

Biblical Theology by Dr. Chuck Baynard

Lesson 7 (HCLD 20)¹

Preparation: Begin and end each study time with prayer. Pay particular attention to the background reading and pray over each passage asking God to reveal Himself to you.

Background Reading: Read all the Scripture verses in footnote # 1 & 2

Vocabulary: Immutable, Eternal, Angel, Sovereign, Divine

Question: What is the special decree that God has made concerning angels and Men?

Answer: God, by an eternal and immutable decree, out of his mere love, for the praise of his glorious grace, to be manifested in due time, has elected some angels to glory;^[a] and in Christ has chosen some men to eternal life, and provided the means thereof:^[b] and also, according to his sovereign power, and the unsearchable counsel of his own will (whereby he extends or withholds favor as he pleases), has passed by and foreordained the rest to dishonor and wrath, to be for their sin inflicted, to the praise of the glory of his justice.^[c]²

The answer above is a modified version of the Westminster Larger Catechism question (Spelling and words have been changed to a more modern English). The Westminster Assembly chose the words *immutable* and *eternal* to introduce the decree of election, and election is the subject before us because the decree of God concerns election alone. Immutable, though seldom heard outside theological discussions today means unchanging. In other words, God has spoken and this cannot be changed. Eternal being added then to reinforce this unchangeable decree to indicate there will be no future

¹ Heidelberg Catechism Q53: What do you believe concerning the "Holy Ghost"?

A53: First, that He is coeternal God with the Father and the Son.^[a] Second, that He is also given unto me:^[b] by true faith makes me a partaker of Christ and all His benefits,^[c] comforts me,^[d] and shall abide with me forever.^[e]

[a] Gen. 1:2; Isa. 48:16; I Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Acts 5:3-4

[b] Matt. 28:19; II Cor. 1:21-22

[c] I Peter 1:2; I Cor. 6:17

[d] Acts 9:31

[e] John 14:16; I Peter 4:14; I John 4:13; Rom. 15:13

² [a] I Tim. 5:21

[b] Eph. 1:4-6; II Thess. 2:13-14

[c] Rom. 9:17-18, 21-22; Matt. 11:25-26; II Tim. 2:20; Jude 1:4; I Peter 2:8

circumstance whereby God will change this decree. The church (Reformed or otherwise) only stands as long as God is sovereign. A sovereign cannot have need to change a decree, or he isn't perfect. The most vivid example of this in my mind comes from the biblical story of Esther. Many have picked points to argue about through the years with this explanation, but nonetheless, I find it to be the best analogy for us mere mortals to grasp and thereby understand the reason why God must be immutable not only in His decrees, but everything He says or does.³

In the story of Esther an earthly king has made a decree. The fact that he was deceived, or tricked into issuing the edict does not matter. He cannot simply repeal his edit or he has proven himself capable of error and thereby unrighteous (unjust). His solution is to issue another edit, but he never rescinded the original. This standard was in place in Eastern kingdoms as far back as we have recorded history. It is easy then to see that the Word of God as the ultimate Sovereign cannot change, ever, or He is no longer God. We need to note here that early monarchs were considered by the people to have divine qualities and indeed many demanded that they be worshiped as a god. So it is the combination of being a sovereign and divine that brings into play the rule a sovereign cannot change an edit.

In this sense then, everything that God says must be perfect and righteous. For this cause Jesus said I have not come to destroy the law but fulfill, and not one jot nor tittle will pass away. Divine Words whether in the form of an eternal decree or not, will stand forever. From this, surely we can see then that indeed the decree of God is eternal and immutable, and in this closer focus, not subject to even the fulfillment that Christ brought to the Old Testament Law. That is these laws would have stood whether they were ever made manifest or understood by mankind. God spoke, so it is.

Here then we have the grounds for the so called "Theonomist" of today's church. They hold, and I believe rightly so, that the laws of the Old Testament have an ethical application for today. Christ said no less when He said search the Scriptures for they speak of me. It is a *divine* word, and cannot pass from history. In this sense we are all Theonomists or we are *antinomian* (law breakers). However like all things in the hands of man this has been carried to extremes by some who demand the Mosaic law be applied today, both to the church and civil government without any change; whereby adultery is a capital offense for example. As a general rule of thumb, all extremes are bad and this is no exception. However the concept of all mankind obeying God's law is not unbiblical in itself. Christ did come and Christ did fulfill and explain the purpose of the law, not to destroy it, but to show God's will more perfectly to man. Therefore where addressed to the whole world in general, the Old Testament law still applies. However civil punishments, ceremonial laws, dietary rules, etc. are not to be taken literally, but the ethic or principle is to be brought forward in the light of the New Testament revelation and the rule of current civil government which is established by God for the protection of the righteous and punishment of the evil doers.

