankind was created by that act. The soul is created separately by 'as many individual creative acts as there are souls.'

Adam and his posterity existed and sinned together when he sinned. This will be dealt with in the lecture on man's relation to God, but it is necessary to refer to the subject of sin at this point because we are to comment a little on Traducianism, and it would not be possible to do so without it being considered. The Westminster Shorter Catechism question/answer 16 states, *The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression.* Was mankind vicariously represented in the first sin? Some say that they were not, because representation implies the absence of the party being represented, but that they were seminally existent and therefore the first sin is deservedly imputed to them because in this generic manner it was committed by them. C.H. Hodge identified imputation solely in representation. Turretin regarded Adam's sin as imputed both as *culpa* and *reatus poenae* (liable to punishment). And Shedd says, *No individual can rise above his species and exhibit a character and conduct radically different from their's.* Bearing in mind the Traducianist position, it follows that a common sinful character was originated by a single voluntary act of apostasy; and hence the sinful disposition of an individual is the evil inclination of the will which comes from Adam by ordinary descent.

Those who are Traducianists refer to the Scriptures which teach that man is a species and the idea of a species implies propagation of the entire individual out of it. Individuals are not propagated in parts but whole. In Gen 1:26 –27, Adam is the name of the human pair, not the individual. It is not used as a proper name until the second chapter to denote the masculine and hence excludes the feminine. This is also so in Rom 7:1, although Paul refers only to the man, the woman is also included, because the same law of marriage includes them both and this is borne out in verse 2. Christ is also called the Son of Man, but only the woman was involved in his birth. And furthermore, in 1 John, 3: 15, *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.....* represents both the male and the female. In Eph 5: 13 there is the same emphasis; *Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.....* According to the record we have in Genesis of the woman's creation, there is no mention that God breathed into her the breath of life as was the case with Adam. The implication is that she was brought body and soul out of Adam. From that it seems that both the visible and the invisible substances were created, and that she was derived from Adam psychically and physically. It is also argued that reference to, *that which is born of the flesh is flesh*, means human nature which includes soul and body, and that *sarx* comprehends soul and body in Matt 26: 12, Luke 3:6, John 1: 14, 17: 2 and Rom 3: 20. The Creationists say that man is called father of the body, but God of soul, Heb 12: 9. But it is not said of God in the text that He is the Father of spirit, but of spirits, and that is generally and not particularly of human spirits. The Traducianists also appeal to Heb 7: 10, *For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedec met him...* that the whole person is referred to; and in Ps 139: 15, where there is reference to the embryonic and fetal life, yet it includes the mental and moral part of man with the physical.

### **Creationism**

According to this view each individual soul is regarded as an immediate creation of God, that is, each soul is created sinless but is joined to a defiled body. What are the strong points in favour of this view? There is a distinction drawn between body and soul – the one is from the earth and the other is from God. It also avoids the problem caused by Traducianism when it comes to Christology, and explains how Christ obtained his soul and remained sinless.

There are however weaknesses. If the soul is possessed of depraved tendencies it makes God the direct author of moral evil. The most serious is that God can be charged with being indirectly the author of moral evil, because the soul was created pure, but became defiled when joined to a sinful body. This is the strongest argument against this view.

There is no statement in the Scriptures on the origin of the soul. Both views have strong points and weaknesses. Theologians such as Dabney, Martensen, Bavinck and Reymond accept that there are elements of truth in both theories.

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## PROVIDENCE

### General Remarks

This doctrine is very clearly taught in the Scriptures. God created the Universe and continues to bear an uninterrupted relation to it. Providence is defined in the Westminster Shorter Catechism Q/A 11 as, *God's works of providence are his most holy wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions.* It has been said of the Greek word, *provia*, that it is, *...the execution in successive time of God's eternal unsuccessive purpose.* Although the actual word, providence, is not in the Scriptures yet the Scriptures are as full of this doctrine as they are of the doctrine of the Trinity, although the word Trinity is not in the Scriptures. The fact is that all things that have been brought out of nothing are not self sustaining. God is the only independent being in the universe and hence all else must be sustained by him and cannot do so without Him.

The Epicureans viewed the world as governed by chance; the Stoics regarded it as ruled by fate. It was Augustine who spearheaded the attempt to develop this doctrine of Providence, and made God's sovereignty central to everything that happens, both good and evil. Thomas Aquinas had a somewhat similar understanding that the will of God is determined by His perfections, and that He preserves and governs all things. On the other hand the Socinians and Arminians exalted the power of man to the extent that he controlled his own life, and thus sovereignty was set aside. The Rationalists' problem is how God's effective providence can intervene in such a way as is consistent with that of natural laws. They overlooked the fact that God can 'modify the effects without infringing in the least on the regularity of the natural law.'

The Reformers stated clearly that God alone is self-existent and therefore that all things which have a dependent existence cannot have the ground of their existence in themselves.

There are three elements in Providence, namely, Preservation, Concurrence and Government. Calvin, Dabney, the Hodges and Shedd regarded only two elements, Preservation and Government, because according to their view Concurrence was included in the other two.

