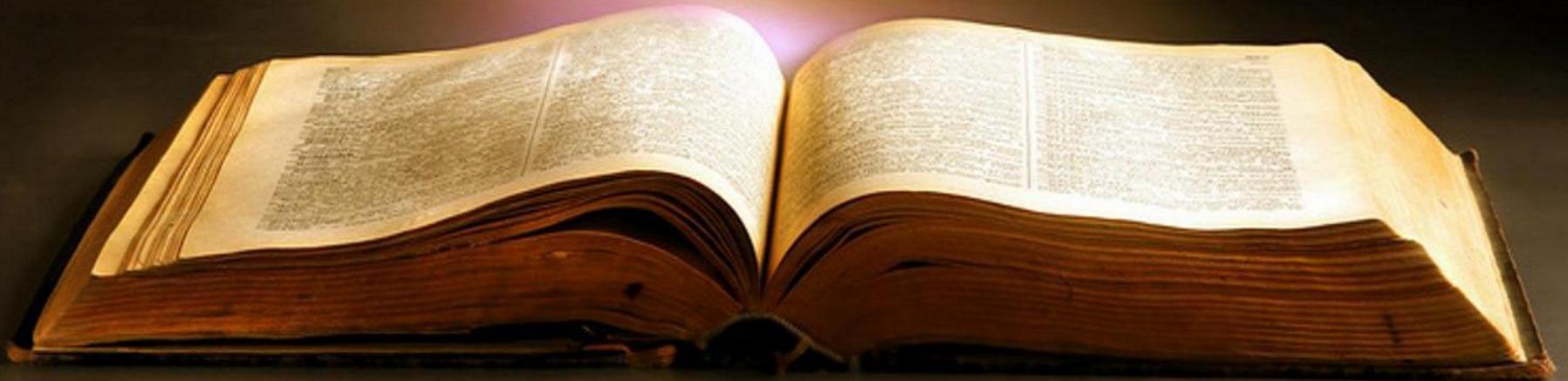


Stow Park Bible Fellowship

# Bible Doctrines

Based on the teachings of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

## 7. The Eternal Decrees of God



## The Eternal Decrees of God

- We now come to a new section of the particular doctrine we have been discussing namely the Doctrine of God.
- You will recall we have been considering what the Bible tells us about the being, the nature, and the character of God as He has been pleased to reveal to us in the Scriptures.
- We have also considered the names which God has applied to Himself as a part of this revelation of His essential Being and His relationship with creation.
- And that, in turn, brought us to the consideration of the great, mighty, inscrutable doctrine of the blessed Holy Trinity.
- Now, still considering the doctrine of God, we come on to the next section, which is this – **THE WORKS OF GOD; the activity of God, that is, What God has Done.**
- A sort of subsection or branch of this general doctrine concerning God Himself.

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- And no doubt you are thinking, 'Oh, yes, that must mean how God created the world - the first thing that we read of in the Bible'.
- And yes, you are right, BUT, before we come to consider this, there is something we must consider first, and we do so because the Bible tells us about it.
- It is this: Before the Bible tells us what God has done, it leads us to the character of all God's activities of which there is a great deal in the Bible, so Doctor Martyn Lloyd-Jones wants to show us **about the way in which God does things.**
- There are certain great principles which underlie and characterise all God's works. If you like, before God proceeded to create the world and man, God had thought, God had willed and God had determined on certain things.
- He determined, for example. The order, or sequence, of events.

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- Now these *thoughts*, and arrangements and chronological things are known as *The Eternal Decrees of God* – the title of this morning's study.
- These are the things which God determined and ordained before He had done anything at all. This is again a very difficult concept to accept, something akin to the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity – beyond our minds.
- The Doctor says **“No matter how difficult, it is simply the more we know about God in His infinity, the more we shall worship Him.”**
- He adds, “It will also save us from making many errors, by helping us to get rid of our prejudices and any kind of ‘party spirit’.”
- He means by that, we all take up certain positions which often we are more concerned about defending than finding truths.

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- Therefore we must approach the subject with humility and, as always, with reverence and with faith and a ready admission of our own limits, having an open mind seeking what the Bible teaches us and *not to ask questions beyond the revelation of the Bible.*
- Above all, he states, we shall have to realise that there are certain things which we, with our finite minds, will not be able to reconcile with one another!
- And here, he introduces another uncommon word – *antinomy* – not antimony. Now what is an **antinomy**? **It is a position in which you are given two truths which you yourself cannot reconcile.**
- There are certain final antinomies in the Bible, and as people of faith we must be ready to accept that. When somebody says, “Oh, but you cannot reconcile those two”, you must be ready to say, “I cannot. I do not pretend to. I do not know. I believe what I am told in the Bible.”

