***Children of God, No.3
RO105-02***

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**The Decree of God**

This morning, we continue with the subject, "The Children of God," segment number 3, covering Romans 8:14-17. It is clear to anybody who reads the Bible that the scriptures teach that God is eternal, that He was before all things did now exist. The Bible is very clear on that subject. 1 Timothy 1:17 therefore says, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever, amen." Unto the King eternal - He who always has existed. The staggering concept to human mentality, but that is true of God.

The psalmist puts it this way, Psalm 90:2, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." You could not say it more explicitly than that; God has always existed, and He existed before there ever was anything, outside of Himself. In the sovereignty of God, there has eternally existed also a divine master plan which we have found thus far from the scriptures; it's called the decree of God.

We found this in Psalms 148:6, "He hath also established them for ever and ever: He hath made a decree which shall not pass." And that scripture tells us that God does have a master plan; it's called His decree, and it will be inevitably fulfilled. No part of it will be frustrated. Because of this decree established by the Godhead in eternity past, God foreknows in His omniscience all that will come to pass. There are no chance happening, and there are no surprises. Please again get that straight, because God in His decree has made certain determinations that consist of His plan all the details involved in that plan, therefore He knows what's going to come before Him. He established that.

**God's Decree for Adam and Eve**

The decree of God included, of course, the creation of a perfect man and a perfect woman in God's image and with freedom to exercise their wills because that too reflected a quality of deity. In Genesis 1:26-27, we read therefore, "And God said, 'Let us [Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.' So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." God in His sovereignty and his omniscience made man after His own image which included the fact that God is a Trinity and man is a Trinity (man as spirit, soul, and body reflecting the quality of the Trinity within the godhead).

Furthermore, man is a unity. His soul does not act independently of his body. His body does not act independently of his spirit. He acts as a unified whole so that again, there is unity within the godhead in terms of the essence of God while there are three distinct persons in that godhead. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 tells us that man has these three parts, and they are blessed by God, and they function together. God's likeness in man is, furthermore, reflected in man's moral purity at the point of His creation. God did not create man in a simple condition. He created him as, in fact, a holy being.

Adam, furthermore, possessed true information about God, and this is the true information which man in sin has lost, but once you are born again, you have the capacity to recapture it. Colossians 3:10 therefore tells us, "And have put on the new man, that is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created Him." When Adam was made in the image of God, he also had certain smarts. He had certain information. He had certain understanding. All of that was lost when sin came in. All of that has to be restored once you're born again.

Adam and Eve, furthermore, possessed a certain holiness as well as knowledge about God, about divine viewpoint things. They possessed a personal holiness, and this too they lost, but this too is restored at regeneration. Ephesians 4:24 therefore says, "and that ye put on the new man [the born again person], after which God is created in righteousness and true holiness." After which we, created in the image of God, were created in righteousness and true holiness. So Adam and Eve, you must understand, were a couple of very super-type of human beings. Absolutely holy. Absolutely perfect. Absolutely in the image and likeness of God without any deviation whatsoever. "In God's likeness," then, included the moral purity that man had at the point of his creation. And this is the way Adam came into existence as part of the divine decree.

Mankind was part of what God planned. Genesis 2:7 tells us that the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. The body of Adam, as per the decree of God, was made from the elements of the earth. Then God gave him the breath of life directly, and man became a living soul inside the body. So that man is inside the body and peers out through the things we call "the eyes." From Adam, God then formed Eve, and we now had two holy people through whom the human race was ready to be developed. Acts 17:26 explicitly says that every human being came from Adam and Eve. We are all of one blood. The decree of God included the whole future of these first two human beings. That was the will of God for them, and the will of God was their best interest.

God's plan for Adam, as you know, was for him to exercise authority over all of God's creation. So it was a wonderful, marvelous gift. Genesis 1:28 says, "And God blessed them [Adam and Eve], and God said unto them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the face of the earth.'" God said, "You, Adam, are completely in charge, and everything I've made - it's all yours." What a nice way to begin life.

