



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Basic Bible Doctrine, Isaiah 14:24-27

"The Decrees of God"

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father we turn again to Thee with thanksgiving and praise for the word of God which is before us, and which we regard as given us by divine revelation, and we thank Thee that we do not have to question it. We know that we have to interpret it under the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, but we know that we cannot question the things that Thou hast said in Thy word and give us, Lord, the mind and the will to read the Scriptures and to ponder them, to seek to find the mind of the Spirit, but at the same time to be willing to accept the things that are difficult and hard for us to understand, and occasionally things that go against our human grain.

We pray tonight as we come to the subject of The Decrees of God, that Thou wilt give us the wisdom to accept the teaching that is found in Holy Scripture. Enable us, Lord, to ponder it, and to rejoice in all of the truth that emerges from the doctrine that Thou art in control of the affairs of this universe. We commit each one present to Thee. We pray that it may be a time of spiritual blessing, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for tonight is The Decrees of God in our study of Basic Bible Doctrine, and this is, if I were to entitle this with a lengthier title, I would say The Decrees of God or the foreordination of God and the freedom of man, and for our

Scripture reading I want to read just a few verses which we will be referring to from time to time in the study that follows, and the first of these is found in Isaiah chapter 14, and I want to read verses 24 and 27, and then I would like to read Ephesians chapter 1 verse 11, and Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 9, so if you have your Bibles, and you ought to have your Bibles at a study such as this, turn to Isaiah chapter 14, and listen as I read verse 24 and then verse 27, "The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand:"

Now, I want you to notice these verses, they are verses that express principles of the Lord's dealing, whether with Assyria, as the case here, or with us as individuals because the principles by which he deals with man are principles that flow out of the nature of his being, and so we should expect him to be sovereign in the affairs of the individual as well as sovereign in the affairs of the church and in the affairs of the nations of the world. "The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand:"

Now, what he is saying very simply is whatever he purposes will come to pass. Now, that's not a big problem for us is it? We believe that God is sovereign. To believe that whatever he purposes will come to pass. Now, just to stir up your mind a little bit, suppose we should say, he purposed to save the world, would it come to pass? Well, just think about that a little bit, we'll not talk about that tonight, but I want you to see the application of some of these truths.

Now, verse 27, "For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall annul it? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" In other words, if God has purposed something, who shall abrogate it? Who shall cause his purpose to fail, and if his hand is stretched out to accomplish something, who shall turn it back, so that that shall not be accomplished.

Now, we turn over to the New Testament, and we read 1 Ephesians chapter 1, in verse 11. Ephesians, 1 verse 11, Paul writes, "In whom" (Referring to Christ) "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!" (Notice the universality of this) "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." All things not some, all things, "all things worked after the counsel of his own will."

Chapter 3, verse 9, "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery," (That is the mystery in this context is the fact that Jew and Gentile are fellow heirs, members of the same body, partakers of the same promises in the body of Christ.) "Make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages hath been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:" And then, he adds in verse 11. "According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." According to the purpose of the ages, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now, you'll notice he, from chapter 1, verse 11, "He works all things according to the counsel of his own will," and in Isaiah chapter 14, he says, "As I have thought, so shall it come to pass." The Decrees of God, again we are faced with a very difficult subject. It is clear when we think about the decrees of God that we are talking about something that is difficult for a finite mind to comprehend, and particularly, for most us who are rather simple minded, when it comes to things such as this. On the other hand, we must, as some have suggested, that we do just forget the whole matter of the divine decrees, and just leave that for someone else to think about. The facts are there are very few people who can leave this for someone else to think about in the first place. Almost all of us have some ideas about the divine decree. They may not be particularly biblical, but we do have our ideas about them, and we are often very careful to express them. It would be a much greater difficulty for us, if we should abandon the idea of thinking about the decrees of God, a universe without decrees. One of the Arminian theologians has said, "Would be as irrational and appalling as would be an express train driving on in the darkness without headlight, or engineer, and with no certainty that the next moment it might not plunge into the abyss."

