

# *The Counsel of God*

By

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## Introduction

### Dangers in Studying the Counsel of God

- I. The Danger of Closed-mindedness
  - A. “I’ve made up my mind and you can’t change it.”
  - B. “Dr. So-and-So, the great theologian says . . .”
  - C. “I already know all there is to know about the doctrine.”
  - D. “Well, I don’t know anything about hermeneutics, but I know what I believe.”
- II. The Danger of Emotionalism
  - A. The Counsel of God is a highly emotionally charged doctrine. It includes the study of such ideas as election, predestination, and God’s determinative will. But since the words are found in Scripture, the Bible student must treat them as he would treat other doctrinal words of Scripture.
  - B. One’s faith system should be established on the facts of revelation rather than on the attachment of emotions. To become enamored with a particular view of doctrine without having done a consistent analysis of the biblical text is to open oneself up to Satanic influences. This is true not only in the area of the Counsel of God, but in all doctrinal areas.
  - C. Emotions are part of the soulish character of man, and need to be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit.
- III. The Danger of Philosophical Speculation and Human Logic
  - A. There are limitations to human logic.
    - i. The lack of all the facts.  
“The basis for all real thinking is the ability to withhold judgment until all the facts are in.” Irving Babbitt
    - ii. The inability to correlate all the facts. It takes time and effort to do so, and then, one must be aware of the possibility of missing something.
    - iii. The danger of inconsistency.
  - B. The Counsel of God is solely a matter of biblical revelation.
    - i. The doctrine of God’s determinative will is comprehended in the Greek word *boule*, regularly translated “counsel.”
    - ii. Of the twelve times the word *boule* occurs in the New Testament, 9 times it refers to the *decree* of God.
    - iii. The word “Decree” refers to the act of God in bringing forth a plan for His current program as a result of the Trinitarian council. In order to understand the need for this truth, the student of Scripture must understand the nature of God’s will.

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IV. The student of the Bible must understand the *two kinds of will* as presented in Scripture.

A. Desirous will is indicated by the Greek words *thelo* and *thelema*

1 TIMOTHY 2:3-4 FOR THIS IS GOOD AND PLEASING IN THE SIGHT OF GOD OUR SAVIOR, <sup>4</sup> WHO DESIRES (*THELO*) ALL MEN TO BE SAVED AND TO COME TO FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH. (GHS)

- i. *Thelo* (209 times in the GNT<sup>1</sup>) is the act of desirous will (verb). *Thelema* (64 times in the GNT) is the thing willed, that is the result of the act of desiring.
- ii. Biblicists have recognized that desirous will belongs to the nature of God. God desires something because of the kind of God He is.
- iii. Since God has only one nature, shared by three persons, He only has one desirous will, which is in turn shared equally by each person.

B. Determinative will is indicated by the words *boulomai*, *boulema*, and *boule* – James 1:18.

JAMES 1:18 OF HIS OWN WILL (AORIST PARTICIPLE OF *BOULOMAI*) HE BROUGHT US FORTH BY THE WORD OF TRUTH, THAT WE MIGHT BE A KIND OF FIRSTFRUITS OF HIS CREATURES. (NKJV)

- i. *Boulomai* (34 times in the GNT) is the act of determination, that is, the act of making a decision, *boulema* is the result of the act of determination, that is, the thing determined (2 times in the GNT) while *boule* (12 times in the GNT) is the determinate plan or counsel that results from an act of the determinative will of God. Since this plan is determined by all persons of the trinity, it is correct to refer to the *boule* of God as the decree of God.
- ii. Biblicists generally recognize that determinative will is the result of individuality, or person.  
1 CORINTHIANS 12:11 BUT ONE AND THE SAME SPIRIT WORKS ALL THESE THINGS, DISTRIBUTING TO EACH ONE INDIVIDUALLY AS HE WILLS (*BOULOMAI*, CORRECTLY TRANSLATED “HE DETERMINES”). (NKJV)
- iii. Since this is true, it is not surprising that each person of the trinity has His own determinative will. The *boule*, or determinative counsel of God comes out of His *thelema*, or desirous will.

EPHESIANS 1:11...IN WHOM ALSO WE RECEIVED AN INHERITANCE, HAVING BEEN PREDESTINED ACCORDING TO THE PURPOSE OF THE ONE WHO WORKS ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE COUNSEL OF HIS DESIRE... (GHS)

C. In order for there to be order in God’s creation program, it was necessary for the three persons of the Trinity, each sharing the same desirous will, but each having His own determinative will, to meet in Trinitarian council in order to determine (*boulomai*) a single counsel (*boule*, decree), which came out of that single desirous will (*thelema*).

## The Importance of the Counsel of God

V. An understanding of God’s counsel is needed to fully comprehend several important doctrinal concepts.

1 GNT = Greek New Testament.

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- A. It provides a biblical basis for understanding the death and resurrection of Christ – Acts 2:22-24.
- B. It provides a framework for understanding God’s purpose in Christ – Ephesians 1:9-10.
- C. It provides a spiritual background for confidence in God, and calmness in the time of trouble – Romans 8:28-31.

### Doctrinal Relationships Concerning the Decree

#### *The Decree is Not a Doctrine in Isolation.*

The student of the decree should have a preliminary background theology proper, including God’s essence, nature, and attributes, as well as a background in the doctrine of the trinity.

- VI. The student of the decree must understand the distinctions between *foreknowledge* and *omni-science*. Without such an understanding utter confusion results, not only in this doctrine, but in many others.
  - A. *Oida* knowledge is intuitive knowledge. It is knowledge gained from reflection and study rather than through the experience of oneself, or the observation of the experiences of others. The word *oida* is based on the idea of “seeing” *ideas* rather than doing or observing activities, as it is derived from *eiro*, meaning “I see.”
  - B. Romans 8:26-27  
LIKewise THE SPIRIT ALSO HELPS IN OUR WEAKNESSES. FOR WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT WE SHOULD PRAY FOR AS WE OUGHT, BUT THE SPIRIT HIMSELF MAKES INTERCESSION FOR US WITH GROANINGS WHICH CANNOT BE UTTERED. <sup>27</sup> NOW HE WHO SEARCHES THE HEARTS KNOWS WHAT THE MIND OF THE SPIRIT IS, BECAUSE HE MAKES INTERCESSION FOR THE SAINTS ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD.
    - i. We have no intuitive knowledge (*oida*) concerning how we ought to pray. This knowledge is not inherently in the individual Christian.
    - ii. He who searches the hearts knows intuitively (*oida*) what is the mind of the Holy Spirit. That is, God the Father knows intuitively the Holy Spirit’s mind, and did not gain this knowledge through experience, but has it held within His eternal nature. God’s knowledge is not based on any experience with the Holy Spirit, but is intuitive because the Father shares the same nature as the Holy Spirit.
    - iii. See also 2 Corinthians 12:3, which states that God knows intuitively (*oida*) what many does not know intuitively. See also Psalm 139:11-16.
  - C. Romans 4:17  
AS IT IS WRITTEN, I HAVE MADE YOU A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS -- IN THE PRESENCE OF HIM WHOM HE BELIEVED -- GOD, WHO GIVES LIFE TO THE DEAD AND CALLS THOSE THINGS WHICH DO NOT EXIST AS THOUGH THEY DID.
    - i. The apostle refers to Genesis 17:5: No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.
    - ii. Abram had already believed for justification (Genesis 15) In Genesis 17, when Abram’s name was changed to Abraham, God says he made that man the father of many nations. But Abraham was unable to bear children at that age. God stated

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as fact something that had not yet happened, and could not happen because Abraham's seed was "dead."