The psalmist, Psalm 8, refers to this same marvelous environment and provision in Psalm 8:5-6, "For thou hast made him [that is, man] a little lower than the angels." Man has certain limitations that angels do not have. Man cannot float around in the air like angels can. Man can't walk through solid objects like angels can, and so on. So, he's in a little lower category. "And thou has crowned him [however] with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands. Thou hast put all things under his feet." So that Adam was in effect God's viceroy, God's representative on this earth to exercise with divine authority this perfect environment that God had created for these two people. And it was a perfect environment.

In Genesis 2 beginning in verse 8, we're told a little bit about that environment. In the Garden of Eden, "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man He had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from hence it was parted, and became into four heads." And then it goes on to name the rivers, to name the minerals that were there within this plan, and the fertility that this land possessed.

Adam was to use his divine authority over this environment to bring glory to God. That was the plan of God in the decree of God. That was a basic objective for every human being that's true today. To bring glory to God is within the decree of God. That's God's plan for our lives. So, as we ask ourselves a lot of questions about the things we should do and the things we should not do, one of the primary guidelines is for us to evaluate whether that thing we do or don't do brings glory to God.

Ezekiel 36:35 further enlightens us that Eden was simply Adam's home base. That was his base of operation, but that his authority had been extended over the whole earth that God had created, which was at that time a place of surpassing beauty and of productivity. Ezekiel 36:35 says, "And they shall say 'This land that was desolate is become like the Garden of Eden. And the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fortified and are inhabited." There, the prophet is comparing the land of Israel in its restoration to the fertility and productivity that once characterized Eden. Isaiah 51:3 says, "And the Lord shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places [that is, Israel], and He will make her wilderness like Eden and her desert like the garden of the Lord.; joy and gladness shall be found in it, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody."

So, all we're saying hers is that you can let your imagination just run rampant with the most idealistic spot on the face of the earth that you can imagine that was absolute perfection in every way - in the climate, in the surrounding, in what grew (including what did not grow), in the beauty of the animal life that were there. It was a terrific place to live. And Eden was simply the home base. There was beyond that the whole beautiful earth that God had created. So, in other words, Adam and Eve had a little bit of heaven on this earth, and they were guided by God every step of the way. There was a divine decree for how they were to function in this perfect environment.

And we have in Genesis 3:8 the indication that God was their personal teacher. After they sin, we have this expression, "And they heard the voice of the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of the day." And that expression reflects a pattern to which they've become accustomed. In the cool of the day, as the sun was setting, God would appear. He would appear in the person of the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ. And he would have conversations with them instructing them, giving them guidance every step of the way.

Now, all of this was great for Adam and Eve. They didn't object to that. They had a freedom, but they understood their freedom was under the obligation to fulfill the will of God as expressed in His divine decrees. And God made that freedom under His will very clear to them by telling them explicitly what they were not to do with that freedom. They were not to eat of a certain tree: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Where you learn the difference between good and evil by experience. The Bible forbids us to learn by experience what is evil.

Genesis 2:15-17 tells us, "The Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to till it and to keep it." He had work to do. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest eat freely.'" Now I want you to notice that when he says, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest eat freely," this is not like some of the orchards that some of you may plant where you manage to get three trees out of five hundred that work. I mean, this was a garden where every place you look there were hundreds and hundreds of trees just filled with luscious fruit, and it continued all year round. And so we're talking about hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of trees.

In fact, I suppose Adam probably had to put a sign on the tree to say, "This is the one; don't eat of it," because it looked like the other in every respect. It was just a special, marked tree, "Don't eat of this particular tree." But it was not much of a denial. What kind of a denial is that to have hundreds of trees to eat from and be told don't eat of this one? "But the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest, thou shalt surely die."