Just now the aircraft controllers, those who control the traffic at the airports, are very disturbed, particularly disturbed with some airplanes, which will not allow them to ride free of charge in the jump seat in the cab of the airplane, and as you may know, it's been published rather widely that one of the Braniff planes was coming into, I believe, Miami airport, and one of the controllers is reported to have suggested that he just steer his airplane over where they were having a little storm, and told him in effect, it was because of Braniff taking the position that they were not going to give free seats to those men any longer. In the course of the discussion of this in one of our leading newspapers, and also over the radio today, there's been a good bit of study of these particular men and the type of work that they do, and I do not think that there has been a serious accident until the recent one in San Diego, relatively recent one, over a period of about seven or eight years, but the near misses have arisen. What they call near misses have arisen from two hundred and something seven years ago, to over five hundred and fifty, I believe was the figure I heard today.

Now, just imagine for a moment, with five hundred and fifty near misses, does that make you make you a little nervous about taking off in a plane? Five hundred and fifty near misses, and just suppose we didn't have any aircraft controllers. Just suppose we didn't have any body at all trying to direct traffic, how many of us would want to get up in an airplane? Well, I know I wouldn't want to get up in one, and I certainly wouldn't want to fly to New York City or Chicago or Dallas or someplace where the traffic is such as it is. The idea of our doing that without some plan is just beyond our comprehension.

Well, the whole matter of the divine decree is something like that, because it is God who is responsible for our universe, and so the idea of a universe left to itself is just as much reason for panic, as would be a situation like that. The Bible of course uses the term decree over and over again. It speaks about the divine purpose, decree, divine will, and many other expressions, express the idea that God has planned the ideas of this universe, and he has not taken his hand off of the control of them, and furthermore, we

are so thankful, he is such a great God, he doesn't need the instruments that men need in order to plot the path of airplanes, and to see that they fly at proper altitudes at certain points in their particular journey, but God has his hand on everything that is transpiring because he works all things according to the counsel of his own will, as Paul has said.

Now, we want to very briefly, and in the time that we have, about thirty minutes, we want to try to go over what the Bible says about the decrees of God. Now, I suggest if you are interested in further study concerning the decrees of God that you take down some of the reputable systematic theologies and read the chapters on the decrees.

Charles Hodge theology has an excellent chapter on the decrees. Professor Berkhoff and his systematic theology also has an excellent chapter on the decree. You'll find in almost all of the systematic theologies, chapters on this in which many of the difficulties that you have in your own mind, and frequently answered very well, so we're going to hasten through and I know there are going to be many questions that you have, but nevertheless, you'll just have to reserve them, and I'll try to answer any that arise, if you'll come and see me, or arrange an appointment, I'll be glad to talk to you about these matters, not as one who knows the answers to all of the questions, but I'd just be happy to talk to you about them.

Let's begin by the statement of the Doctrine of God's decree, and I'd like to give you two simple definitions. One is found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. This is something that is taught to children. Westminster Shorter Catechism says concerning the decrees of God, "That the decrees of God are his eternal purpose. According to the counsel of his will, whereby for his own glory he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass."

Now, all who subscribe to the Westminster confession of faith are suppose to subscribe to that statement. Notice the things that are said in it. God has an eternal purpose. He has a counsel that flows out of his will. He does these things for his own glory, and he has foreordained whatsoever, comes to pass, so he has a plan. He has a counsel that flows out of his will. That is his will has determined upon a certain wise

course of action. He has foreordained that these things come to pass, and it is done for his glory, not for ours, for his glory.

Now, Presbyterians are supposed to subscribe to that or those who hold to reform doctrine. Let's listen to what a Baptist has to say. Just to show you how ecumenical orthodox men are on the doctrine of the decree. This is what A.H. Strong the Baptist says. He says, "By the decrees of God we mean that eternal plan, that eternal plan, by which God has rendered certain all the events of the universe, past, present and future." So by his eternal plan, God has rendered certain all the events of the universe, past, present, and future, so was God surprised when you were saved? No, he wasn't surprised. He planned it. He planned it. It's part of his eternal plan.