I am somewhat amused at the Assembly's choice of God's reason for making these

³ James 1:17

decrees, “out of his mere love.” I would like to have had the opportunity to have sat in on the full discussion of this passage. Yet, how else can one measure any single attribute of God, compared to the whole? Though I believe what the Assembly was trying to point out was that God did this out of love and not because of any hidden agenda so to speak, nor because of the use of His divine foreknowledge, whereby it could be thought some in any way earned their salvation. We see this developed more completely in the conclusion of this sentence, “for the praise of His glorious grace.” Again we see it as a free of anything except the unsearchable will of God (grace), as God holds true to Himself whereby the purpose of all creation was for His glory. This consistency in the presentation of the Westminster Assembly of one doctrine (precept) after another without a single break in the unity of the whole has only been surpassed by the Holy Spirit in the writing of the Bible itself. While others who hold to another of the Reformed confessions may make the same claim, I don’t think any covered the full scope of theology as completely as the Westminster Assembly. The ending then is the explanation of the beginning, and we see why God elected any human being to eternal life, for His own glory. This makes God from the human perspective appear very self-centered. So be it, that is how God chose to reveal Himself to man. Being God, such self-centeredness is perfect and holy, and is not to be considered the bad trait it is among men.

In this answer we find most of the five classic tenets of the Christian faith once more rising from the testimony of Scripture to show God’s glory and radiance in the ordering of salvation for the elect and condemnation for the rest. Passages like this cause one to stop and wonder how any could deny the truth of God underlying either of these classic points of theology. *Depravity* being first established, whereby all have sinned and came short of the glory of God makes *Limited Atonement* and punishment of the sinner a thing of glorious righteousness, brought to perfection by the same love and grace that chose the elect to be glorified. The Reformed TULIP only points to the perfection of God in all areas, including justice and wrath. How we all gather to ourselves the words love and grace, but try so desperately to close out justice and wrath from our minds. For a Holy God must also be a Just God. And here we have come full circle, a Just God must have then eternal and unchangeable decrees! So the doctrine of the decree of God flow as a necessity from there being a God. In Reformed churches some choose to wear this symbol of classic Christian faith as a badge and claim Calvin as its father. In other circles it is seen as completely unloving and unbiblical, and the name of Calvin (who died before the acronym of the TULIP was born) thought to be of some radical pietism that is to be avoided at all costs. But when taken one tenet at a time, not one tenet can be proven wrong from the Bible and then the whole is indeed a beautiful flower in the garden of God making God’s love manifest to the chief creation of God, man while at the same time bringing glory to the God who created it all.

This only leaves one point to cover briefly in this treatment of such a great work as the Westminster Assembly handed us in question thirteen; namely “the means thereof.” What a fantastic God we serve who has never required from us anything He did not first furnish to us. Thereby, the means for entry into His eternal presence in glory, were provided; the Word, preaching, sacraments, and discipline of His church. I have used some liberty here as traditionally the Word of God and sacraments have been used as the

Reformed view of the “means of grace.” However by Word it was understood to include preaching of both the law and gospel. I have chosen first to present the Word as Scripture, then the practices of the church that are a natural outflow of this Word put into practice. I included the church, meaning the true church of God whereby all the other means are given a visible manifestation in this world, and the last addition of discipline for judgment begins in the house of God and as such is a grace bestowed upon believers.