- iii. Paul's reference relates to God's omniscience. God states the existence of things to be a fact, even though humanly speaking that could not come to be. He gave life to Abraham's dead seed, and spoke of the birth of nations as though such births had already occurred.

### D. Luke 11:17

BUT HE, KNOWING THEIR THOUGHTS, SAID TO THEM: EVERY KINGDOM DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF IS BROUGHT TO DESOLATION, AND A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST A HOUSE FALLS.

- i. Jesus knew (*oida*) men's thoughts apart from having been told what they were. That is, He knew apart from any experience.
- ii. Such knowledge was intuitive rather than experiential, and is based on Christ's divine nature, which includes the attribute of omniscience. See also Luke 12:30.

### E. Isaiah 46:9-11

REMEMBER THE FORMER THINGS OF OLD, FOR I AM GOD, AND THERE IS NO OTHER; I AM GOD, AND THERE IS NONE LIKE ME, <sup>10</sup> DECLARING THE END FROM THE BEGINNING, AND FROM ANCIENT TIMES THINGS THAT ARE NOT YET DONE, SAYING, MY COUNSEL SHALL STAND, AND I WILL DO ALL MY PLEASURE, <sup>11</sup> CALLING A BIRD OF PREY FROM THE EAST, THE MAN WHO EXECUTES MY COUNSEL, FROM A FAR COUNTRY. INDEED I HAVE SPOKEN IT; I WILL ALSO BRING IT TO PASS. I HAVE PURPOSED IT; I WILL ALSO DO IT.

- i. God, who is unique, knows and therefore declares "the end from the beginning," that is, at the beginning He declares the end. This is a statement of God's omniscience. He knows all things without experiencing any succession of events.
- ii. Verse 11 relates God's omniscient declaration to his counsel and purpose. God's eternal omniscience produces determined events. It would be a mistake, however, to think of God's counsel and purpose as being eternal, since if it were, He could make no decision, but would be "locked in" to a single possibility.
- iii. "God knows the succession instantaneously and simultaneously. He sees the end from the beginning and hence for Him there is no interval or sequence between the end and the beginning. Man sees the end at the end, not at the beginning." H. L. Schafer.

### F. *Ginosko* (*gnosis*) knowledge is knowledge based on experience.

- i. In distinguishing between *ginosko* and *oida* knowledge, George Abbott-Smith states, "γινώσκω, to know by observation and experience is thus properly distinguished from οἶδα, to know by reflection (a mental process based on intuition or information)." *A Manual Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, page 92.
- ii. God's foreknowledge or *prognosis* is based on the fact that He has acquaintance in an experiential way before the actual event in time. With reference to people, foreknowledge is only possible if God has chosen (elected) them, and therefore becomes acquainted with them. This is shown by the fact that in the decree, election *precedes foreknowledge*. As a result of His choosing, God foreknows, and as a result of His foreknowledge, God predestines (Romans 8:28, 29).

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- iii. The verbal form *proginosko* (foreknowledge) is used five times in the New Testament. From its use we get the idea of an *intimate pre-acquaintance* with some object.
- a) Acts 26:5  
THEY (THE HEBREWS) KNEW ME FROM THE FIRST, IF THEY WERE WILLING TO TESTIFY, THAT ACCORDING TO THE STRICTEST SECT OF OUR RELIGION I LIVED A PHARISEE.
- The word “knew” is *ginosko*. This verse shows that people (the Hebrews) were acquainted with Paul prior to the time of his speaking.
- b) Romans 11:2  
GOD HAS NOT CAST AWAY HIS PEOPLE WHOM HE FOREKNEW.
- God foreknew (*proginosko*) His people, Israel. This statement does not mean that He knew *about* His people, but He actually knew His people *in an experiential sense*. He was acquainted with them before they were actually His people. This is true because He had already chosen, or elected them.
- c) Several statements in the New Testament discuss God’s foreknowledge:
- Romans 8:29  
FOR WHOM HE FOREKNEW, HE ALSO PREDESTINED TO BE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON, THAT HE MIGHT BE THE FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BRETHREN.
  - 1 Peter 1:20  
HE INDEED WAS FOREORDAINED BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, BUT WAS MANIFEST IN THESE LAST TIMES FOR YOU... (NKJV)
    - The NKJV translates *proginosko* “foreordained” in this verse. Many translations follow suit, but Darby translated the word correctly as “foreknown.”
    - However, as we shall see, “foreordained” is not a terrible translation, because foreknowledge indicates certainty (unlike omniscience, which includes possibilities without certainty), and is the result of God’s choice. See the discussion of the order of the decree words below.
  - 2 Peter 3:17  
YOU THEREFORE, BELOVED, SINCE YOU KNOW THIS BEFOREHAND, BEWARE LEST YOU ALSO FALL FROM YOUR OWN STEADFASTNESS, BEING LED AWAY WITH THE ERROR OF THE WICKED
    - Peter’s readers knew previously (beforehand) about the misuse of some of Paul’s teachings because they were difficult to understand for some people. They had experienced such misunderstandings and abuse.

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- From these statements we can see that *proginosko* is not merely knowing facts beforehand, but is an acquaintance based on previous experience.
- d) The noun form *prognosis* (foreknowledge) is used twice: Acts 2:23 and 1 Peter 1:2. These significant verses show the relationship of *prognosis* to other aspects of God's decree program.

## The Order of the Decree

### VII. The Terms Involved

We will review the terms studied so far, and introduce other important words that are used in connection with the counsel of God.