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- So we now come to discover what the Bible tells us about the way God works and we must be very careful not to say anything that contradicts what we have already said about His omniscience, His omnipotence and all the other things that we have agreed together. In other words:
  - 1. That He knows everything from the beginning to the end, so He cannot have an afterthought. Nothing is accidental, haphazard, uncertain or fortuitous.
  - 2. God has a definite plan and purpose about creation, about men and women, about salvation, about the whole of life in this world, about the end of it all, about the ultimate destiny.
  - 3. Everything that God has done and has brought to pass is according to His own eternal plan, and is fixed, unchangeable, and absolute.
- These are essential statements.

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- Furthermore, *The plan of God comprehends and determines all things and events of every kind that come to pass.* If you believe that God has determined certain ends, then you must believe that He determines everything that leads to those ends.
- You must realise that there is a kind of interrelationship between all events and things that happen, and that all are leading to that end. **So the doctrine of The Eternal Decrees of God says that all things are ultimately determined and decreed by Him.**
- Therefore, if everything is determined by God it must include the free actions, the voluntary actions of free and voluntary agents.
- This is a difficult, yet a fundamental statement, and Dr. Lloyd-Jones breaks it up a little and gives the scriptural evidence for it.
- For example:
- He quotes Paul in Ephesians 1:9-11 (Page 1818)

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- “And God made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works everything in conformity with the purpose of His will.”
- Now that applies to everything. Paul is speaking there of the whole cosmos being united in Christ, and he says that God is going to bring this to pass in that way.
- Further evidence is in the book of Proverbs where we read in 16:33, ‘The lot is cast into the lap; but its every decision is from the Lord.’
- A ‘Lot’ is a matter of chance and of accident, is it not? “We cast our lot”. Yes, says this scripture, but the disposing of it is the Lords.

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- The New Testament tells us that a little sparrow falls to the ground dead. An accident or by chance, we might say? Not at all. Not one of them falls without God. The life of a little sparrow is in the hands of God. Why even the hairs of our heads are all numbered.
- There are events which appear to be quite accidental, but they are controlled by God. Can we possibly get our heads around that? Very difficult to do so, yet that is what God tells us about Himself in the Bible.
- And here is some more difficult things:
- Paul writes to the Ephesians in 2:10, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Jesus Christ to do good works, *which God prepared in advance for us to do.*” Can you understand that?
- Paul write to the Philippians in 2:13, “For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good pleasure.”

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- Yet, here is something even more amazing, for Peter preaches on the Day of Pentecost at Jerusalem: “The terrible sin that those men did (crucifying Jesus) was determined beforehand by Your will and power.”
- Let’s be clear, God we discovered previously is Holy and does not approve of evil, but He permits the wicked agents to perform it and then He overrules it for His own wise and holy ends.
- I suppose the most striking example of all this is to be found in the betrayal of Jesus by Judas: a free and voluntary action, and yet a part of God’s great eternal purpose and plan.
- Now we come to the Doctor’s general proposition, which is that *all the decrees of God are unconditional and sovereign*.
- They are not dependent in any sense on human actions, nor determined by anything that people may or may not do.

## The Eternal Decrees of God

- God's decrees are not even determined in the light of what He knows people are going to do. They are absolutely unconditional. They do not depend upon anything except God's own will and God's holiness.
- But he wants to make it clear that that does not mean that there is no such thing as cause and effect in life or conditional actions.
- There is such a thing in nature and in life as cause and effect, yes. But what this doctrine says is that every cause and effect, and free actions, are part of the decree of God Himself. He has determined to work in that particular way.
- God has decreed that the end which He has in view shall certainly and inevitably be brought to pass, and that nothing can hinder or frustrate it.
- So much we cannot understand, suffice it to say, perhaps, "Even so, it seemed good in His sight".

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- Lloyd-Jones says that we may find this doctrine stated most clearly of all in the great chapter 9 of Romans and in verse 11 where referring to the Old Testament twins, Jacob and Esau, Paul writes: "Yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who calls."
- Paul's argument is that God had decreed that the elder should serve the younger because before either of them were ever born he had said, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated".
- "Why," you might ask, "did God love Jacob and hate Esau? Was it because of what they did?" No. Before they were even born, before they were ever conceived, God had chosen Jacob and not Esau. It had nothing to do with their works in any respect.
- God's purpose is unconditional and absolutely sovereign. Listen to Paul again in Romans 9:14:

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- “What then shall we say? Is God unjust?” Not at all.
- God forbid that we should even think such a thing. It is impossible, for God says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. It does not, therefore depend of man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden.”
- The next principle is that *the decrees of God are efficacious*. Now this of course, follows of necessity. Because God is a sovereign Lord, because of His omnipotence and His almightiness, His purposes can never fail. What God determines and decrees must infallibly be brought to pass. Nothing can prevent it. Nothing can frustrate it.

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- Then the next principle is that *the decrees of God are in all things perfectly consistent with His own most wise, benevolent and holy nature*. I don't think we need to query that do we? There is no contradiction in God. But this can bring out a problem to our finite and sinful minds:
- Why, then, did God decree to permit sin?
- There is only one answer to that question – **we do not know!**
- We do know that He did decree to permit sin, or sin would never have taken place. Why we do not know. It is an insoluble problem.
- But we shall see it all clearly when we are in glory and face to face with God.
- Two things we can be certain of and must always assert: first, *God is never the cause of sin*.

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- Secondly, the purpose of God is, in all things, perfectly consistent with the nature and the mode of action of His creatures. In other words, though we cannot reconcile it, there is an ultimate reconciliation.
- The decrees of God do not deny the existence of free agents and free actions. All we say is this: though God has granted this freedom, He nevertheless overrules it all in order that His ultimate ends may come to pass.
- Another question then: *How can God decree everything and yet hold us responsible for what we do?* Romans 9: 20-23 answers it.
- “But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? ~Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it, “Why did you make me like that?” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

## The Eternal Decrees of God

- Another question then: *How can God decree everything and yet hold us responsible for what we do?* Romans 9: 20-23 answers it.
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- But you may ask, ‘How do you reconcile those two?’
- I cannot, I know the Bible tells me 2 things: that man, in a sense, is a free agent, and on the other hand, that God’s eternal decrees govern everything.

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- Now the Doctor comes to his last proposition, which is that *The salvation of men and women and of angels, and of certain of them in particular, was determined by God before the foundation of the world.*
- God does this entirely of His own good will and His grace. He again refers us to Matthew 11: 25-26 and in John 6:37 we read, 'All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.'
- And in verse 44, Jesus says, 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.' and in Acts 13:48, 'All who were appointed for eternal life believed'.
- In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 you find, 'But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved in the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.'

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- Then in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to Timothy, Paul says in 1:9: ‘God who has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace.’
- Especially Lloyd-Jones wants to emphasise again that great statement which we have already quoted from Romans 9:20-23.
- Paul was preaching the great doctrine of The Eternal Decrees of God, imagines someone in Rome asking a question, and saying, ‘I do not understand this. It seems to me to be contradictory, to be unfair. If what you are telling me about these decrees is true, it seems that God is unjust.’
- The questioner says to Paul in verse 19, “Then why does God still blame us? For who resists His will?”
- Paul replies, “Who are you to talk back to God . . .
- That is Paul’s answer. That is the scriptural answer. That is God’s answer.

# The Eternal Decrees of God

- Therefore to us and for us while we are in this world of time. It is beyond us. We cannot grasp the ultimate working of God's mind. It is no use asking, Why this? and Why that? Why did God raise up Pharaoh? Why did He choose Jacob and not Esau? Why does He punish us if all things are determined and decreed?
- The answer is, "Who are we to talk back to God?" for we would be pitting ourselves against the mind of God. We would be forgetting how small we are. How finite we are and how sinful as a result of the fall.
- We have to leave the ultimate understanding until we arrive in glory. All we have to do here is believe that God is always consistent with Himself and to accept what He has plainly and clearly told us about His eternal decrees, about what He has determined and decided before He ever created the world.

## The Eternal Decrees of God

- Above all, we must realise if you are a child of God it is because God has determined it, and what He has determined about you is certain and safe and sure.
- Nothing and no one can ever take you out of His hands, or make Him forgo His purpose in respect of you. The Doctrine of the Eternal Decrees of God before the foundation of the world tells us that He knew you and your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the world was ever made, before you and I or anybody else ever came into it.
- Let us bow before His Majesty. Let us humble ourselves in His holy presence. Let us submit ourselves to the revelation that He has so graciously been pleased to give.