So, everything was made clear. Here were two human beings, perfect environment, personally holy, and God gave them explicit directions to His plan for them. Adam now could retain his holy integrity by obeying the will of God, or he could lose it by disobeying him by eating of the tree. Same choices we have. From the point of view of Adam and Eve, they were free to choose either way: obedience for their happiness or disobedience for their sorrow and death. After the sin of Adam, all of their progeny became slaves to sin, and they were compelled to do evil. They had no choice. For a while, Adam and Eve chose the plan of God, and when they did, they enjoyed a wonderful life of freedom. There were no strains. They were not to be denied anything that they chose to do except don't eat of that one tree.

So they lived. For how long? We don't know. A perfect environment, a perfect experience, a perfect life. But it was very clear to Adam and to Eve that they were not free to operate outside of the sovereign will of God with impunity.

**Adam and Eve's Freedom to Make Choices**

And that's the point of our study. Yes, you have freedom. Yes, you have choices. Yes, you can make those choices. Yes, you can go this route; you can go that route. But you cannot make a choice that is contrary to the decreed plan of God without paying a price. So that our freedom, you see, has certain limitations and restrictions upon it. Adam did not have, as a matter of fact, the mental capacity to know what was best for him. And he had an IQ that was terrific and uncontaminated by the degenerative effects of sin. But he did not have the mental IQ to know what was best for him, because he did not have omniscience.

Fallen man, obviously, knows even less what is good for him. And remember that what is good for you is not established by the fact that you desire something. The natural man says, "If I want it, it must be good for me." The sovereign authority of God was clearly established then by the prohibition concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God made it very clear that he was in charge and you must operate in His plan. Now, God has made us all, and He has the right to call all the plays in our lives and to call those plays for no other reason than His good pleasure. And I hope that you have learned that now. We have tried to stress that.

Why does God make decisions? For His good pleasure. And His holiness will not cause Him to exercise His good pleasure in a way that would violate his holiness. He will not do what is unrighteous. He will not do that which is not just. But He will do it for His good pleasure. Man, therefore, is not free to seek his satisfaction in anything else in life but in God Himself. And when you learn that, you have taken a quantum leap ahead of most of the rest of humanity. We are only free in life to do that which is not satisfaction in anything that God has created but satisfaction in only God Himself.

Eventually, you see, Adam and Eve chose satisfaction no longer in God as they did originally. Believe it or not, they decided to find satisfaction in a stupid piece of fruit on one tree. That's the only thing that would satisfy them was to have that fruit from that tree that God told them they should not eat of. And that's the thing that most people do today. Most people do not concern themselves with finding satisfaction in God. Because the only way you can find satisfaction in God is by doing His plan that He has for your life. Executing the divine decree. Man's freedom to choose was there, but his freedom was confined within the plan of God. To violate that brought consequences of the most disastrous kind.

Today, everyone is born with a sinful nature. We are all totally alienated from the will of God as contained in the decree of God. If Adam didn't know how to go, we certainly don't. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God by eating from the forbidden tree, and thereby they lost their position of uprightness before God. While this fall into sin was of course included in the divine decree, it was nevertheless the product of human freedom to choose. Today, because man is fallen, he doesn't even care to choose God. That's what the Bible means when it says, "There is not one that seeketh after Him - no, not one," because our sinful nature does not even care to pursue God. But when the fall came, we were all contaminated by it, and it has affected our ability to obey God.

**The Path of Wickedness**

Now, this fall came into the experience of Adam and Eve because they violated a principle that we should remind ourselves of and which will preserve us from a lot of heartache. And the younger you are, the sooner you should learn this principle in Proverbs 4:13-15 to keep yourself from getting blown out of the water or to keep yourself from having a lot of those ugly scars all over your life like some huge live oak tree that people have cut limbs off of and then they have the scabs that cover over the place that the wound was made. Proverbs 4, beginning at verse 13 says, "Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: Keep her; for she is thy life." That's talking about the instruction in the Word of God, instruction in what God thinks that we find in the Bible. Verse 14, "Enter not into the path of the wicked, And go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, Turn from it, and pass away."