- A. Will (*thelo, thelema*)
  - i. Used approximately 213 in the in the Greek New Testament.
  - ii. The noun form *thelema* is used approximately 64 times in the Greek New Testament.
  - iii. The noun form *thelesis* is used 1 time in the Greek New Testament (Hebrews 2:4), where it is used of God.
  - iv. When used of God, this word family emphasizes His desire rather than His sovereign act of determination.
- B. Will (*boulomai*)
  - i. Used 34 times in the Greek New Testament. When used of God this verb form always refers to the act of determination (1 Corinthians 12:11).
  - ii. The noun form *boulema* is used only twice (Acts 27:43, of human determination; Romans 9:19, of God's determinative will).
- C. Counsel (*boule*)
  - i. Used 12 times in the Greek New Testament. (See Hebrews 6:17; Ephesians 1:11; Acts 20:27)
  - ii. Translated in the KJV *counsel* 10 times, *will* 1 time and *advise* 1 time.
  - iii. Implies a council that produces a counsel.
- D. Good Pleasure (*eudokia*)
  - i. The noun form *eudokia* is used 9 times. (See Ephesians 1:5, 9; Philippians 2:18)
  - ii. The verb form *eudokeo* is used 21 times. (See Galatians 1:15.)
  - iii. Both words are used of both God and men.
  - iv. Derived from *eu + dokeo*, meaning to think something good. Used in legal documents of giving consent.
- E. Election (*eklegomai, haireomai, procheirotoneomai*)
  - i. While three word families are used by Paul to teach the truth of the decree, the broadest word is *eklegomai*, which is derived from *eklego*. It is this word that the apostle uses to schedule the idea of election with reference to other words dealing with the counsel of God.

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- ii. This verb is used 25 times in the verbal form in the Greek New Testament, always in the middle voice.
- F. Purpose (*prothesis*)
  - i. Used 12 times in the Greek New Testament.
  - ii. Derived from *pro* + *thesis* (a position). Therefore, the word means *a setting forth, a purpose*. Translated *purpose* in Acts 11:23; Acts 27:13; Romans 8:28; 9:11; Ephesians 1:11; 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:9; 3:10.
  - iii. Interestingly, it is used 4 times with the word “bread” (e.g. Matthew 12:4; Mark 2:26; Luke 6:4, and Hebrews 9:2), where it is translated *shewbread*. Literally, the phrase means “bread of setting forth.”
- G. Foreknowledge (*prognosis*)
  - i. Noun form used only twice in the Greek New Testament (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:2).
  - ii. Verbal form used 5 times (Acts 26:5; Romans 8:29; Romans 11:2; 1 Peter 1:20; 2 Peter 3:17).
  - iii. See “The Two Kinds of Knowledge” below.
- H. Predestination (*proorizo*)
  - i. Used 7 times in the Greek New Testament (Acts 4:28; Romans 8:29, 30; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:5, 11).
  - ii. Derived from *pro* + *horidzo* (to set a boundary).

### VIII. The Scheduling of the Decree

Paul used several Greek syntactical relationships as means of giving precision to his discussion of various doctrinal matters that show methods of subordination (see comments below). As one surveys the following verses, the precise syntactical relationships that Paul employs cannot be ignored, or else confusion results. The consistency with which Paul uses these relationships is clearly not accidental.

Note specifically the relationships of the words *purpose* and *good pleasure* to the various other decree words that are employed. See “The Order of the Decree” chart included in this study.

#### A. Ephesians 1:11

...IN WHOM ALSO WE RECEIVED AN INHERITANCE, HAVING BEEN PREDESTINED ACCORDING TO THE PURPOSE OF THE ONE WHO WORKS ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE COUNSEL OF HIS DESIRE... (GHS)

- i. Desirous Will
- ii. Counsel
- iii. Purpose
- iv. Predestination

#### B. Romans 9:11

...FOR *THE TWINS* NOT HAVING YET BEING BORN, NOR HAVING DONE ANY GOOD OR BAD THING, THAT THE PURPOSE OF GOD ACCORDING TO ELECTION MIGHT STAND, NOT OF WORKS BUT OF THE ONE WHO CALLS... (GHS)

- i. Election
- ii. Purpose

#### C. Ephesians 1:9

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...AFTER MAKING KNOWN TO US THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL, ACCORDING TO HIS GOOD PLEASURE WHICH HE PURPOSED IN HIMSELF... (GHS)

- i. Desirous Will (See Ephesians 1:11)
- ii. Good Pleasure
- iii. Purpose

### D. Romans 8:28, 29

AND WE KNOW THAT TO THE ONES WHO LOVE GOD ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD, TO THE ONES BEING CALLED ACCORDING TO *His* PURPOSE, <sup>29</sup> BECAUSE WHOM HE FOREKNEW, HE ALSO PREDESTINED CONFORMITY TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON, SO THAT HE MIGHT BE THE FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BRETHREN. (GHS)

- i. Purpose
- ii. Foreknowledge
- iii. Predestination

### E. Ephesians 1:5

...AFTER HAVING PREDESTINED US IN LOVE TO PLACEMENT AS SONS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST TO HIMSELF, ACCORDING TO THE GOOD PLEASURE OF HIS WILL... (GHS)

- i. Desire
- ii. Good Pleasure
- iii. Predestination

## Grammatical Subordination in the Greek New Testament

Means of subordination or dependence in the Greek language are generally overlooked in formal theology books. The reasons for this vary, but one significant fact is that most theologies are based on broad-based statements of Scripture rather than a detailed analysis of specific statements. Hence, the biblical order of decree is not considered, at least not in a consistent and systematic way. But such a consideration is necessary if one is to see how God places in consistent order the ideas expressed in decree passages.

There are several ways to subordinate one word or idea to another in Greek. We will deal with three of the most common:

### 1. The Use of Greek Participles

The aorist participle in particular indicates either temporal or logical dependence. Often one thing is said to be following another by using the participle rather than the actual adverb “after.” This is most common in passages that deal with logical subordination, where the actual adverb “after” would imply a temporal idea almost exclusively. In decree passages, this use of the aorist participle is quite common.

### 2. The Use of the Greek Construction Indicated by the English Word “Of”

The translation of the word “of” in Greek is not the translation of a simple Greek word, as the word “of” does not occur in that language. Rather, a special construction is used called the genitive, and it, in turn, is used in a variety of ways. One way is to show logical subordination or dependence.

### 3. The Use of the Greek Word “Kata”



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The preposition “*kata*” is often (not always by any means) translated “according to.” When so translated it indicates subordination of one element or thing to another. This prepositional use is so common in passages dealing with the decree words, that it is difficult to see how it has been overlooked in so many theological presentations.

