



Cherreguine Bible Doctrine Ministries

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THE DIVINE DECREE & MAN'S NEGATIVE VOLITION

The elect were chosen "before the creation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 4:3; I Peter 1:20; 2 Timothy 1:9; I Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 3:11). We are not chosen based on our righteousness because God chose us before we were born. The relation of eternity and time, of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, makes human understanding of God's eternal decree very difficult. Several important distinctions are helpful.

The decree is not eternal in exactly the same sense that God is eternal. God created and designed the divine decree in relationship to angels and human beings.¹

The decree results from the free, sovereign will of God; it must be distinguished therefore from the necessary acts of God within the divine Trinity.

The decree of God must also be distinguished from its execution in history. The decree to create is not the actual creation of the world "in the beginning" (Genesis 1:1). The decree to send Jesus Christ is not carried out until Jesus was born of Mary in the days of Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1-7).

Whenever human agents are used in carrying out God's decree, some decreed events occur by God's direct agency, as creation, regeneration, and the first and second comings of Jesus Christ. Other decreed events are carried out in history through human agency; sometimes they occur through obedient human agents who live according to God's law, the will of precept. Sometimes the decree is fulfilled through sinful, disobedient human action, as in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The complex issues involved in the relation of divine sovereignty and human responsibility or irresponsibility in carrying out the eternal decree becomes clearer when one examines scriptural references to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

The eternal, divine decree clearly lies behind the cross of Christ. Before His death Jesus indicated that "the Son of man will go as it has been decreed" (Luke 22:22), and Peter told his Pentecost audience that Jesus of Nazareth "was handed over to you by God's set purpose [βουλε] and foreknowledge[προγνωσει] (Acts 2:23).

The crucifixion was the most heinous crime of human history; the crucifiers transgressed God's commandments, his will of precept [Acts 4:27-28]. The above-mentioned text also refers to the sin of those taking part in the crucifixion: Judas, Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and Israel.

The crucifixion was part of God's eternal decree, and sinful human action was involved; but the guilt of such action is not minimized even when it functions as means to effectuate God's decree. Reflection on this crucial event of redemptive history is helpful since so many

¹ See diagram 3 –page 122

of the complex issues involved in understanding the relations of God's decree and human history are involved.

Scriptural references to God's decree are generally set forth in concrete relation to historical situations for the purpose of promoting comfort, security, assurance, and trust. The Lord foils the plans of the nations and thwarts the purposes of the peoples; but the plans of the Lord Stand firm forever.