Now, you'll notice that Mr. Strong omits the ideas of harmony with his will, but he would not deny that, and he omits the fact that this is all for the glory of God, but he would not deny that. Essentially these two definitions are the same. Let's now turn to the nature of God's decrees, and I'll try to briefly trace through these seven things that we may say about God's decrees.

First of all, the glory of God is the final cause of God's decree. The Bible always puts God first, the good of his creatures second. We tend to want to put ourselves first, and then God second, but the Bible always puts God first, and the good of his creatures second. His infinite perfections in the revelation of himself is the highest conceivable end of all things. In other words, if something takes place or something is, and out of that God is given glory, that is the highest end or purpose which any thing, person, or event may have. The more fully that God is known, the more fully the highest good of the universe is promoted. The better we know God, the more he is revealed, the better this universe is. The glory of God is the final cause of God's decrees. That's the simple truth, which we know about. Paul writes of it over and over. The Scriptures are full of it. He says of him, to him, and unto him are all things to whom be glory forever and ever. So

it's a biblical truth we all should know. Second or B. The decrees of God are many and yet one.

Now, we read in Ephesians chapter 3, verse 11 about the purpose of the ages, which he has purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. But when we say the decrees are many, yet one, we don't mean to be contradictory; we mean simply that they are many in details, yet one in overall purpose. From all possible events, God has determined on one plan, and because he's determined to accomplish his affairs according to this one plan, he foreknows everything that is going to come to pass, so he does not foreknow, and then foreordain what he comes to know, in that case he would be increasing in knowledge and then he would ordain what he has learned, but a God who learns things is a God who doesn't know everything and so it's just the reverse. He knows what is going to come to pass, because he has determined that it shall come to pass. That's very simple, but nevertheless that is what we are to think about when we think of God.

If we think of a building, for example, let's think of an extensive building, some of the great skyscrapers that go up all across our land. Well, when we look at an extensive building or a complicated machine we perceive the multiplicity of the parts of it. We can look at a building as it goes up, and we notice the work of the foundation. We notice the work of the super structure. We notice the work of the stonemasons. We notice also then the filling out of the building, the painting of it, the preparing of it for occupancy, and all of the minute details, the plumbing the electricity, etcetera, that must go into this building, but nevertheless we can think of the building as one building, one structure, and so the decree of God is, we can say the decrees are many because the one plan of God involves many, many, many, in fact, an almost infinite number of details, so the decrees are many, and yet at the same time they are one.

The acts of God are not successively formed as emergencies arise. He doesn't start out and say, "Well, I think I will do this." And then as begins, something happens, and he says, "Wait a minute, we've got to start over again, and we've got to have some

repair work done here. We've got to change our course a little bit." That's the way we do. He doesn't meet with the angels on Monday morning in the quarterback club, and construct a new game plan for the week because of what happened last Saturday. He knows exactly what is transpiring, and so he is carrying out his unified plan, but involved in it are many details. Third, the decrees are eternal.

Now, the Bible states these things in passages like Ephesians 3:11, the purpose of the ages, his eternal purpose. He has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. That's one aspect of his decree. He speaks about the purpose, which he has purposed in Christ our Lord before eternal times, in 2 Timothy chapters 1, verse 9. In other words, the decrees of God are decrees that stretch back into the past, and there is no definite place in the past where he formed them. We say they are eternal in the sense that they lay in the mind of God in the infinite pages past. History is the evolution of his eternal purpose. Someone has said, "History is his story." Someone else has also said, "It quite a bit different from her story too." But nevertheless history is his story truly in the sense that it is the story that God has determined and planned, and which is being carried out in our midst, and Mr. Wesley was right. He read the newspapers. He said to see what God was doing. We read the newspapers ultimately to see what God is doing. God cannot have plans now that he did not have at another time. He is an omniscient being from the beginning, and so he does not have any new plans that he did not have before. You see, if he were to have some new plans, that he did not have before, then he would not be an omniscient God. He has not come to know certain of his plans.

Forth, the decrees are immutable, that is they are unchangeable. Now, we have lots of changes in the administrations of a political nature throughout the world. A great many of you in this auditorium would probably like to have a change in the administration this year in our own United States administration. Administrations generally change because of the fact that the administration manifests a lack of wisdom, or a lack of power to carry out things that are wise, and so we have changes in foreign

policy, changes in economic policy, changes in environmental policy, changes in almost everything. We have lots of changes. In fact, we are in the midst of an administration that seems to like to change a great deal.

Now, changes as a rule are signs of weakness. That is they are an indication of the fact that things have not been done too well, and an acknowledgement of that, but in the case of the decrees of God they are immutable. With him the causes of change have no reason for existence. He doesn't change his plans because he's thought up some better plans. He doesn't change his plans because some are not working. All of his plans work, and so consequently there is no need for change. Change is usually from better to worse or from worse to better. Well, neither one of these pertain to an unchangeable, perfect God, and so his plans are unchangeable. His decrees are immutable. He has determined that certain things take place, and they do take place.

Now, he may insert certain contingencies in his plans. He may say, "If such and such takes place, then this will take place." That's done for our benefit, but so far as the eternal plans of God are concerned, they are immutable. Fifth, the decrees are free.

Now, when we say that the decrees of God are free, we mean by this that they are rational decisions based on sufficient reasons. God did not act out of a mere necessity of his nature, he was free to create, or he was free not to create. He did not have to do what he did because of something that was lying in his nature. Our purpose are free even when formed under the influence of other minds, and so we should, when we talk about God being free, when we talk about man being free, we are not suggesting that there may not be some influence from other minds. In the case of our marriages, we say that they are free, but nevertheless we were influenced. The man influences the woman, and the woman influences the man.

Now, the Lord of course is above all kinds of influence like that, and so it's obvious that if our decisions are free, his decisions are most free. They are free decisions, and they also free in the sense of being absolutely sovereign. That is they are in no way

conditional upon something that man does. There is no suspense or indecision in him, so his decrees are free. They are rational decisions based on sufficient reasons. His purposes are free in the sense of being absolutely sovereign, and then sixth, the decrees are certainly efficacious.

Now, what we mean by that, and that is expressed, I think, in Isaiah 14, verse 27, where we read, "For the Lord of host hath purposed and who shall annul it." That is he renders certain the occurrence of what he decrees. All events are equally certain in the mind of God whether they are brought to pass by his own power, or whether he determines that they take place through some secondary agency. He affects the good. He determines that evil exists.

Now, we'll prove that in a moment in case you have some question about it, but he does effect the good, and he determines that evil exist. Now, that's proved by his perfection, which forbids the ascription to God of uncertain purposes. Who would want a God who is uncertain? Who would want a God who didn't really know what he was doing? And who would want a God who did not have the power to carry out what he wanted? How would you like to worship a God who was uncertain in his purpose? You wouldn't like that at all.

Now, this also is proved by the unity of his plan. His decrees must be certainly efficacious by the fact that all of his plan works together, and his plan would not be a unified plan, if there were things that were not certainly efficacious in it, and then also the evident linking together of events in the progress of history indicate that everything is working according to a plan. All things are intimately connected. It's impossible for us to think of any event that is not intimately connected with almost every other event in the universe, and if you know anything about history, you know that often the most important of historical events have depended upon the most trivial incidents.

I mentioned last time that Professor Bury had said that the course of the world's history was changed by the shape of Cleopatra's nose, and the effect that that had upon

history, but just think for a moment of World War II, and the salvation of Great Britain, because when the Germans reached the English Channel, and that great fog came over the channel and lasted there long enough for the British soldiers to get back to England, and also convince Adolph Hitler that it might be a risky task to make it across that channel. Looking at it now, it was obvious that all they had to do was just cross the channel, and Britain would have fallen into their hands. They were totally disorganized, and could never have held off the Germans, but God in a most remarkable way, it appears now, we cannot prove this incidentally.