4. The following chart is based on a thorough examination of the doctrine of the decree in the Greek New Testament. Care has been taken to correctly identify the logical relationships between the various important doctrinal words that are found in the decree passages examined above. The careful student should to study those passages carefully, and identify the relationship of the words of the decree which each uses.
5. The chart uses the Greek form of the words rather than the English translation. For the convenience of the non-Greek reading student, the following list provides a transliteration of each word into English letters.
  - a. *panoia*
  - b. *thelēma*
  - c. *boulomai*
  - d. *boulē*
  - e. *eudokia*
  - f. *eklegomai*
  - g. *prothesis*
  - h. *prognosis*
  - i. *proōridzō*

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### The Order of the Decree

OMNISCIENCE	<i>πανοιδα</i>	GOD KNOWS ALL WITHOUT LIMITS
DESIRES, WISHES	<i>θηλημα</i>	DESIROUS WILL - EPH. 1:11; 1:9; 1:5
ACT OF DETERMINATIVE WILL	<i>βουλομαι</i>	ACT OF DETERMINATION EXPRESSED IN COUNCIL TO DETERMINE COUNSEL OF ACTS 2:23
DETERMINATION, COUNSEL	<i>βουλη</i>	COUNSEL ARISING FROM COUNCIL - EPH. 1:4; HEB. 6:17; ACTS 2:23; ACTS 4:28
GOOD PLEASURE	<i>ευδοκια</i>	WHAT GOD DETERMINED BROUGHT HIM GOOD PLEASURE - EPH. 1:5, 9
ACT OF CHOOSING	<i>εκλεγομαι</i>	WHAT GOD HAD CHOSEN WAS ACCORDING TO HIS GOOD PLEASURE - RO. 9:11; EPH. 1:9
PURPOSE	<i>προθεσις</i>	WHAT GOD HAD CHOSEN BECAME HIS PURPOSE - RO. 9:11; EPH. 1:11; EPH. 3:11
FOREKNOWLEDGE, PREVIOUS ACQUAINTANCE	<i>προγνωσις</i>	WHAT GOD HAD PURPOSED HE FOREKNEW WITH AN EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE - RO. 8:28, 29; ACTS 2:23; EPH. 1:5; 1 PET. 1:20
PREDESTINE, FIXATION OF LIMITS	<i>προοριζω</i>	WHAT GOD PURPOSED HE LIMITED OR RESTRICTED, AND THUS PREDESTINED BASED ON HIS FOREKNOWLEDGE - EPH. 1:11

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### Election and Predestination in the Counsel of God

#### IX. What is Election?

The word “election” simply means “choice.” The verb “to elect,” then, means “to choose.”

##### A. Three Different Greek Word Families Carry the Idea of “Choose.”

###### i. The *Eklektos* Family

a) This family reflects the general idea of distinguishing between two or more possibilities and choosing one over the others. The *eklektos* family has come into English as “elect,” “election,” etc.

###### b) Colossians 3:12

THEREFORE, AS *THE* ELECT OF GOD, HOLY AND BELOVED, PUT ON TENDER MERCIES, KINDNESS, HUMILITY, MEEKNESS, LONGSUFFERING....

###### ii. The *Haireomai* Family

a) The basic meaning of this word family is “to hold an opinion.” One is viewed as choosing a specific opinion or viewpoint.

###### b) Philippians 1:22

BUT IF I LIVE ON IN THE FLESH, THIS WILL MEAN FRUIT FROM MY LABOR; YET WHAT I SHALL CHOOSE, I CANNOT TELL.

c) Paul was not choosing whether to live or die. He was deciding which was the better situation. His viewpoint was that for him personally, to die would be better, but not for the Philippians.

###### iii. The *Cheirotoneo* Family

a) The *cheirotoneo* family of words is derived from the idea of using the hand to cast a vote, and therefore to elect. It means “to elect” similarly to the modern political use of the word. It came to mean “to appoint” since one must be chosen to be appointed.

###### b) Acts 26:16

BUT RISE AND STAND ON YOUR FEET; FOR I HAVE APPEARED TO YOU FOR THIS PURPOSE, TO MAKE (APPOINT, CHOOSE) YOU A MINISTER AND A WITNESS BOTH OF THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE SEEN AND OF THE THINGS WHICH I WILL YET REVEAL TO YOU.

##### B. Election is an Act of Distinction

The concept of distinction between two or more possibilities necessary for there to be a choice. Without such a possibility, no choice can be made. This obvious, but sometimes overlooked fact, releases the individual from the idea that God “had to elect,” a view has sometimes been expressed in order to lessen the impact of individuals *not* being chosen.

###### i. Luke 10:38-42

NOW IT HAPPENED AS THEY WENT THAT HE ENTERED A CERTAIN VILLAGE; AND A CERTAIN WOMAN NAMED MARTHA WELCOMED HIM INTO HER HOUSE. <sup>39</sup> AND SHE HAD A SISTER CALLED MARY, WHO ALSO SAT AT JESUS’ FEET AND HEARD HIS WORD. <sup>40</sup> BUT MARTHA WAS

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DISTRACTED WITH MUCH SERVING, AND SHE APPROACHED HIM AND SAID, LORD, DO YOU NOT CARE THAT MY SISTER HAS LEFT ME TO SERVE ALONE? THEREFORE TELL HER TO HELP ME. <sup>41</sup> AND JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID TO HER, "MARTHA, MARTHA, YOU ARE WORRIED AND TROUBLED ABOUT MANY THINGS. <sup>42</sup> BUT ONE THING IS NEEDED, AND MARY HAS CHOSEN (*EKLEKTOS* FAMILY) THAT GOOD PART, WHICH WILL NOT BE TAKEN AWAY FROM HER.

### ii. Hebrews 11:24-26

BY FAITH MOSES, WHEN HE BECAME OF AGE, REFUSED TO BE CALLED THE SON OF PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER, <sup>25</sup> CHOOSING (*HAIREOMAI* FAMILY) RATHER TO SUFFER AFFLICTION WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD THAN TO ENJOY THE PASSING PLEASURES OF SIN, <sup>26</sup> ESTEEMING THE REPROACH OF CHRIST GREATER RICHES THAN THE TREASURES IN EGYPT; FOR HE LOOKED TO THE REWARD.

- a) See also Hebrews 11:39-40.
- b) Moses chose between two possibilities (*haireomai*). His correct opinion was that it was better to be counted with God's people than to enjoy Egypt's pleasures.

### iii. Acts 14:21-23

AND WHEN THEY HAD PREACHED THE GOSPEL TO THAT CITY AND MADE MANY DISCIPLES, THEY RETURNED TO LYSTRA, ICONIUM, AND ANTIOCH, <sup>22</sup> STRENGTHENING THE SOULS OF THE DISCIPLES, EXHORTING THEM TO CONTINUE IN THE FAITH, AND SAYING, "WE MUST THROUGH MANY TRIBULATIONS ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD. <sup>23</sup> SO WHEN THEY HAD APPOINTED (*CHEIROTONEŌ* FAMILY) ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH, AND PRAYED WITH FASTING, THEY COMMENDED THEM TO THE LORD IN WHOM THEY HAD BELIEVED.

- a) Paul and Barnabas had to choose between several possibilities. They appointed elders (plural) from among a group.
- b) Note the three cities involved. The elders were chosen during Paul's return trip; they were not novices.