Indeed God is gracious and while all mankind deserves condemnation and eternal punishment in the fires of hell, for his own purpose, in counsel with no one but himself, God chose some to eternal salvation in Christ. I disagree that God chose some to reprobation. God chose the elect, those whom God provided the means to be saved from the foundation of the world (before creation). All mankind being condemned, when God passed by a man, that man is going to pay the price of his rebellion. *Reprobation* then flows from the election by necessity, not because God so created any soul to be condemned. Does this make a difference? I believe it does because if I say God elected them to eternal damnation, then they are not guilty and have been unjustly condemned. We must understand that eternity is not an infinitely long line in time. God created time (seasons) for the benefit of man. God is not bound by time and the beginning and end are always present before God. God knew that man would fall and provided the means of salvation of some for His own glory, out of grace alone, not using divine foreknowledge to choose those who at some future date would choose Him.⁴

God gave to the original creation of angels the same ability to choose as he gave man in the creation of earth and all other things. Satan rose up and rebelled against God. God cast Satan from his presence and one third of this original creation of angels were cast out with Satan. The remainder God declared holy and so set them in his will they cannot sin nor fall from grace. God made no provision for the salvation of any fallen angel. Thus the angels have always desired to look into and understand the miracle of the rebirth of sinful man. Man fell after the creation, and the plan of God to glorify Himself in creation continued, plan B was not introduced. The choice has always been to obey God or to sin against God and not of eternal resting place. Neither angels nor men choose heaven or hell.

Some say God permitted the fall of the world into sin. This is true, but a complete necessity for the glory of God. If God had not created man with the ability to sin and rebel, there would be no glory to God for man would be a mere robot doing what he was designed to do, worship God. The free will or choice the world screams for has always been present, the choice to sin or not. God said to Cain that Cain had power over sin.⁵ Sin entered first by Satan and the angels who followed him in rebellion against God. Satan tempted mankind to follow him in rebellion. Did God know this would happen? Yes! Could God have stopped it? Yes, all things are possible for God. However the sin was by man and man did have the power not to sin, man chose sin. The glory to God then is that out of this fallen creation any should *voluntarily* worship Him and become holy. Many who embrace the other tenets of the Christian faith falter at *Irresistible Grace*, but the Bible is

⁴ Eph. 2:8 ff

⁵ Gen 4:7

clear it is of God for us both to will and to do. That is God makes us willing to be willing. How does God do this? God opens the eyes of man (regeneration) so man can see the truth of God as compared with the lie of Satan. God only regenerates those whom He elected before the foundation of the world.

Sin then lies with the created (man) not God. God's election of any is a great act of grace and mercy as God stayed the hand of the executioner in the election. The wonderful miracle of Calvary was made manifest in history of necessity when God first said I will glorify myself.

SUGGESTED SERMON OUTLINE

The Holy Spirit

What do you believe concerning the Holy Spirit?

First, that, with the Father and the Son, He is equally eternal God; second, that God's Spirit is also given to me, preparing me through a true faith to share in Christ and all His benefits, that He comforts me and will abide with me forever.

I. The Holy Spirit Is God with the Father and the Son

A. Believers encounter the Holy Spirit as God at the start of the Bible.

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. (GENESIS 1:1-2)

B. The Holy Spirit is a person rather than an attitude or an effect.

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. (JOHN 4:24)

C. Jesus taught the basic doctrine of the Holy Spirit as He revealed the Trinity in John 14. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will

pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. (JOHN 14:7-17)

D. The New Testament church learned the hard way to show proper respect the Holy Spirit. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. (ACTS 5:3-5)

II. God's Spirit Fills Believers

A. Christians are Trinitarian believers from the start. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: (MATTHEW 28:19)

B. The Holy Spirit lives in believers. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (1 CORINTHIANS 3:16)

C. The personal interaction believers have with God on a daily basis is with the Holy Spirit. Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. (2 CORINTHIANS 1:22)

D. The Holy Spirit works inside believers to prepare them for the task assigned them by God. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? (1 CORINTHIANS 6:17-19)

E. The response you show to God is a product of the Holy Spirit at work inside you. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (GALATIANS 4:6-7)

III. The Holy Spirit Is the Promised Comforter

A. Jesus promised to send us a Comforter. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (JOHN 14:26)

B. When your heart focuses on Jesus it does so because the Holy

Spirit is at work in you to do so. But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: (JOHN 15:26)

1. The still small voice is the Holy Spirt. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: (ROMANS 8:16)

2. The assurance that God understands us and our needs rests on the work of the Holy Spirit for us with God. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (ROMANS 8:26)

C. Church history is a constant illustration of the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit to transform the Bible from words to power. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. (ACTS 9:31)