Historians can never prove anything like this, but it is strange that the providence of God at that particular point in history, caused that tremendous fog to come, and that turned the course of World War II, or take the battle of Gettysburg, when the Southern men were doing so well, and finally, there came the snafu in communications evolving J.E.B. Stewart, and it appeared as if Lee and the forces of the South were going to win that war, but something happened at Gettysburg, which most Yankees at least, would admit was the providence of God.

Now, as far as a Southerner's concerned, well, we believe that God looked down here, and finally decided, "Well, you know, if I don't do something about that Stonewall Jackson, the South's going to win this war, and I've not intended that they win it." And so he had something happen to Stonewall, and his purposes were accomplished.

Now, isn't it striking just a little incident like that, and all admit that in the case of Jackson, who was the outstanding general of the Civil War, all admit, that the fact that he was wounded by one of his own men, had a very definite effect on the course of the Civil War, perhaps not on the ending of it, but on the course of it. It's remarkable how history is woven into a particular plan. Dom Gregory Dicks, who is not known for fundamentalism said, "The tapestry of history has no point at which you can cut it, and leave the design intelligible." So the decrees are certainly efficacious, and that is proved also by the providential and moral government of God. There is no certainty in

providence. There is no certainty in the moral government of God if the decrees are not efficacious. There would be no assurance of fulfilled prophecy. There would be no assurance of salvation. There would be no assurance of anything written in the Bible, if we were uncertain about God's ability and intention to accomplish exactly what he intends to accomplish. What reason do you have, for example, for believing that God would not change his mind tomorrow, and not save you after all? Suppose his intention should change? Suppose he should say, "I did determine that men should be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ shed on Calvary's cross, but now I think I have a better plan?" How would you like that?

Most of you read the Bible and you read about the prophecies of the Bible and you believe God is going to bring them to pass. Well, he cannot bring his prophetic word to pass if he does not control events. In the book of Revelation in the 17th chapter in the 17th verse, it says that he puts into the minds of these wicked ten kings a certain purpose, so that they agree, and thus they carry out the plan of God. And then finally, the decrees relate to all events. Not some events, but all events. Some are necessary events. Some are contingent events, or the acts of free agents. Some are good. Some are evil, but all are included in the plan of God. As Paul says in Ephesians, 1:11, "He works all things according to the counsel of his own will."

Now, everything is included in his plan, and that is evident from the unity of the divine purpose. A general who plans a campaign does not plan just generally. He plans down to the minutest detail, and to the limit of his wisdom. An inventor planning a machine does not in general invent his machine. He actually plans down to the minutest details, so that he can demonstrate that that machine is a workable thing. Patent office would not accept it if it were not a workable thing. From the universal dominion of God we learn that the decree relates to all events. Control extends to everything, from the certainty of the divine government, and from the Scriptures themselves, the Bible, our Lord himself, speaks about those little incidental things, about a sparrow falling to the

ground. That doesn't happen without the knowledge of God. He knows, as I said Sunday in the message, he knows the hairs on our head. That's the Lord's way of saying that his purposes and his intentions, his concerns deal with smallest detail of our lives.

It would be terrible to have a God, whose concerns did not touch these little things because these are the little things that most concern us. The Bible declares that free acts are decreed before hand, such as the doctrine of prophecy. It declares that sinful and holy acts are foreordained, sinful acts, foreordained. The Bible says that very plainly. It says concerning the cross of Christ, remember what it says? It in Acts chapter 2, verse 23, and 24, it's good to take a look at that because there is no question about the meaning of it. Acts chapter 2, in verse 22, in verse 23, Peter says,

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," (Notice the order.) "Determinate counsel foreordination, then foreknowledge, and fore knowledge of God ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:"

There is divine sovereignty and human responsibility in the one passage. Human responsibility for they have with wicked hands taken him and crucified him, but this is by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. It has been predetermined. Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken with wicked hands and crucified him.

Now, was that a wicked act? Well, there is no act in the universe that is more evil than the crucifixion of Christ, but he says it was determined by God. The Bible teaches that God does determine that certain evils exist, that certain evils take place. Turn over to chapter 4, verse 27, "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed,

both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Nations, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever Thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." Again, the cross of Christ, the wicked event determined by God.