## C. In His Counsel, God Made Choices in Several Areas

### i. Acts 13:16-17

THEN PAUL STOOD UP, AND MOTIONING WITH *HIS* HAND SAID, "MEN OF ISRAEL, AND YOU WHO FEAR GOD, LISTEN: <sup>17</sup> THE GOD OF THIS PEOPLE ISRAEL CHOSE (*EKLEKTOS* FAMILY) OUR FATHERS, AND EXALTED THE PEOPLE WHEN THEY DWELT AS STRANGERS IN THE LAND OF EGYPT, AND WITH AN UPLIFTED ARM HE BROUGHT THEM OUT OF IT.

- a) Israel was chosen by God to be brought out of the land of Egypt. This does not mean that God chose every individual Israelite to become a believer, but that the entire nation was chosen.
- b) The choice of Israel came before His act of bringing them out of the land, which was an application of predestination.

### ii. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

BUT WE ARE BOUND TO GIVE THANKS TO GOD ALWAYS FOR YOU, BRETHREN BELOVED BY THE LORD, BECAUSE GOD FROM THE BEGINNING CHOSE (*HAIREOMAI* FAMILY) YOU FOR SALVATION THROUGH SANCTIFICATION BY THE SPIRIT AND BELIEF IN THE TRUTH, <sup>14</sup> TO WHICH HE CALLED YOU BY OUR GOSPEL, FOR THE OBTAINING OF THE GLORY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

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- a) God chose the Thessalonians to whom he wrote “for salvation.” These were selected from the great body of unbelievers in Thessalonica.
- b) God’s choice was “from the beginning.” Paul makes sure that the Thessalonians understood that this was not a choice made at the time of their salvation, but long before. The beginning to which he refers is the beginning of God’s program expressed in His Trinitarian Counsel.
- c) Because God chose the Thessalonians, Paul was “bound to give thanks to God always for you.” Christians should thank God that He chose any for salvation, not condemn Him because He chose so few.
- d) If God not chosen, NO ONE could have gotten saved. (See *Why is Election Necessary* below.)

### iii. Acts 22:12-14

THEN A CERTAIN ANANIAS, A DEVOUT MAN ACCORDING TO THE LAW, HAVING A GOOD TESTIMONY WITH ALL THE JEWS WHO DWELT *THERE*, <sup>13</sup> CAME TO ME; AND HE STOOD AND SAID TO ME, BROTHER SAUL, RECEIVE YOUR SIGHT. AND AT THAT SAME HOUR I LOOKED UP AT HIM. <sup>14</sup> THEN HE SAID, THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS HAS CHOSEN (*CHEIROTONEŌ* FAMILY) YOU THAT YOU SHOULD KNOW HIS WILL, AND SEE THE JUST ONE, AND HEAR THE VOICE OF HIS MOUTH.

- a) God chose Paul to know His will (desirous will)
- b) God chose Paul to see the Righteous One (Jesus)
- c) God chose Paul to hear a voice from His mouth

### iv. 1 Timothy 5:21

I CHARGE *YOU* BEFORE GOD AND THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THE ELECT ANGELS THAT YOU OBSERVE THESE THINGS WITHOUT PREJUDICE, DOING NOTHING WITH PARTIALITY.

- a) There are two groups of angels, the elect and the non-elect.
- b) Most Bible scholars think that God chose the elect angels to keep them from falling into Satanic delusion.

## D. Election is Definable

- i. A Doctrinal Definition – Election is the act of God whereby, as the result of making a distinction known only to Himself, He chooses an individual or group over another individual or group with a specific purpose in mind. This includes the election of the Lord Jesus Christ as well as angels.
- ii. A Soteriological (salvation) Definition – Election is the act of the Godhead made in Trinitarian counsel, whereby, as the result of making distinctions, the reason for which distinctions being known only to Themselves, but not including any merit or lack of merit in doing good or evil by the object(s) of election, They choose deliberately to save certain individuals and not others.

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### X. Why is Election Necessary?

#### A. Man is in a Fallen Condition

##### i. Psalm 51:5

BEHOLD, I WAS BROUGHT FORTH IN INIQUITY, AND IN SIN MY MOTHER CONCEIVED ME.

##### ii. Ephesians 2:1-3

AND YOU *HE MADE ALIVE*, WHO WERE DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SINS, <sup>2</sup> IN WHICH YOU ONCE WALKED ACCORDING TO THE COURSE (AGE) OF THIS WORLD, ACCORDING TO THE PRINCE OF THE POWER OF THE AIR, THE SPIRIT WHO NOW WORKS IN THE SONS OF DISOBEDIENCE, <sup>3</sup> AMONG WHOM ALSO WE ALL ONCE CONDUCTED OURSELVES IN THE LUSTS OF OUR FLESH, FULFILLING THE DESIRES OF THE FLESH AND OF THE MIND, AND WERE BY NATURE CHILDREN OF WRATH, JUST AS THE OTHERS.

#### B. Man is Unwilling and Unable

##### i. Romans 3:10-12

AS IT IS WRITTEN: THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE; <sup>11</sup> THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS; THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS AFTER GOD. <sup>12</sup> THEY HAVE ALL TURNED ASIDE; THEY HAVE TOGETHER BECOME UNPROFITABLE; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, NO, NOT ONE.

##### ii. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

BUT EVEN IF OUR GOSPEL IS VEILED, IT IS VEILED TO THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING, <sup>4</sup> WHOSE MINDS THE GOD OF THIS AGE HAS BLINDED, WHO DO NOT BELIEVE, LEST THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF CHRIST, WHO IS THE IMAGE OF GOD, SHOULD SHINE ON THEM.

#### C. An Exposition Concerning the Truth of Saving Faith

##### i. Ephesians 2:8-9

FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH, AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES; IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD, <sup>9</sup> NOT OF WORKS, LEST ANYONE SHOULD BOAST.

##### ii. Biblical faith means simply to believe the facts. Yet the object of faith in Scripture always includes that which is not normally acceptable to human thinking. Therefore, biblical faith is a gift from God, apart from which an individual would be unable to believe.

- a) The grammar of this passage demands that faith is the gift of God rather than any other idea or concept.
- b) Faith for salvation is not identical to faith for daily living. The tendency to mistake the two aspects of faith has caused some to incorrectly interpret Ephesians 2:8-9. Their false argument goes something like this:
  - Faith cannot be a gift of God because if it is, it is impossible for a person to violate his system of faith, which we know is not true. True Christians do violate their faith system, sometimes regularly.
  - If Ephesians 2:8,9 teaches that faith is a gift of God, then if a person is truly saved, he must persevere in the Christian life. The doctrine of perseverance of the saints is a pernicious doctrine that

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teaches that a believer must persevere, that, in fact, he will persevere. Therefore we reject the doctrine of perseverance.