Now, obviously, this is not what Eve did. Eve would have exercised great wisdom had she said, "I know where that tree is. I know we're not to eat of it, and I'm not even going to get near it! I'm going to avoid it, I'm not going to stay there, and furthermore, I'm not going to discuss anything about this." Now, as you know, before the fall, the Bible tells us that serpents were very beautiful creatures, and they were very graceful. And apparently, they moved in an upright position. They weren't belly-creepers in the dust. And we may almost surmise that Eve, walking by that tree, came up and saw the serpent in his upright position. And here's the old snake leaning up against the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and munching on one of the fruits. You can almost suspect that that's what was happening.

And he looked at that and said, "Wow." What's clicking in her mind? "God said you'd die if you ate of that. He's eating it. He's not dead. Hey, what's going on here?" And so she walked up to look. Mistake! The minute she saw that happening, the minute she saw him eating of that tree, she should not have fallen into the charismatic mistake of, "I must demonstrate and prove something by experience." Bologna. You had the Word of God, and the moment you saw that tree being touched or being dealt with, she should have, as the Proverbs said, "refused to walk that path." Get off of it.

It's like James said in his book, "Flee the devil. Flee from him." How do you flee from him? You resist him. You reject his appeals. You do not discuss the Word of God from him. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. And so, the great bit of wisdom here in the book of Proverbs says when you are confronted with the path of the wicked, don't enter into that path. Avoid it. Don't pass it. Don't get near it, and certainly, don't walk on it.

Now, our society is filled - I need not tell you - with all kinds of paths of wickedness. You can't go to a movie without walking a path of wickedness, so don't kid yourself. And you might as well face the fact that it is not in the decree of God for you to be walking in the path of wickedness that is represented by most movies. You cannot watch a great deal of what is on television without walking in a path of wickedness. There is hardly a program you can watch, even a regularly scheduled program that does not establish that sexual immorality is a normative role for human beings to play.

Well, how do you deal with that? You sit there and you watch it. And you sit there, and you watch this program where this is carrying on, and this is being interjected as a legitimate activity. This is part of the lifestyle, this is a part of what's going on, instead of walking away and clicking it off and saying, "I don't watch that. That's a path of wickedness that if I sit here looking at this, next time it's not going to be quite so shocking. If I sit here and I move in the company of some foul-mouthed creature, his foul mouth is going to, after a while, not seem so bad. I get used to it."

Now, you can multiply the paths of wickedness all around us through all of the eye-gates, near-gates, and all of the rest of the senses we have, and the Bible says, "Avoid it." Eve had no business hanging around that tree. She should have avoided it. She should have given it a distance. She should have simply refused when she did get there to even discuss this matter with Satan as he spoke through the serpent. She did not do that. She did not avoid that tree.

**Jesus' Response to Temptation**

When Satan tempted the humanity of Jesus Christ, on the other hand, do you remember what the Lord did? He quoted a principle of doctrine from scripture to Satan on each of those three temptations in the wilderness, and then, if you'll go back and read the scripture, you will notice that there was no discussion. Satan tried to discuss. Satan comes back and says, "Yeah, well, ok!" And then he gave him another proposition. And Jesus sat there looking at him, and Jesus gave him another scripture. And then Satan says, "Yeah, but look at this!" And then he gave him the big one: "I'll give you the whole domination of all the kingdoms of the world, if you'll come and bow down to me."

Did the Lord discuss that? Did He have anything to say on that? He could have had a lot to say on that. Instead, He gave him a scripture, and that's it. And He did not discuss evil with evil personalities. And you would be wise to avoid discussing evil walking the path of evil, being in the presence of evil, being in contention with evil people. Eve fell out of the will of God because she doubted and debated the sovereign will of God. She doubted the decree of God; she thought she could beat the plan.

**The Deceit of Temptation**

Proverbs 14:7 says, "Go from the presence of a foolish man when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge." Ok, girls, are you listening? "Go from the presence of a foolish man when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge." You go out with some dumbbell bimbo who doesn't know up from down spiritually but because he's handsome and good-looking and derogare and because all the girls have somebody that pays attention to them and you want to be paid attention that you stay with him even though you listen to the words of a fool. You listen to somebody that has no knowledge. Here is the principle again. The Bible says, "Get away from him." How much sin, I assure you, you can preserve yourself from, you cannot imagine if you just get away from stupid people and refuse to participate in ungodly conversations and be in the presence of ungodly activities.

Proverbs 19:27 says, "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction That causeth thee to err from the words of knowledge." How could you put it clearer? "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction That causeth thee to err from the words of knowledge." And this knowledge referring to the divine viewpoint knowledge. Well, how do you cease from that? Well there's just some television programs you don't listen to, some movies you don't go to, some books you don't read, some people you don't listen to. You just cease from the presence of that kind of destructive conversation. And those of you who think that you're big time, strong Christians and that you can play around in that world are going to have cause to regret it. And you as parents may have cause to regret it because you demonstrate to your children that they should not avoid that kind of contact with evil, and they will grow up being much more ready to be participants in it than you ever dreamed that you would want to be or that they would.

Once Eve abandoned, you see, the Word of God, "Don't eat of that tree," that's the decree, then her mind was cut loose from reality. And so, her reasoning became darkened with human viewpoint, then she was an easy target for Satan to deceive. And that is exactly what happened to her. 2 Corinthians 11:3, 2 Timothy 2:14 tells us that she was tricked. She was conned into the sin that she committed just because she doubted and debated what God had said. And the worst thing about it is, she made her ultimate decision by listening to this creature - who was this snake - who was leaning up against this tree munching on the fruit.

And you could see how her reasoning and experience was saying, "You know, snakes don't talk. All these snakes, they don't talk. How come you can talk?" "Ah, it's the knowledge of this tree. You eat this, boy, it'll make you a god. See what it's done for me? I used to just be one of these snakes walking around here mute; now I'm not anymore. Now I can talk. I'm no longer dumb." But he was. But she was impressed. You can just see her mind saying, "Boy, that has done something for you!" Experience. How stupid it can be.

Do you remember the old television program called Candid Camera? No, of course you wouldn't. You're such young, little characters. You wouldn't remember the old stuff in the old days. But there used to be a program where, you know, they'd get people in situations and have a camera on them. And one of the all-time great was a man who was walking down the street and the mailbox said, "Sir." And he looked around. It said, "Sir." And he walked around, opened the flap, and said, "Are you talking to me?" "Yes, sir." "What," he said, "How can you? How come this box is talking?" "Well sir, this is a new service we have with the postal department. We are able to give better service more directly and you can communicate with us directly. We can help you with your problems." "Really, is that wonderful!"

And he carried on conversation and saw a man - a total stranger - come walking down, and he said, "Hey, look what they're doing down here! They'll talk to you here in the mailbox." He says, "Go ahead and ask it a question." The guy looks at him, and he says, "Hello, how are you?" The box says nothing. He opens the lid and says, "Hey, tell him what you told me!" The box says nothing. Finally, the stranger looks at him and, boy, he rolls his eyes and walks down the street. This guy's standing in front of the mailbox that won't talk.

What was this man proving? By experience, the box talked. It should have proven, it should have convinced him that this box can talk. But it was a deceit. And the devil was talking through that snake. That snake wasn't talking. Because she depended on experience - not the Word of God - she was deceived.

You see, you have to be careful who the people are you listen to. You listen to the wrong people and you will destroy yourself. And that's exactly what Eve. She listened to this snake -an animal, something she knew God had created - instead of listening to the God who came every day in the cool of the day and sat down with them and said, "Now, I'm going to explain to you the doctrine of propitiation, the doctrine of the atonement ahead. I'm going to explain this. I'm going to explain God. I'm going to explain the sovereignty of God to you. I'm going to explain the relationship of husband and wives. I'm going to explain the divine institutions to you," and so on, right down the line, discussing the critical things of the Word of God. Suddenly, she's willing to listen to a snake.