Now, we shouldn't have any problem with this because we've recently been studying the book of Genesis together, and we have seen that Joseph said, "You meant it unto me for evil. God meant it unto me for good. You sold me. God sent me." In other words, the very act in which they committed evil was something determined by God for the ultimate good, of Jacob and the whole family, so God does determine even the evil things, for the purpose of greater good, so from the Scriptures the Bible says, that all events are foreordained by God. History itself is in the will of God. Consider the conquests of Nebuchadnezzar, the destruction of Jerusalem, the history of Josephs, the sufferings of the martyrs, the apostasy of the man of sin. It would destroy our confidence in God himself if the future were uncertain.

Now, I know that there are difficult things for us to understand about this, but my dear friend, we are children. We are little children. We are little children in divine things. We do not understand all that God understands. How often have we said to our children, "Well, son you just cannot understand now, but don't do this. Sooner or later you'll find out." And our children of course tell us when they grow up, "You know, I never realized how much you learn between the time I was a child and the time that I have grown. It's amazing." So in divine things we listen to the word of God, and we obey the word of God. There are many things that we don't understand about it. I don't preach the things I don't understand. I preach the things I do.

Now, let me just, for a few moments, speak about some of the objections to God's decrees. First of all foreordination, it is said in inconsistent with free agency. Now, of course if an act to be free must be uncertain, then there is a contradiction. If you want an uncertain act together with a sovereign God, then there is contradiction, but foreordination is not inconsistent with free agency. I say if an act to be free must be

uncertain then a contradiction exists, but an act may be free and yet certain. For example, a parent may be free to succor a child in danger, but it's certain that he will. If one of my children were in danger, you could just put it down as a certain fact that I would do everything I could to rescue that child. That's a free act, but it's certain. Free acts have been predicted therefore their occurrence is certain. Our Lord is free, and yet it was certain he would not sin when he was here, so when we talk about something that is free, something may be free, and at the same time, certain. The decrees of God secure the certainty of events. There is liberty with regard to the mode of their occurrence.

Now, he determines the means as well as the ends. If no foreordination, God would be constantly increasing in knowledge. If actually all God did was to look down through the centuries, and see what was going to happen and then determine that that would happen, he wouldn't be an omniscient God. He would be a God that learned something, and he is not a God who has learned anything, and so he does not learn by looking down through the centuries to see what is going to happen. He knows what is going to happen because he has determined what is going to happen.

Incidentally, this subjection bears with equal force against the doctrine of foreknowledge. There are some who say, "Well, God doesn't foreordain. He just foreknows." Well, if he fore knows something it's just as certain as if he had foreordained it. Do you think something that he foreknows is not going to happen? Of course it is, that's just as certain as they are. Any way a completely free man, you wouldn't like a free man, you know why? Because a free man could never be counted on, a completely free man would be no more moral or ethical than a tossed coin. One moment he would act one way. The next moment he would act another way. How would you like your wife to be free, totally free? That is you wouldn't know, what in the world she was going to do. I know some of you want to raise your hand and say, [laughter] "That's exactly the kind I've got." No it isn't. It is not really. You know your wife. You don't everything about her, of course, but you know your wife, and you know certain things you can

count on. You couldn't live if you didn't have these things, you could count on. So the idea of a completely free person is not a moral thing. Foreordination of sin is inconsistent with holiness. How can we say God is holy if he foreordains sin?

Well, I might first of all deal with this by saying, why your objection bears against the plain teaching of the word of God. If you want to say to me, "He cannot foreordain sin. That that's inconsistent with his holiness." I just come back to you, and I say well please explain to me then, those passages I read in the book of Acts. "He foreordained that Jesus Christ would be crucified by wicked men. Was that not a wicked act that they did? Was that not a sinful act? Is it not foreordained? Did God not foreordain it? Then God foreordained sin, so you see if you want to deny it, you have to deny the plain teaching of the word of God. It's very plain.

Now, I am not saying I understand everything about this, but you would have to deny the word of God. It's vain to say, you cannot foreordain sin, if he has foreordained sin. An agent incidentally is not responsible for all the necessary consequences of ones acts. In this sense higher ends may be accomplished by the permission of lower consequences. For example, it just may be that God, by determining that sin of those wicked men, has brought to pass the greater good of a company of redeemed people who worship and praise him for the manifestation of God's grace to them.

Now, we know that's what the Bible teaches. It's by virtue of the foreordination of sin that we come to know God as a gracious God and as a just God, and we could never know him, as a gracious God if he has not determined that sin exist in his universe. And since he controls everything, it is ultimately he that determined that sin should exist in his universe. You can even see instances of this in human judges. A judge may sentence a criminal, but he sentences a criminal because it's according to the law. He may know that that individual will be very bitter as a result, but nevertheless he does it because of the greater good. A father may punish a son, and know that out of this there may arise some

very unpleasant consequences, but he thinks that it's for the ultimate good his son. God's dealings with the evil angels manifest this too.

Then there are those who say foreordination destroys all motive to action and exertion. Well, that of course supposes that God has determined the end without respect to the means. In other words, someone immediately says, "Well, if that's true then certain people are going to be saved, and they are going to be saved regardless of what we do." Well, the facts are that they will be saved whatever you do, but you must hasten to point out. It must be pointed out very quickly, that he has determined not only the individuals who are going to be saved, but he's determined that they be saved through prayer. He is determined that they be saved through witnessing. He is determined that they be saved through the reading of the Bible. In other words, the means have been determined just as much as the end. And consequently, the responsibility for prayer, the responsibility for witnessing, the responsibility for reading the word of God is upon us, and particularly among us Christian who knows the teaching of the word of God. That supposes that the certainty of events acts as a motive to neglect. Actually, the certainty of the things acts to urge us on, and if you read the Bible you will discover this.

Why do you know that if you did not have the hope of success in witnessing, you wouldn't witness, but since you know from the Bible that God has said that he is going to save his people, and we are still here, so evidently all of his people have not yet been saved, that therefore we have the certainty that God is going to do something through our preaching and through our witnessing. And so the certainty of God accomplishing his purpose is an encouragement to the preaching of the word of God. It's not a discouragement. It is an encouragement to preaching. That's why the Calvinists have preached. That's why Whitfield preached, why he was the greatest evangelist to ever preach in the United States. It was because he believed in the certainty of God's decrees, and he knew that his purpose would be accomplished. He was encouraged, and when they treated him ill, he could take it because he knew that God was accomplishing

something through him. It's so foolish to say that foreordination destroys all motives to exertion.

Oh, I just wish I could sit down here and let Paul speak for a few minutes.

[Laughter] You know it would be so great, but all you have to do to see that is just to take Paul and read him. Read what he says. You'll find in those great passages in which he talks about foreordination, he instantly is talking about what we must do in the light of this. He doesn't know anything about those Arminian objections. And foreordination is fatalism.

Well, our time is really up. I've gone a few minutes over tonight, and maybe next time we'll say just a word or two about this. There's only one point of similarity between God's doctrine of the decrees and fatalism, and that is that they both assume absolute certainty in the sequence of all events, but in the case of one, we have an abstract principle, in the case of the other we have a loving Father, who is sovereignly carrying out his purpose. There is no relationship whatsoever between them. The doctrine of the decrees creates the greatest sense of humility in the presence of a great sovereign who carries out all of his purposes. It creates a sense of confidence in the God who works all things according to his will, and it warns the impenitent that his punishment is sure to come, and that he must receive God's salvation before it is too late because the certainty of the decrees of God includes not only the salvation of the saints, but the just punishment of the eternally impenitent. May God help us to respond. Let's bow in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the wonderful comforting truth of the decree of our great God, and Lord we do pray that it may be an impotent and a very definite means by which we accomplish the will of God. May it give us an impetus to preach the word of God to all with whom we come in contact, as we are guided by the Holy Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