- Sadly, those who teach perseverance in this sense often deny the truth that a Christian can become carnal or live a carnal lifestyle. They say that a person who enters into a life of sin was never a Christian in the first place. This we also reject.
  - Since we reject the idea of the perseverance of the saints, we must also reject the idea that Ephesians 2:8-9 teaches that faith is a gift of God, because if it were a gift of God, a believer would always walk according to the faith that God gave him at his salvation.
- c) The solution to the problem is rather simple. If one maintains a consistent distinction between “saving faith” and “living faith,” the problem disappears.
- We reject the doctrine of perseverance of the saints as taught by many so-called Calvinists. “Perseverance of the saints” is sometimes confused with the doctrine of the security of the believer, but it is not the same. Security teaches that a person is saved permanently at the moment of faith. Perseverance teaches that a saved person must persevere and thereby prove that he is a believer. While we reject the teaching of perseverance, we accept the doctrine of security.
  - Scripture is clear that a believer can become carnal, and even come to the place of living a life that is devoid of Christian principles. This does not mean, however, that he was not a Christian in the first place as some who teach perseverance so claim.
  - The idea that Ephesians 2:8-9 encompasses all forms or acts of faith is an error that both Calvinists and non-Calvinists sometimes fall into. In fact, the word “faith” or “belief” is used in several senses in the New Testament, and to over-simplify or confuse these uses can lead to serious misunderstanding.
  - “Living faith” is not a “gift of God” in the same sense as “saving faith.” It is possible for a believer to depart from the faith program of the New Testament, and therefore live contrary to the word of God.

Therefore the arguments against the doctrine of perseverance are not valid reasons for rejecting the clear teaching that saving faith is a gift of God according to Ephesians 2:8,9. The grammar of the passage makes that view unacceptable.

XI. What are the differences between *election* and *predestination*?

- A. Election and predestination are two different things. This is clear because:
- i. The words do not mean the same thing.

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- a) The words elect and election carry the idea of making a choice based upon a distinction between two or more possibilities.
  - b) The word predestine carries the idea of placing boundaries around that which was chosen so that the determined purpose of God can come to pass.
  - ii. The words are used differently:
    - a) Election precedes both purpose and foreknowledge, while predestination follows them. In other words, in order for God to have purpose and foreknowledge, He must have made a choice. In order for God's purpose and foreknowledge to be fulfilled, predestination must follow them.
    - b) Predestination has a different result than election. The result of election is the expression of a choice between two or more elements, including the salvation of individuals. The result of predestination is the limiting of possibilities so that the purpose of God is fulfilled in time, including the placement of believers as adult sons.
- B. The word *predestine* has a specific meaning.
- i. The Derivation of the word
    - a) The Greek word predestine is derived from two elements: *pro*, meaning before and *horizo* meaning boundary.
    - b) Therefore, God has set boundaries around the ones He has chosen so that His resultant purpose might come to fruition.
  - ii. The Definition of the word

God predestines by setting boundaries by which He made certain the various circumstances in time, so that His specific purpose derived from His choices (election) will come to pass.
  - iii. The Discussion of the Word
    - a) Romans 8:28-30

AND WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THOSE WHO LOVE GOD, TO THOSE WHO ARE THE CALLED ACCORDING TO *HIS* PURPOSE. <sup>29</sup> FOR WHOM HE FOREKNEW, HE ALSO PREDESTINED *TO BE* CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON, THAT HE MIGHT BE THE FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BRETHREN. <sup>30</sup> MOREOVER WHOM HE PREDESTINED, THESE HE ALSO CALLED; WHOM HE CALLED, THESE HE ALSO JUSTIFIED; AND WHOM HE JUSTIFIED, THESE HE ALSO GLORIFIED.
    - b) Ephesians 1:5

...HAVING PREDESTINED US TO ADOPTION AS SONS BY JESUS CHRIST TO HIMSELF, ACCORDING TO THE GOOD PLEASURE OF HIS WILL,
    - c) Ephesians 1:11

...IN WHOM ALSO WE HAVE OBTAINED AN INHERITANCE, BEING PREDESTINED ACCORDING TO THE PURPOSE OF HIM WHO WORKS ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE COUNSEL OF HIS WILL...



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### d) Acts 4:27-28

FOR IN TRUTH WERE GATHERED TOGETHER IN THIS CITY AGAINST YOUR HOLY CHILD JESUS, WHOM YOU ANOINTED, BOTH HEROD AND PONTIUS PILATE, TOGETHER WITH THE GENTILES AND THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, <sup>28</sup> TO DO WHATEVER THINGS YOUR HAND AND YOUR COUNSEL PREDESTINED BEFORE TO OCCUR. (GHS)

## The Doctrine of Potentiality and the Decree

- XII. The student of the decree should have an idea of the concept of *potentiality* as it is presented in Scripture.
- A. We might well ask the question, “Was there more than one possible plan in God’s omniscience, each equally acceptable, that God could have determined? The answer is, “Yes, or else there would have been no place for a choice of God’s will.” There were likely an infinite number of possible decrees that could have been determined that would have fulfilled God’s desirous will. In other words, there was in God’s omniscience, at the point of decree, more than one potential that would bring about His desired result. In His omniscience, God knows all potentialities as well as all actualities.
- B. This fact is recognized by theologians of different doctrinal viewpoints:
- “He (God) knows what is possible as well as what is actual; all things that might occur under certain circumstances are present to His mind.” - Berkof, pg. 67.<sup>2</sup>
- “God even knows what would have happened under different circumstances. In pronouncing woes upon the cities where His mightiest works were done, Christ declared that Tyre and Sidon would have repented and Sodom would still have been in existence had these same mighty works been done in them (Matthew 11:21-24).” - Baker, pg 135.<sup>3</sup>
- C. Matthew 11:20-24
- THEN HE BEGAN TO REBUKE THE CITIES IN WHICH MOST OF HIS MIGHTY WORKS HAD BEEN DONE, BECAUSE THEY DID NOT REPENT: <sup>21</sup> WOE TO YOU, CHORAZIN! WOE TO YOU, BETHSAIDA! FOR IF THE MIGHTY WORKS WHICH WERE DONE IN YOU HAD BEEN DONE IN TYRE AND SIDON, THEY WOULD HAVE REPENTED LONG AGO IN SACKCLOTH AND ASHES. <sup>22</sup> BUT I SAY TO YOU, IT WILL BE MORE TOLERABLE FOR TYRE AND SIDON IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT THAN FOR YOU. <sup>23</sup> AND YOU, CAPERNAUM, WHO ARE EXALTED TO HEAVEN, WILL BE BROUGHT DOWN TO HADES; FOR IF THE MIGHTY WORKS WHICH WERE DONE IN YOU HAD BEEN DONE IN SODOM, IT WOULD HAVE REMAINED UNTIL THIS DAY. <sup>24</sup> BUT I SAY TO YOU THAT IT SHALL BE MORE TOLERABLE FOR THE LAND OF SODOM IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT THAN FOR YOU.
- See also Genesis 18.
- i. Christ, preincarnate, in human form, was on earth at the time of Sodom’s judgment.
  - ii. Potentially, He could have done mighty works in the cities of the plain, and they would have repented. He did not, and they did not.
  - iii. This passage shows several ideas that are connected with God’s purpose:

<sup>2</sup> Berkhof was an amillennial covenantalist.

