

GOD HAS A PLAN

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The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination

CHAPTER 3

It is unthinkable that a God of infinite wisdom and power would create a world without a definite plan for that world. And because God is thus infinite His plan must extend to every detail of the world's existence. If we could see the world in all its relations, past, present, and future, we would see that it is following a predetermined course with exact precision. Among created things we may search where we will, as far as the microscope and the telescope will enable the eye to see, we find organization everywhere. Large forms resolve themselves into parts, and these parts in their turn are but organized of other parts down as far as we can see into infinity.

Even man, who is but the creature of a day and subject to all kinds of errors, develops a plan before he acts; and a man who acts without design or purpose is accounted foolish. Before we make a trip or undertake a piece of work all of us set our goal and then work to attain that goal in so far as we are able. Regardless of how some people may oppose Predestination in theory, all of us in our every-day lives are practical predestinarians. As E. W. Smith says, a wise man "first determines upon the end he desires to attain, and then upon the best means of attaining it. Before the architect begins his edifice, he makes his drawings and forms his plans, even to the minutest details of construction. In the architect's brain the building stands complete in all its parts before a stone is laid. So with the merchant, the lawyer, the farmer, and all rational and intelligent men. Their activity is along the line of previously formed purposes, the fulfillment, so far as their finite capacities will allow, Of preconceived plans." (The Creed of Presbyterians, p. 159.)

The larger our enterprise is, the more important it is that we shall have a plan; otherwise all our work ends in failure. One would be considered mentally deranged who undertook to build a ship, or a railroad, or to govern a nation without a plan. We are told that before Napoleon began the invasion of Russia he had a plan worked out in detail, showing what line of march each division of his army was to follow, where it was to be at a certain time, what equipment and provisions it was to have, etc. Whatever was wanting in that plan was due to the limitations of human power and wisdom. Had Napoleon's foresight been perfect and his control of events absolute, his plan -- or we may say, his foreordination -- would have extended to every act of every soldier who made that march.

And if this is true of man, how much more is it true of God! "A universe without decrees," says A. J. Gordon. "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." We cannot conceive of God bringing into existence a universe without a plan which would extend to all that would be done in that universe. As the Scriptures teach that God's providential control extends to all events, even the most minute, they thereby teach that His plan is equally comprehensive. It is one of His perfections that He has the best possible plan, and that He

conducts the course of his tory to its appointed end. And to admit that He has a plan which He carries out is to admit Predestination. "God's plan is shown in its effectuation to be one," says Dabney. "Cause is linked with effect, and what was effect becomes cause; the influences of events on events interlace with each other, and descend in widening streams to subsequent events; so that the whole complex result is through every part. As astronomers suppose that the removal of one planet from our system would modify more or less the balance and orbits of all the rest, so the failure of one event in this plan would derange the whole, directly or indirectly." (Theology. p. 214.)

If God had not foreordained the course of events but waited until some undetermined condition was or was not fulfilled, His decrees could be neither eternal nor immutable. We know, however, that He is incapable of mistake, and that He cannot be surprised by any unforeseen inconveniences. His kingdom is in the heavens and He rules over all. His plan must, therefore, include every event in the entire sweep of history.

That even the small events have their place in this plan. and that they must be as they are, is easily seen. All of us know of certain "chance happenings" which have actually changed the course of our lives. The effects of these extend throughout all succeeding history in ever-widening influences, causing other "chance happenings." It is said that the quacking of some geese once saved Rome. Whether historically true or not it will serve as a good illustration. Had not the geese awakened the guards who gave the alarm and aroused the defending army, Rome would have fallen and the course of history from that time on would have been radically different. Had those geese remained silent who can imagine what empires might have been in existence today, or where the centers of culture might have been? During a battle a bullet misses the general by only an inch. His life is spared, he goes on commanding his troops, wins a decisive victory, and is made the chief ruler of his country for many years,--as was the case with George Washington. Yet what a different course history would have taken had the soldier on the other side aimed the slightest trifle higher or lower! The great Chicago fire of 1871, which destroyed more than I half of the city, was started, we are told, when a cow kicked over a lantern. How different would have been the history of Chicago if that one motion had been slightly different! "The control of the greatest must include the control of the less, for not only are great things made up of little things, but history shows how the veriest trifles are continually proving the pivots on which momentous events revolve. The persistence of a spider nerved a despairing man to fresh exertions which shaped a nation's future. The God who predestinated the course of Scotch history must have planned and presided over the movements of that tiny insect that saved Robert Bruce from despair." (The Creed of Presbyterians, p. 160.) Examples of this kind could be multiplied indefinitely.