### Objects of Divine Providence

His Providence extends to all things, and this is according to the following passages: Psalm 103: 19, *The Lord has prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all;* Eph 1: 11, *In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.* There are other passages which refer more specifically to the world such as Psalm 104: 14, *He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth.* Ps 135: 6; *Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.* Matt 5: 45; *That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on*

*the just and the unjust.* Besides the above references there are passages which refer to

His care for the brute creatures, Ps104: 21,28; Matt 6: 26: the affairs of nations, Job 12: 23; Acts 17: 26: man's birth and lot in this world 1 Sam 16: 1; Ps 139:16; Gal 1: 15,16: supplying wants of people Gen 22: 8,14; answer to prayer, Is 20:5,6; Ps 65: 2; and punishment of wicked, Ps 7: 11, 12; Ps 11: 6.

Whilst some accept a general providence they reject a special one, on the ground that God is too great to be concerned with small things. But this position is unscriptural, for we are told that even a sparrow does not fall to the ground without God's permission, and that the hairs of our head are all numbered. If it were possible for certain events and certain actions to be out with the Providence of God that would be a denial of His sovereignty over all things. Instead, His providential control in the execution of His sovereign purpose remains always consistent. It must not be overlooked that the manner in which He controls His creatures and their actions, is in every case perfectly consistent with the nature of the creatures and their actions.

It would be relatively easy to perceive created spiritual substance as immortal because it has self-subsistence imparted to it by the Creator, but its self-subsistence is not the key to its immortality, but that the Creator intends to uphold it in being forever. Hence there is no independency to be associated with this form of self-subsistence. God alone is independent. It is true that the soul has no composition that leads to decay or subject to any power that will dissolve it, nevertheless it depends for its continuance on the power of God. This point will be enlarged on under the heading, Preservation.

What relation does God bear to the sinful actions of His rational creatures? If God's sovereignty extends to all things, this must also include the sinful actions of human beings. It is true that He directs and controls their actions to the determination of His own purpose, yet at every point, from the desire to commit a sinful act, to the realization of it, the sinning agent is responsible, and at no time is God the author of sin. While sins occur by His permission, He also restrains sin, and overrules it for good. He makes it absolutely clear in the Scriptures that He detests sin - in hell His anger towards it will be forever. There is no clearer message of His detestation of it than in the sufferings and death of Christ. Until sin was expiated God could not be propitiated. His moral law demonstrates clearly how much He hates sin, and the grave consequences of sinning against Him.

### **Preservation**

The One who brought all things into being is the same One who preserves all things. There are many passages which could be quoted, but the following will suffice: Deut 33: 12, 25, 28; Ps 145: 14, 15; Matt 10: 29; Acts 17: 28. Preservation is more than 'imparting to matter certain properties, and placing it under certain invariable laws.' This is of course the deistical view of providence which is simply saying that God has imparted self-subsistence to the creature. In the material world God immediately works in and through material properties and laws; and in the mental world God works immediately in and through the properties of the mind. Preservation does not at any time run counter to creation. God never violates in Providence what He has established in creation. From this it follows that Providential agency relates to

physical nature generally, Ps 104:14, Ps 135: 5-7, Ps147: 8-15 and Job 9: 5-9. It also extends to both the particulars as well as the universals, Matthew 6: 26 and Matt 10:

29. But He also preserves His people in a special manner. They persevere all because they are preserved by Him from falling, and enabled in the face of all kinds of trials and temptations to go forward unto strength. There are many relevant passages regarding this subject: Gen 28: 15; Job 1: 10; Ps 32: 6; Is 40: 11; 1 Pet 3: 12. 'The power of God put forth in upholding all things is just as positive as that exercised in creation.'

**Concurrence**

Concurrence is regarded as the cooperation of the Divine with subordinate powers causing them to act as they do, because the powers of nature do not work by themselves - God is thus immediately operative in every act of His creatures. This cooperation is not to be regarded as a joint effort. It is indeed a great mystery that each deed is the deed of both God and the creature. God's sovereignty remains intact although He realizes His deeds through the self activity of the creature. The creature could never work without the energy that is derived from God so that it can be said that the impulse to action is from God. Everything works towards a predetermined end. From this it follows that there is not a moment when the creature operates independently. However, the act still remains the free act of man for which he is responsible.

**Government**

He who brings all things into being out of nothing must also have sovereignty over all things, Ps 103: 19, *The Lord has prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.* His government in the physical universe is administered by means of physical laws which He has established, therefore the law of nature is a positive statute as much as the law of the Sabbath. Care has to be exercised here lest what has been said is interpreted as having elements of deism. Although God has established the law of nature, nothing can ever happen in nature but that which He has foreordained. There is not the least possibility of anything arbitrarily happening which was not in God's purpose.

The government of God in the mental world is administered through the properties and laws of the mind, but also immediately by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. But it is equally true that moral agents are governed and controlled 'by all the varieties of moral influence such as circumstances, motives, instructions, persuasion and example.' There is also the personal efficiency of the Holy Spirit upon the heart and will.