<sup>3</sup> Baker is a premillennial dispensationalist.

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- a) It is not God's purpose to bring all people to salvation, even though He desires all to be saved.
- b) God's purpose as decreed is always carried out in the way God has determined. In other words, God has determined the means to the end as well as the end itself. This eliminates casuistry as a legitimate philosophy.
- c) Since God is perfectly righteous, He chose the outcome from all possibilities without error.

### D. Isaiah 38:1-8

IN THOSE DAYS HEZEKIAH WAS SICK AND NEAR DEATH. AND ISAIAH THE PROPHET, THE SON OF AMOZ, WENT TO HIM AND SAID TO HIM, THUS SAYS THE LORD: SET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER, FOR YOU SHALL DIE AND NOT LIVE. <sup>2</sup> THEN HEZEKIAH TURNED HIS FACE TOWARD THE WALL, AND PRAYED TO THE LORD, <sup>3</sup> AND SAID, REMEMBER NOW, O LORD, I PRAY, HOW I HAVE WALKED BEFORE YOU IN TRUTH AND WITH A LOYAL HEART, AND HAVE DONE *WHAT IS* GOOD IN YOUR SIGHT. AND HEZEKIAH WEPT BITTERLY. <sup>4</sup> AND THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME TO ISAIAH, SAYING, <sup>5</sup> GO AND TELL HEZEKIAH, THUS SAYS THE LORD, THE GOD OF DAVID YOUR FATHER: I HAVE HEARD YOUR PRAYER, I HAVE SEEN YOUR TEARS; SURELY I WILL ADD TO YOUR DAYS FIFTEEN YEARS. <sup>6</sup> I WILL DELIVER YOU AND THIS CITY FROM THE HAND OF THE KING OF ASSYRIA, AND I WILL DEFEND THIS CITY. <sup>7</sup> AND THIS *IS* THE SIGN TO YOU FROM THE LORD, THAT THE LORD WILL DO THIS THING WHICH HE HAS SPOKEN: <sup>8</sup> BEHOLD, I WILL BRING THE SHADOW ON THE SUNDIAL, WHICH HAS GONE DOWN WITH THE SUN ON THE SUNDIAL OF AHAZ, TEN DEGREES BACKWARD. SO THE SUN RETURNED TEN DEGREES ON THE DIAL BY WHICH IT HAD GONE DOWN.

- i. Hezekiah had a potential life span as well as an actual life span.
- ii. Likely, every person has an indefinite number of potential life spans.
- iii. Only one life span is actually determined, based on God's determinative will. Therefore, it is possible to express the addition or subtraction of years because in the counsel of God, He could have determined a different life period than that which He actually did determine.

### E. 1 Corinthians 11:30

FOR THIS REASON MANY *ARE* WEAK AND SICK AMONG YOU, AND MANY SLEEP.

- i. Chastening can shorten one's potential life span. Actual years may be shorter than potential years.
- ii. We must understand that God is not bound by the facts that He knows, since He Himself is the source of those facts.
- iii. In some way, not totally comprehensible to human understanding, God built into the decree potentialities as well as actualities. Which potentiality was actually determined does not remove the fact that potentialities were real from a human viewpoint.

## XIII. The Application of Salvation and the Decree

### A. An Exegetical Translation of Romans 9:1-24

1 I AM SAYING *THE* TRUTH IN CHRIST, I AM NOT LYING, MY CONSCIENCE CO-WITNESSING WITH ME BY *THE* HOLY SPIRIT, <sup>2</sup> THAT I HAVE GREAT GRIEF AND CONTINUAL PAIN IN MY HEART.

3 FOR I KEPT PRAYING FOR I MYSELF TO BE ACCURSED FROM CHRIST ON BEHALF OF MY BRETHREN, MY KINSMEN ACCORDING TO *THE* FLESH, <sup>4</sup> WHO ARE ISRAELITES, OF WHOM *ARE* THE ADOPTION AND THE GLORY AND THE

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COVENANTS AND THE GIVING OF LAW AND THE *PRIESTLY* LITURGY AND THE PROMISES, <sup>5</sup> OF WHOM *ARE* THE FATHERS, AND OUT FROM WHOM *IS* THE CHRIST ACCORDING TO *THE* FLESH; HE IS THE ONE WHO IS OVERALL, BLESSED OF BY GOD FOREVER, AMEN.

6 NOT, OF COURSE, THAT THE WORD OF GOD HAS FAILED. FOR NOT ALL THE PEOPLE OUT OF ISRAEL ARE *REALLY* ISRAEL.

7 NEITHER BECAUSE THEY ARE ABRAHAM'S SEED ARE THEY ALL ISRAEL, BUT, "IN ISAAC SHALL YOUR SEED BY CALLED."

8 THIS IS IT *THEN*, THE CHILDREN OF THE FLESH ARE NOT THE CHILDREN OF GOD, BUT THE CHILDREN OF THE PROMISE ARE CONSIDERED AS A SEED. <sup>9</sup> FOR THIS IS THE WORD OF PROMISE, "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME AND SARAH WILL HAVE A SON."

10 AND NOT ONLY *THIS*, REBEKAH IS THE ONE WHO CONCEIVES FROM ONE, OUR FATHER ISAAC. <sup>11</sup> FOR *THE SONS* NOT YET BEING BORN NOR PRACTICING ANYTHING GOOD OR BAD, IN ORDER THAT ACCORDING TO ELECTION THE PURPOSE OF GOD MIGHT REMAIN, <sup>12</sup> NOT OF WORKS, BUT OF THE ONE WHO CALLS, IT WAS SAID TO HER THAT THE GREATER WILL SERVE THE LESSER; <sup>13</sup> EVEN AS IT HAS BEEN WRITTEN, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

14 THEREFORE WHAT SHALL WE SAY? IS THERE UNRIGHTEOUSNESS IN GOD? MAY IT NEVER BE! <sup>15</sup> FOR TO MOSES HE SAYS, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I WILL HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL PITY WHOM I PITY." <sup>16</sup> SO THEREFORE, IT IS NOT THE ONE WHO DESIRES NOR THE ONE WHO RUNS, BUT GOD WHO HAS MERCY. <sup>17</sup> FOR THE SCRIPTURE SAYS TO PHARAOH THAT "FOR THIS VERY THING I RAISED YOU UP, SO THAT I MAY SHOW FORTH IN YOU MY POWER, AND SO THAT MY NAME MAY BE PUBLISHED ABROAD IN ALL THE EARTH. <sup>18</sup> THEREFORE, GOD HAS MERCY *ON* WHOM HE DESIRES, AND WHOM HE DESIRES HE HARDENS.