There are many snakes walking around in human form. And the sooner you learn it, the sooner you will be prepared to protect yourselves from the consequences of listening to them. And once we accept the opinion of another person on the matter instead of God's opinion, then there's no way you're going to accept the will of God and you're going to take second best in your life by your own sad choice. Those who reject the will of God, furthermore, are always zealously eager for others to follow them so they will join them in their evil and thus gain for themselves some reinforcement of encouragement.

Eve did the same thing. She wasn't satisfied with what she had done, and of course, it was evident to her that something happened. We suspect that she was covered with a clothing of light that immediately left her and which Adam was aware of. Thus, the scriptures say they became aware of their nakedness which they had not been up to then, simply because they had the clothing of the glory of God's light around them. And she wasn't satisfied with what she had done; she was bound determined to bring Adam in with her. And, of course, he did it, but not as a con but as a deliberate choice. So mankind was set upon a road of total moral depravity and rejection to the will of God in all of its tragic consequences.

**The Nature of God's Divine Decree**

So, all of this brings us to the point that we today who bear that burden of guilt and sin from our first parents are in a much harder position for understanding what the plan of God is for us within the decree of God, and the appreciation for the sovereignty of God. So, let's look at the divine decree in terms of its nature.

We speak of the divine decree because it's one plan with God. But we can't think of it as one plan. We are rational creatures. We have to think in an orderly fashion. We have to think in time sequence, we have to think in logical sequence. We have to think in terms as things are revealed to us, so we talk about the decrees of God. We add an "s" to it, meaning the little individual pieces of the plan of God. But God sees it as a whole, all at once. Our finite minds are limited to taking it in as parts.

The decree of God is unconditional. It cannot be frustrated. It will be executed. Neither angels nor human beings can in any way outmaneuver the sovereign decree of God. Remember, sovereign means God is not guided or directed by anybody except His own character. Isaiah 46:10 says, "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel will stand, and I will do all my pleasure.'" Now, that is God declaring that His decree, in all of its parts, is inevitable.

James 4:15 says, "For ye ought to say, 'If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.'" All that happens in human history and our personal lives is part of the divine decree. The precise order and the precise manner and occurrence of every detail relative to our experience is in the plan of God, and it is certain of fulfillment. You cannot evade it.

Now, this passage in James is very significant. It is legitimate and right that when we pray, we say, "If it is the will of God." When we make plans, whether we say it or not, we understand that it is conditioned upon, "If this be the will of God." What do we mean by that? We mean, if this proves to be within the decree of God. And we'll not get to it this morning, but in the very near future, we will go very deliberately step-by-step through elements of guidance that unless you're dumb, blind, and deaf, you could not fail to see that God is saying, "This way, fellow. Not this way." And the pointing in the direction of being there. The guidance is very explicit indeed. But we don't know all the details. We do not have all the whole picture as the omniscient mind of God grasps it, so we have to go step-by-step, and so we say, "I'm going to have to do this." And we say, "If the Lord will."

And then, isn't this a funny statement: "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." That's an odd thing to interject there. My life is going to determine what I'm going to do or not do? All of my big-time plans? You betcha. All your big-time plans are contingent on whether you can keep breathing and the blood can keep flowing in your veins. That's what all your plans are on, and that is the basis upon which you may do something.

Now, look back and you'll see the context of what he says there. We'll go back to verse 13. "Come now, ye that say, "To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get great gain." "Here's my business plans. I'm the big operator. I'm the last of the big time bananas in downtown Israel here. And I'm going to do this and do that, and we're going to make this profit. And then we're going to take this trip, and we're going to go here, and then we're going to do this investment, and we're going to do this." Verse 14 says, "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the next day. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." And how very quickly in the prime of life something can happen and suddenly you know: terminal point has been reached, and you become a terminal person. And sometimes, you don't even have time to think about it. Don't even have time to think about it and suddenly your life can be snuffed out. You can be in a recreational activity.

The news the other day. A family out at the lake having a great time on Memorial Day. Little girls go out to wash the sand off their feet, and one drowns in five feet of water. Bingo - just like that. It happens to young people, and it happens to adults. And all you have to do is just be in a certain situation at a certain point in time, and your life goes - just like that. Just like a vapor. Just like breathing out your mouth on a cold day. You see that vapor condensing, and pretty soon it's just gone.

Now, smart people look that over, and they say, "Yes, that's how it really is. That's how life really works." So, when I go and I say, "This is what I'm going to do, and this is what I'm going to do here and what I'm going to do then. This is what I'm going to pursue." Ye ought to say, "If the Lord will and we shall live, and do this, and that." Otherwise, he said, that kind of rejoicing and planning is evil. All that happens in your life is already lined up by God. The question is for us to come into alignment with it in order that God can do what he wanted to do with Adam and Eve: puts you in a blessed situation and to pour blessing upon you.

God has not, of course, decreed anything about Himself in terms of His own existence. He didn't decree Himself into existence. He decreed you and me into existence. He did not decree anything about His character. He decreed everything about our character. He did not decree anything relative to Himself - only about things that are external to Himself. He is sovereign, and the decree is designed to bring glory to Him. That's why when you do make plans, it should always consist of not only, "If the Lord will, I intend to do this," but also, "If indeed I may demonstrate to my satisfaction that this will be to the glory of God." And as we've already pointed out, God acts toward His good pleasure. That's what brings glory to Him - not because it happens to be to our good pleasure.

**The Directive Will of God**

Here's the nature of the will of God. In the divine decree, all things were foreordained, and they proceed from various, distinctive facets of the will of God.

Facet number one (you're acquainted with, but let's repeat it): it's the directive will of God. God has ordained a master plan which he requires all to execute. That's the plan we call the decree and all the exigencies and all the variations and all the expressions of our human freedom of will are all tied into that decree, and God has it all wrapped up and all laid up.

**The Permissive Will of God**

There is, however, the permissive will of God. God permits human and angelic volition to function within His decree to bring divine blessing or to bring divine discipline. From a human viewpoint, you can look down, you can say, "I can choose the path of sexual immorality; I can choose a path, like Joseph, of sexual purity." Bingo. You can do it both. You can make it harder on yourself to do the right thing by putting yourself in the presence and opportunity of evil. Now we're back to fleeing - being smart enough to get away from the evil rather than being in the proximity to it, but you in the human point of view can go both ways. From the divine viewpoint, God's sovereignty achieves His will for an individual.

And we've had some great times, as many of you have mentioned to me personally and agreed with, on Sunday nights recently in looking over these amazing sons of Joseph in terms of their character, not the least of which was this principle concerning God's sovereignty to achieve His will even when He's permitting us to do what we may want to do contrary to that will. Where's it going to go? That's permissive will. "Oh yeah, I'll permit you to go down that path, if you choose to do so." Joseph's brother had no business selling that little kid into slavery, and they had no business treating him in that way. They had no business treating their father with a lie concerning the boy's death.

And when finally they came face-to-face with Joseph and found that he was in charge - second in command in Egypt - they now feared for their lives. Genesis 45, therefore, verse 5, remember we studied, says, "Now therefore [Joseph says to his brothers] be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me here: for God did send me before you to preserve life."

Oh yes, God permitted your permissive will to work, but did you think you were going to outwit the decree of God? Not for a moment. God used your permissive will to accomplish His decree. Verse 7, "And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance." If it hadn't been for that very evil thing you did that God was in control of, you'd all be dead. The only reason you're going to live is because I've been here storing the food that's going to preserve you so that you can have children in posterity.

The negative volition choices of some Christians, furthermore, is used as a testing ground for the positive volition of other Christians to reject or not. And some of the brothers of Joseph had a reticence of going along with the evil that the others were doing. And Reuben tried to say, "I'll pretend I'm going along; I'm going to let the boy go later." His brother, the other older brother (I forget his name at the moment) was also in the same attitude, the same attitude that he was going to protect this boy. But they went along. And in any case, they became equally guilty. They became part of the problem.

So, you have to be careful to realize that God does permit in his permissive will for people to do evil, and one of the reasons He does that is for you to test out your own volition and to not become part of it. You can go along and become part of that negative volition and thus come down with all the rest. You've got to be very careful who you listen to, who you go along with. Negative volition to the will of God is permitted, but deep discipline has been decreed in keeping with God's justice.

So, what we're saying is that either you and I as Christians adjust to the justice in the decree of God for blessing or divine justice - adjust to the negative Christian for discipline. God permits us to make a choice, but He has already decreed the outcome. So, rejection, for example, of Jesus Christ as Savior, is maladjustment to God's justice, so divine justice has decreed the consequences as the lake of fire. Either you adjust to the justice of God relative to your sin or the justice of God will adjust relative to God's essence and send you to the lake of fire. You cannot escape it. The same relationship for us as Christians. Either as Christians we adjust to the justice of God, or if we pursue carnality, his justice adjusts judgment to us.

There is one other thing. And I should tell you that God has provided for the church-age believer the fullest, most absolute, complete capacity to follow the pattern, the will of God and the justice of God, to adjust to that justice, in the completed scripture and in the internal guidance of God the Holy Spirit.

**The Overruling Will of God**

There is one other factor to tie this up this morning, and that's the overruling will of God - where God comes in and, in His sovereignty, he counters human volition so that His decree is fulfilled. An example of this is Genesis 50:15-21. Here, we have again a problem on the part of Joseph's brothers because now their father Jacob has died, and the brothers get together, and they say, "Now that the father is gone, Joseph didn't want to hurt him, but he's going to kill us now for sure. Now that our father is dead."

"And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, 'Joseph will perhaps hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him.' [He's going to get even.] And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, 'Thy father did command before he died, saying, 'So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father.' And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, 'Behold, we be thy servants.' [The brothers are groveling in their fear.] Joseph said unto them, 'Fear not: for am I in [God's place? Am I in] the place of God?'

This guy Joseph was really fantastic! A man who can think as we've seen, a divine viewpoint that just causes you to stand in awe of him. And here again, as he refused to enter into the immorality of Bathsheba on the basis that he could not do this evil against God, he knew against whom the evil was, so here he says, "Am I God that I am going to deal with your evil?" And he was insulted. And he said, "I would think that by now, you would understand that I am not going to pretend to be God, and I am not going to act as God. Oh, sure, you did a terrible thing, but do you think that I am going to come and be God's agent to straighten you out? Fellows, you're really off your rockers. I wouldn't dare do that!"

"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God [overruled it] meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones.' And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them." Joseph recognized that God is the one who is in charge, and He has a decree that He executes.

You see, our problem is that in our arrogance, we get up there, and we say, "Oh, we're going to help you execute your decree, Lord. We're going to get in there, and we're going to make this thing work. We're going to straighten out these goof balls. We're going to let them know where we stand. We're going to arrange them." Who do you think you are? Joseph knew so well that only God can execute His plan, and when you get in the way, God's dealings of His decree, of any individual, will crack a whip across you as well as that person. Dangerous business to play. The overruling, sovereign will of God is not going to be frustrated. Instead, Joseph says, "I'm going to take care of you. I'm going to nourish your little ones. You have nothing to fear from me."

Well, did the brothers have a happy time? Well, if you've been here on Sunday nights and you've been following that deathbed analysis in Genesis 49 of each of these sons, you know what the consequences were to each of them because of their evil. They didn't get away with anything. They had horrendous consequences and to their progeny. But again, the overruling grace of God comes in. We look down into the tribulation era, and there are the descendants of some of the worst of these sons who are the evangelists proclaiming the eternal life that no one will hear except from those people in that time.

So, the decree of God is an amazing provision to which we may relate ourselves with great blessing or great suffering. Now, it is necessary for us to look at some detail at the functioning of the decree of God and for the divine guidance into that decree. And we'll go from there next time.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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