The Pelagian denies that God has a plan; the Arminian says that God has a general but not a specific plan; but the Calvinist says that God has a specific plan which embraces all events in all ages. In recognizing that the eternal God has an eternal plan in which is predetermined every event that comes to pass, the Calvinist simply recognizes that God is God, and frees Him from all human limitations. The Scriptures represent God as a person, like other persons in that His acts are purpose- ful, but unlike other persons in that He is all-wise in His planning and all-powerful in His performing. They see the universe

as the product of His creative power, and as the theater in which are displayed His glorious perfections, and which must in all its form and all its history, down to the least detail, correspond with His purpose in making it.

In a very illuminating article on "Predestination," Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield, who in the opinion of the present writer has emerged as the outstanding theologian since John Calvin, tells us that the writers of Scripture saw the divine plan as "broad enough to embrace the whole universe of things, and minute enough to concern itself with the smallest details, and actualizing itself with inevitable certainty in every event that comes to pass." "In the infinite wisdom of the Lord of all the earth, each event falls with exact precision into its proper place in this unfolding of His eternal plan; nothing, however small, however strange, occurs without His ordering, or without its peculiar fitness for its place in the working out of His purposes; and the end of all shall be the manifestation of His glory, and accumulation of His praise. This is the Old Testament (as well as the New Testament) philosophy of the universes world-view which attains concrete unity in an absolute decree, or purpose, or plan of which all that comes to pass is the development in time." (Biblical Doctrines, pp. 13, 22.)

The very essence of consistent theism is that God would have an exact plan for the world, would foreknow the actions of all the creatures He proposed to create, and through His all-inclusive providence would control the whole system. If He fore-ordained only certain isolated events, confusion both in the natural -world and in human affairs would be introduced into the system and He would need to be constantly developing new plans to accomplish what be desired. His government of the world then would be a capricious patch work of new expedients He would at best govern only in a general way, and would be ignorant of much of the future. But no one with proper ideas of God believes that He has to change His mind every few days to make room for unexpected happenings which were not included in His original plan. If the perfection of the divine plan be denied, no consistent stopping place will be found short of atheism.

In the first place there was no necessity that God should create at all. He acted with perfect freedom when He brought this world into existence. When He did choose to create there was before Him an infinite number of possible plans. But as a matter of fact we find that He chose this particular one in which we now are. And since He knew perfectly every event of every kind which would be involved in this particular world-order, He very obviously predetermined every event which would happen when He chose this plan. His choice of the plan, or His making certain that the creation should be on this order, we call His foreordination or His predestination.

Even the sinful acts of men are included in this plan. They are foreseen, permitted, and have their exact place. They are controlled and overruled for the divine glory. The crucifixion of Christ, which is admittedly the worst crime in all human history, had, we are expressly told, its exact and necessary place in the plan (Acts 2:23; 4:28). This particular manner of redemption is not an expedient to which God was driven after being defeated and disappointed by the fall of man. Rather it is "according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord," Eph. 3:11. Peter tells us that Christ

as a sacrifice for sin was "foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world," I Peter 1:20. Believers were "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world" (or from eternity), Eph. 1:4. We are saved not by our own temporary works, "but according to His purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal," II Tim. 1:9. And if the crucifixion of Christ, or His offering up Himself as a sacrifice for sin, was in the eternal plan, then plainly the fall of Adam and all other sins which made that sacrifice necessary were in the plan, no matter how undesirable a part of that plan they may have been.

History in all its details, even the most minute, is but the unfolding of the eternal purposes of God. His decrees are not successively formed as the emergency arises, but are all parts of one all-comprehending plan, and we should never think of Him suddenly evolving a plan or doing something which He had not thought of before.

The fact that the Scriptures often speak of one purpose of God as dependent on the outcome of another or on the actions of men, is no objection against this doctrine. The Scriptures are written in the every-day language of men, and they often describe an act or a thing as it appears to be, rather than as it really is. The Bible speaks of "the four corners of the earth," Is. 11:12, and of "the foundations of the earth," Ps. 104:5; yet no one understands this to mean that the earth is square, or that it actually rests upon a foundation. We speak of the sun rising and setting, yet we know that it is not the motion of the sun but that of the earth as it turns over on its axis which causes this phenomenon. Likewise, when the Scriptures speak of God repenting, for instance, no one with proper ideas of God understands it to mean that He sees He has pursued a wrong course and changes His mind. It simply means that His action as seen from the human view-point appears to be like that of a man who repents. In other places the Scriptures speak of the hands, or arms, or eyes of God. These are what are known as "anthropomorphisms," instances in which God is referred to as if He were a man. When the word "repent," for instance, is used in its strict sense God is said never to repent: "God is not a man, that He should lie, Neither the son of man, that lie should repent." Nu. 23:19; and again, "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for He is not a man, that He should repent," I Sam. 15:29.

The contemplation of this great plan must redound to the praise of the unsearchable wisdom and illimitable power of Him who devised and executes it. And what can give the Christian more satisfaction and joy than to know that the whole course of the world is ordered with reference to the establishment of the Kingdom of heaven and the manifestation of the Divine glory; and that he is one of the objects upon which infinite love and mercy is to be lavished?

SCRIPTURE PROOF

1. God's plan is eternal:

II Tim. 1:9:(It is God) who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal.

Ps. 33:11: The counsel of Jehovah standeth fast for ever, The thoughts of His heart to all generations.

Is. 37:26: Hast thou not heard how I have done it long ago, and formed it of ancient times?

Is. 46:9, 10: I am God and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done.

II Thess. 2:13: God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

Matt. 25:34: Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

I Peter 1:20: (Christ) who (as a sacrifice for sin) was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world.

Jer. 31:3: Jehovah appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.

Acts 15:18: Saith the Lord, who maketh these things known from of old.

Ps. 139:16: Thine eyes did see mine unformed substance; And in thy book they were all written, Even the days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was none of them.

2. God's plan is unchangeable:

James 1:17: Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning.

Is. 14:24: Jehovah 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.

Is. 46:10, 11: My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure: . . . yea, I have spoken, and I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed I will also do it.

Nu. 23:19: God is not a man, that He should lie, Neither the son of man, that He should repent; Hath He said, and shall He not do it; Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make It good?

Mal. 3:6: I, Jeho vah, change not; therefore, ye, 0 sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

3. The divine plan Includes the future acts of men:

Dan. 2:28: But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and He hath made known to the King Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days.

John 6:64: For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who it was that should betray Him.

Matt. 20:18, 19: Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him unto the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify; and the third day He shall be raised up. (All the Scripture prophecies which are predictions of future events come under this heading. See especially: Micah 5:2; Cp. with Matt. 2:5, 6 and Luke 2:1-7; Ps. 22:18, Cp. John 19:24; Ps. 69:21, Cp. John 19:29; Zech. 12:10, Cp. John 19:37; Mark 14:30; Zech. 11:12, 13, Cp. Matt. 27:9, 10; Ps. 34:19, 20, Cp. John 19:33, 36.)

4. The divine plan Includes the fortuitous events or chance happenings:

Prov. 16:33: The lot is cast into the lap; But the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah.

Jonah 1:7: So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.

Acts 1:24, 26: And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show of these two the one whom thou has chosen . . . And they cast lots for them; and the lot fell on Matthias.

Job 36:32: He covereth His hands with the lightning, And giveth it a charge that it strike the mark.

I Kings 22:28, 34: And Micaiah said, If thou (Ahab) return at all in peace, Jehovah hath not spoken by me . . . And a certain man drew his bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the armor.

Job 5:6: For affliction cometh not forth from the dust; Neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.

Mark 14:30: And Jesus said unto him (Peter), Verily I say unto thee, that thou, today, even this night, before the cock crow twice shall deny me thrice. (Cp. Gen. 37:28 and 45:5; Cp. I Sam. 9:15,16 and 9:5-10.)

5. Some events are recorded as fixed or inevitably certain:

Luke 22:22: For the Son of man indeed goeth, as it hath been determined; but woe unto that man through whom He is betrayed.

John 8:20: These words spake He in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no man took Him; because His hour was not yet come.

Matt. 24:36: But of that day and hour (the end of the world) knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only.

Gen. 41:32: And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharoah, it is because the thing is established of God, and He will shortly bring it to pass.

Hab. 2:3: For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hasteneth toward the end, and shall not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay.

Luke 21:24: And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

Jer. 15:2: And it shall come to pass when they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them. Thus saith Jehovah: Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for famine, to the famine; and such as are for captivity, to captivity.

Job 14:5: Seeing that his days are determined, And the number of his months is with thee, And thou has appointed bounds that he cannot pass.

Jer. 27:7: And all nations shall serve him (Nebucbadnezzar), and his son, and his son's son, until the time of his own land come; and then many nations and great kings shall make him their bondman.

6. Even the sinful acts of men are included in the plan and are overruled for good.

Gen. 50:20: As for you, ye meant evil against me (Joseph), but God meant it for good.

Is. 45:7: I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I am Jehovah that doeth all these things.

Amos 3:6: Shall evil befall a city and Jehovah hath not done it?

Acts 3:18: The things which God foreshowed by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled.

Matt. 21:42: The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner.

Rom. 8:28: To them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to His purpose.

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