19 WILL YOU SAY TO ME THEREFORE, WHY DOES HE STILL FIND FAULT? FOR WHO RESISTED HIS COUNSEL? <sup>20</sup> RATHER, NAY O MAN. WHO ARE YOU TO BE REPLYING AGAINST GOD? THE THING FORMED SHALL NOT SAY TO THE ONE WHO FORMED *IT*, WHY DID YOU MAKE ME *THUS*? <sup>21</sup> OR DOES NOT THE POTTER HAVE AUTHORITY OVER THE CLAY OUT OF THE SAME LUMP TO MAKE THE ONE VESSEL TO HONOR BUT THE *OTHER* TO DISHONOR?

22 BUT WHAT IF GOD, DESIRING TO SHOW FORTH HIS WRATH AND TO MAKE KNOWN HIS POWER, BORE IN MUCH LONG-SUFFERING VESSELS OF WRATH HAVING BEEN FITTED FOR DESTRUCTION, <sup>23</sup> AND IN ORDER THAT HE MIGHT MAKE KNOWN THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY ON THE VESSELS OF MERCY, WHICH HE PREVIOUSLY PREPARED FOR GLORY, <sup>24</sup> EVEN US WHOM HE CALLED, NOT ONLY OUT OF *THE* JEWS BUT ALSO OUT OF *THE* GENTILES?

### B. An Explanation of Romans 9:1-24

1. God is being attacked for being unrighteous in that He elects some and not others.
2. In chapters 9-11 God is specifically being attacked because after choosing Israel He set them aside and did not fulfill His promises.
3. Paul's response to the first charge is that God chose Israel because of who He is, not because of who Israel was.
4. Paul's response to the second charge is that God's choice of Israel has not been permanently annulled, but Israel has been temporarily grafted out of the place of blessing, and will ultimately be saved and come into the fullness of the Old Testament promises.
5. Paul was perfectly aware of the tension between the sovereignty of God and the will of man (vs. 16). His answer is simple. God is sovereign, and when the two wills are under consideration, God can do with man's will what He determines, as He did with Pharaoh (vss. 17,18).
6. Does this mean that we are not responsible to God for our actions? Is God unrighteous because He finds fault with me when it was He who created me thus? Paul

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answers this objection in vss. 19-21. God finds fault because He has a right to, just as a potter from a single lump of clay prepares one vessel for honor and another for dishonor. As vessels, we have no right to accuse (reply against) God.

7. This doctrine of God's choosing is applied to all, not only to the Jews, but also to those called out of the Gentiles (vs. 24).
8. Therefore, we conclude that no conditions are placed on the human being in order to be chosen by God.

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Appendix

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### The Relationship of Omniscience to the Decree

#### *Omniscience. . .*

. . . is eternal knowledge (*oida*) of all possibilities and actualities.

- A. Nothing has as yet been determined (no fixity).
- B. Therefore, nothing is yet foreknown. Foreknowledge is not knowing facts before they occur, but experiencing those facts as a result of God's determinative will.
- C. No revelation of future events is in evidence, since, while known, they are not foreknown.
- D. God knows which plan He will determine without affecting His ability to choose between an infinite number of possible plans.
- E. If the plan (decree) were fixed in God's omniscience, the plan would be as eternal as God is, and therefore God would be required to decree in line with His omniscience. This would place limits on God, as He would not have the ability to act using His determinative will. This view leads to fatalism, since God is not in control during time. Rather, God operates His determined plan through His sovereign will throughout the ages.

#### *Decree. . .*

. . . is the non-eternal determinative plan (*boule*) which results in foreknowledge (*prognosis*).

- A. The plan is determined and all potentialities other than the one which has been determined are eliminated. Only God knows which potentialities are not determined. To this extent, God's plan is secret, except where He chooses to reveal elements of it in Scripture, which is why some refer to God's determinative will as His secret will.
- B. Based on His experience in the decree, God now has foreknowledge (*prognosis*). He is now acquainted with all the facts in His plan as an experience because they are actually fixed by an act of determination which proceeds from His desirous will (Ephesians 1:11).
- C. Revelation of future events now becomes possible because the future is now fixed and will occur in the sequence which God has determined. This sequence is for man's benefit, and is necessary because of man's temporal nature.
- D. God Himself is not limited by the sequence which He has decreed, because he "inhabits eternity" and He "sees the end from the beginning."

GOD WORKS ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE DETERMINATION OF HIS DESIRE -  
EPHESIANS 1:11.

Throughout the ages of time, God works all things which He decreed because that which He determined became His purpose, and God *will carry out* His purposes. See Isaiah 46:19-11.

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### Problems Concerning the Decree\*

1. *Was there a stage in the existence of God when the decree was not?*  
Yes, the decree was before the creation of mankind, but not eternal as God is. If this were not true, the decree would be eternal as God is and God would be limited in His ability to determine a specific plan.
2. *Was the decree an act of God?*  
Yes, it was an act of His determinative will from that which He desires (Hebrews 6:17; Acts 2:23; 4:28). Since God's will was the means of determination, He was free to choose from among many possible plans.
3. *Was there more than one plan equally good that God could have chosen?*  
Yes, or else there would have been no place for a choice of His will.
4. *From where did the various possible plans arise?*  
From God Himself.
5. *Is the decree fatalism?*  
Though God has decreed all that comes to pass, it is not fatalism since the decree is from the nature of God and expresses His character. It is neither mechanical nor blind, because God has decreed the means as well as the end, and works the decree during time.
6. *Is the decree incompatible with human freedom?*  
Though God has decreed and it will come to pass, one must give a place for the will of man as well as the sovereignty of God. Man is held responsible to make correct decisions during his lifetime. However, one must guard against making God's will subservient to man's will. Ultimately, man is held responsible because God says man is responsible (Romans 9:14-24).
8. *Should the decree be presented as an evangelistic tool to the unbeliever?*  
One must realize that this is a family secret. It is not for the unbeliever, nor should the doctrine be used to frighten or otherwise compel any person to act in a certain way. Only God knows who is elect and who is not, with the result that the believer should give the gospel to anyone if he has an opportunity to do so.
9. *What is the purpose for the revelation of the decree in Scripture?*  
The decree gives the believer confidence in the program of God, and is therefore a comfort in times of difficulty (Romans 8:28). Furthermore, the Christian can know for a certainty that the predictive prophecy of Scripture will come to pass, because the sovereign God of the universe has so determined it.

\*The preceding was adapted and expanded from class notes given to the students of H. L. Schafer, past professor of theology at San Francisco Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary.