***Children of God, No. 4
RO105-02***

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Our topic this morning is The Children of God, segment number 4. Romans 8:14-17. In Romans 8:14, we have read, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Before the fall of Adam and Eve from sinlessness into sinfulness, there was total unity between the will of God and the will of man. This was a condition which created complete happiness and maximum prosperity for the first two human beings. Adam knew God was in authority over him, and he knew that God possessed omniscience with which to guide him into the best of all worlds and to the best that there was in life for him. Doing God's will, in fact, made the Garden of Eden the golden age of mankind.

But with the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God's will came the loss of divine guidance. Man, then, found himself possessed with the sin nature, and he had lost the golden age of Eden. He was spiritually dead, now separated from the living God. He was no longer in God's family. Man's will, at this time, was now under the control of Satan along with the whole earth that God had created for man to enjoy and to control. Rebellion against the will of God was compounded, furthermore, in the progeny of Adam and Eve, and the human race descended to the pit of every moral corruption and evil that the mind of man could imagine and invent. Man's will dominated by his sin nature's arrogance has led the human race, subsequently, from one disaster to another.

Man cannot make it without God, but the whole world is still trying to do it. The only way back to this issue of divine guidance is through the new birth by trusting Christ as Savior. Those who are the sons and daughters of God instead of the sons and daughters of Satan. They are under divine guidance. Whether they use it, pay attention to it or not, they do receive divine guidance. Whether you're a young person [or] an older person, you do receive divine guidance.

The Bible clearly furthermore proclaims that it is, there are certain things that are specifically the will of God. And it spells those specific things out and says, "This is what God wants you to do." Certain moral principles are very specifically enunciated. The Holy Spirit, furthermore, guides the individual believer in various ways to apply principles of doctrine to issues which are not specifically covered in scripture. There are many things that we have to make decisions about that we have to go back and find a principle of scripture, and then we apply it to that current, modern situation that we're in. It is God the Holy Spirit that helps us take the principles that we know and to make a decision on the basis of the current circumstance.

**The Logical Order Within the Decree of God**

The sovereign God has a master plan. That plan covers all that takes place in His creation, and we have found in the Bible called that His decree. This exercise incorporates, of course, the exercise of man's will under the will of God. And as we've summed it up last week, we've found that God's will is expressed in three ways.

First, there is His directive will. That is what God has ordained to be done. Secondly, it's His permissive will. That is what God allows man to do. And third is His overruling will which is what God allows to happen to fulfill His decree in spite of human choices to the contrary.

Now, if you get those three, you'll have a basic understanding of the functioning of the will of God in relationship to the will of angels and to the will of man. So, divine good is part of God's directive and overruling will. Divine good is what God wants us to perform. Divine good is what God is going to see to it as executed, because that's within his decree. While human good and sin are only part of his permissive will, they are not his directive will. God is not the author of evil. God did not direct sin. God did not bring sin into existence. That was the function of man's choice. But God's permissive will allowed sin to come into the picture, and human good along with it.

The logical order, I want to remind you again, so that you have this clearly in mind between these various factors that we talk about - foreknowledge, the decree of God, the election, predestination, and so on - this is the logical. And I say "logical" because it is not chronological. You see, God does not go, "Step now. Oh yeah, I'll take this step. Now, I'll take this step." With God, it's zapped. It's all there in one view. It is all totally in his picture.

It's like somebody who's standing at an intersection here and a parade is going by on the street a block up. Now, you stand here at this intersection, you'll see the parade come by. First battalion comes by, second battalion comes by, third battalion comes by. But somebody that's in the helicopter looks down and sees the whole thing in one view. That's how God sees, whereas we see in fragments.

So, logically, here's the order. First of all, in the order of these events, you have to begin with the omniscience of God. That's where it all begins. The omniscience of God, logically, is number one. The omniscience of God produces the divine decree. That's number two within the divine decree is foreordination. There is also election. There is also predestination. And if you want to have more details on all of these, you will find them in the early part of the Jude series of tapes.

The decree of God includes foreordination: He has declared everything that's going to happen. Election: that includes selecting those who are going to be unto eternal life. Predestinating: directing where things are going to go for each one of us. All of that is part of the divine decree. And out of that divine decree then comes foreknowledge.

If you remember this order (but with God, it's not chronological, it's all at once, but this is the logical order), then you won't make the mistake of sticking foreknowledge up here before the omniscience of God. Saying, for example, if God looks down the corridors of time and sees who's going to believe the gospel and who isn't, and then God knows who's elect and who isn't. If you get foreknowledge out of the way, then you'll make some God something less than omniscient. It starts with omniscience, divine decree, and foreknowledge. The reason God knows ahead of time what's going to happen is because He's decided it's already in His decree on the basis of His omniscience which picked the best of all possible plans.

**The Laws of God**

A distinction should furthermore be made between the decrees of God (and when we use the word in the plural, we're talking about the individual parts of God's decree), and the laws of God. There is a difference between God's decrees and God's laws. The decree of God is His master plan of which no detail can be broken or frustrated by either angelic or human volition. For this reason, we know that Satan cannot take the world away from God and rule the universe, because God's decree does not include Satan doing that, and therefore, that cannot come to pass. But God has certain laws related to the world of nature - the laws of nature - and the laws of morality. And these can be violated. You can never violate what's here in the decrees, but you can violate the laws of God. You can break the moral code. You can violate the laws of nature. If you do, you bear certain consequences.

Such human violations, however, I should say, are already included in the decrees of God. Any violation of the laws of God -that's already been taken into account and included in God's decree in some way. God's decrees are inviolate; God's laws can be broken.

**The Functioning of the Decree of God**

Now, let's look at the functioning of the decree of God itself, because this is what life is all about for us day by day. Every morning, the wise Christian begins with the frame of reference: what is in God's decree for me? That's the thing that's best. That's the thing that in terms of eternity is going to make me a winner. That's the which if I ignore and violate is going to make me a loser - not necessarily on earth. You may be the biggest success in the world on earth, but in heaven, you'll be the biggest loser. It is important to know what is in the decree of God, and the Christian who's smart opens his eyes, looks up at the ceiling and says, "Now, Lord, let's start this day, and I look to you for thy moment-to-moment guidance for the issues - the elements of the decree - for this particular point in time for me."

Bible doctrine, of course, is essential to interpreting the details of the divine decree as we see them unfolding in history and in our personal lives. Divine viewpoint is required to lead us to the reality so that what we see, we know how to interpret. So that we can interpret the issues that are confronting us in terms of God's decree. So that we will not fall into self-pity when we get into some serious crises in life, when we come to some serious problem, we'll know how to look at these things from the frame of reference of an omniscient and all-wise and totally loving God.

1 Peter 1, for example, verses 18-20, give us information for understanding the working of God's divine decree in history. 1 Peter 1:18, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain manner of life received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: [now, notice] who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."

Peter says, "You people who have been born again are not born again because you pay the priest so say some masses for you, because you gave money to a great foundation, you create some Christian cause and some Christian organization, because you did anything at all, because you believed all that nonsense that human viewpoint has passed down religiously to you, that didn't save you. You were saved in spite of all of that. You were saved because Christ died for you. And so, your moral guilt has been removed by the death which He experienced in your place." This death, Peter says, was in the decree of God before the world was ever created. The Godhead had already had an eternal life conference, and they had already made the decision that God the Son would die for the sins of the world to redeem those whom God the Father had elected to eternal life and whom God the Holy Spirit would enlighten and bring to conviction.

If you pass your eye down to verses 23-25 of 1 Peter 1, you may see how this works out. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God [scripture], which liveth and abideth for ever." And then here we have this warning again, how fleeting life is, especially when you're in the prime. "For all flesh is like grass, and all the glory of man like the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and its flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

So, here in eternity past, Christ was destined to die for you. And the information concerning that was brought to you by the Word of God at the point of time in which you lived to apply something the decree of God had already established. And it is through the Word of God that you are able to be born again.

Remember that you have never witnessed to anybody until you have done two things. One, you have told them the Gospel, that Christ has died for them and covered their sin. And two, you have told them what to do with the Gospel: to believe it, to trust in that provision that God has made and in that savior. And it is the Bible that gives us that information. That's why it is accurate, that's why it is true, and that's why we can trust ourselves to it. So, while life is a very fleeting thing, God, in His decree, established a place, a point where the provision would be made to cover our sins, and He made it possible for the information to be given to us to act upon. But He did not shove it down your throat. You still must say, "Yes, I believe it."

You can't go floating in and out of this auditorium as a young person just because your parents bring you here and they are Christians, and because you get into all the program and all the activities to think that that's going to cover you. The information has to be personally received. You have to say, "Yes, I accept Him as my savior." And you're only going to have a short time, because pretty soon, every one of you will be dead. Very, very soon. A very short period of time in terms of eternity. The Bible says the best you can hope for is seventy years.

So, it is necessary for us to have the doctrines of scripture understood so we can see how God's decree is working out and functioning in time and see that it is inevitable. The purpose of the eternal life conference, I can assure you, is not going to be frustrated. Jesus Christ is going to bring into heaven through His death a certain number of human beings. And the Bible helps us to see how that is inevitable.

Human volition in all of this, of course, is given its freedom. This is given its freedom through the directive and the permissive will of God. And here's a classic example of how human freedom, permissive will, functions to execute in time the directive will of God by God coming in with his overruling will. You'll find this in Acts 2:23-24. And if you don't have your Bibles, you're going to be at a great disadvantage not to follow these verses, because we are on a subject that strains the mental capacities to the limit. So, please bring your Bibles.

Acts 2:23 said, "Him [speaking of Jesus of Nazareth], being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." Now, you should be able to explain that to yourself. You know what determinate counsel is: the decree of God. You know what the foreknowledge is: the consequence of the decree of God. God knowing what was going to happen because He had decided it. "Ye [these Jews to whom they were preaching] have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be held by it."

So, here is God telling us that Jesus Christ was again ordained in the decree of God that He would be taken by the hands of human beings. Men exercising their volition would make their decision to murder him, and that was permitted to happen. But drop your eye down to verse 36 of Acts 2. The overruling will of God limits the consequences of the volition of man so that God's decree, the original plan, is kept intact. Acts 2:36 says, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." This man whom you took and whom you thought you were making a decision on to execute, God had already decreed that you would function in that way, and out of that He would be the one that would become the Lord and the Christ the Savior.

In Acts 3:18, we may add this, "But those things which God before hath shown by the mouth of all His prophets that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled." Man did not fulfill it. God told us ahead of time that this was going to happen. Jesus said it was going to happen. But you notice that it says, "God hath fulfilled Christ's suffering in this way."

Notice Acts 4:27-28, "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together." Human volition functioning. But notice what verse 28 says. Human volition functioning to do what? "To do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." You couldn't have it any clearer than that.

All these powerful people - government authorities, Pontius Pilate, Herod, the Gentile soldiers, the Gentile people there, the people of Israel, the Jews - all these elements that had a hand in the death of Christ all thought that they were making decisions. They were talking to each other, and they were consulting, and they were coming to a decision about what they were going to do with Jesus, and then they executed it. And from their point of view, they were in full command.

But there was a God in heaven whose decree was being executed. And when we understand this doctrine, you see, then we understand what's taking place around us every day and in history and in our personal lives. For they were doing whatever the hand of God and His counsel had determined in eternity past could be done.

Now, that is the decree of God, and that is the thing that we as Christians walking day by day must understand. All that possibly could happen, therefore, which God does not allow, were known to Him, and these things were rejected in His sovereign decree from happening. All that man would do has been rejected that is not in God's plan. And it's all to be incorporated in some fantastic, smooth way. Everything we do, then, and everything that happens is part of the divine decree. But since our personal volition is part of the decree, we are not absolved from responsibility for our actions. And I know that inevitably, the thought is going to come to your mind that if the decree of God is so inviolate, it's irrefutable, that therefore, man is innocent.

But in Luke 22:22, we clearly see that this is not so. "And truly the Son of Man goeth as it was determined." Yes, the Son of Man goes to His death as was determined by the decree of God. The Son of Man goes to His death as a result of the betrayal of Judas, the man who set it all in motion, the man who exercised free volition to make a deal for thirty pieces of silver to identify where Jesus was gathering with His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane to lead them to where he knew they would be gathered and thus to put Him in the hands of the Roman authorities. "Truly the Son of Man goeth as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!" Just breathe a sigh of relief that you're not in Judas' shoes this morning. The Bible says, "Yes, the decree of God determined how sin would be paid for through the death of Christ, but pity the man who decided to execute that action." And Judas is forever held responsible in enormous suffering for what he did.

**Relating Ourselves to the Will of God**

Someday, we will come into the Lord's presence, and our minds will enjoy an expansion beyond the limitations that we have now, and this question of the relationship of the decrees and the determination of God and our exercising of our will and the consequences of suffering the results of what we decide are somehow going to come together. And we're going say, "Oh, I see it now. I don't know why I had any trouble trying to figure that out. It's so clear." For God, it is no problem.

So as far as you and I can go is to recognize you've got a sovereign God. He's in authority. You're not going to outmaneuver or frustrate Him. Now, one of the best ways to try to keep from beating your brains out against a brick wall is to know enough about the Word of God, to know enough principles of Bible doctrine that you know what you shouldn't do.

And that's what our society is doing today. It is pursuing things that the God says, "No, you can't do that. That violates my principles." Or people are saying, "No, I don't believe that that's what that is saying." Well, you better be very confidently sure that when somebody says, "Here is the implication of the principle of scripture. You should not do this in your life. You should not do this in society. You should not do this in government," and you say, "Oh no, I can do that," you better be sure you know how to interpret the Bible. Because God says you will be held responsible for your decision to violate that principle, and you will pay the results. Those results, while they will not cause the loss of your soul, they will cost you in terms of your eternal reward so that everything happened to us is part of the decree, but we are responsible for the choices that we make that brings those things about.

Sometimes you and I know the will of God in a situation, therefore, we learned it from the Bible, and so we have what we call simply a reflex action. We know what the Bible says about stealing, so you don't have to sit and think, "Is this the will of God that I rip this thing off from somebody?" We know what the Bible says about lying. We know what is says about illicit sex. So, immediately, if we're confronted with that, you have a knee-jerk reaction. It's a reflex reaction. You simply react and say this is what's to be done in this case and in this case.

But, there are some times when we are faced with situations that are not explicitly covered in the Bible, and that's where we have to have guidance. This is where God the Holy Spirit has to come and in and guide us to apply a principle. The implications of a certain principle are then what guides us to the decision. We are led to the decision concerning the will of God. And of course, this is where prayer comes in, and this is why prayer is to be governed, it is to be prescribed by the limitation of, "If it is thy will." But it is prayer that comes in that looks to God to ask the Holy Spirit to govern us to know how to apply a certain principle that brings the results that we need at that point.

Doing the will of God is really the Christian's whole life. And therefore, divine guidance is a very essential principle. It is relating ourselves each day of our lives to the decree of God. And there is nothing more important in life than relating yourself to the decree of God. Few of us bother even to think about it.

Hebrews 13:20-21, tell us, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

So here is a point for the cry of hallelujah that God has made a provision. You are not out there drifting on your own. The more knowledgeable you are in the Word of God, the more understanding that you have of doctrinal principles (not just the stories of the Bible; the doctrinal implications of those stories, the principles of doctrine that are laid out), the more attuned you are to the leading of the Holy Spirit who then can make you "perfect." And that word means "mature," not sinless. It will make you spiritually mature in every divine, good work to do His will. Nothing could be finer than to find yourself doing the will of God working in us, causing in us to rise up the desire to do that which is will-pleasing. We naturally don't do that. Our sin nature loathes everything that is well-pleasing to God. You're not going to do that on your own. It takes an enormous change of control on the hand of God the Holy Spirit so that you will do that which is well-pleasing in his sight. Because our inclination is to do all the things that are not pleasing to God, and therefore we do not bring glory to Him.

Add to this Ephesians 6:6, which says, "Not with eye service, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." Now, how are you going to do the will of God from your heart? Only as you've related yourself to the decree of God so that God the Holy Spirit has led you to do the things that He has prepared for you. Otherwise, you will not do them from the heart. You will not do them willingly. You will not do them with zeal. You will do them with reluctance. Now, there are many things that Christians should do that they do not do. They refuse to do. They know they should do them. They excuse themselves. They explain it away, and they will have to bear the consequences of that. But nevertheless, God has burdened your heart to do something, and you're resisting it. That which is pleasing to Him, He will guide you to having the heart to do. So doing the will of God is the Christian's whole life.

**God's Decrees Verses His Desires**

We should also point out that there is a difference between two other words. There's a difference between the decrees of God and the desire, the desires of God. There's a difference between the decrees and the desires of God. For example, sin, human suffering, death, spiritual reversionism, human good - none of these things are the desires of God. That's clearly seen in the warning that was given to Adam relative to eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - that all these things would be consequent to him if he ate of the tree. They were not God's desire for him, but they certainly were the decrees of God, you see. So there are some things that God does not desire for us that are in His decree. All of these things are incorporated; they are a part of the best plan for the universe.

God desires one thing: that angelic and human volition line up with His will so that He may bless. As long as Adam and Eve did that, they were blessed. When they did not line up with God's will, and it was not God's desire that they should not line up with him, the result was they lost their blessing. But that was in the decree of God. God does not desire to cast angels and people into the lake of fire, but, He has so decreed for those who reject the Gospel.

So, in 2 Peter 3:9, we read, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." That is the desire of God, but the holiness, the justice of God comes into the picture, and therefore in the decree of God is incorporated the consequence of those whose will exercises a negative attitude toward that Gospel.

And so in Revelation 20:15, we read, "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was throw into the lake of fire." Whoever does not accept the Gospel, whoever does not trust in Christ, he will suffer the pangs of hell for all eternity. It's not what God wants for you, but it is what will be the result.

God does not desire, furthermore, to make life hard on any of you. He does not desire to be coming down with a whip across our back. He does not desire to be disciplining us in all the different ways that He does. And 1 Corinthians 11:31-32 tell us that if we do not rebel against Him, if we do not drift off into carnality, into reversionism, then He will be able to do His desire toward us, which is to bless us, to prosper us, to bring happiness. I Corinthians 11:31-32 says, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." He is not going to enable you and me to act like the spoiled brats of the world's system. He's going to come down on us if necessary to bring us back in line with His decree.

So, God's desire is never divorced from the reality of His decrees. That's the real world. That's the world of divine justice. And when the liberal gets up and says, "I can't imagine a God who is a God of love who would put people into the terrible condition of hell forever," that is not God's desire for people to do that, to be in that condition, but His decree, structured upon His own justice that that's the consequences of those who reject.

**God's Decree for the Apostle Paul**

Now, one great example that we may use that we find in the Bible that reflect to us this relationship between God who has called the plays and man who is free to execute and run the play or to break it, and that's the great Apostle Paul. Acts 9:15-16 give us the divine declaration of the decree of God for the life of Paul upon the occasion of His salvation on that road to Damascus. Acts 9:15-16. Ananias was told to go find Paul, to be prepared to meet him, and to explain to him of what God had in store for him, to baptize Him. Ananias recalled, he said, "Hey, Lord, I know this guy. I've got the rumors from Jerusalem he's been killing Christians left and right. He's not our friend. I can assure you you don't want me to talking to him. He's one of the top Pharisees. And he's coming here with the writ of condemnation to Damascus, to slaughter us."

God says, "Here's what I have in my decree for Paul." "But the Lord said unto him, 'Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.'" So, God says, "I'm going to explain to Paul that he has been chosen by Me." That's God's decree. To do what? "He's going to bear my name." He is going to proclaim the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah, the Savior of the world. The very thing he was so loathed to do before. That's the last thing on earth that Paul, when he started that journey to Damascus, would ever have believed he would have done or could have envisioned that God would have chosen him to be the proclaimer of the name of Jesus Christ and all that that stood for.

And he said that this was going to be before the Gentile world (of course that proved to be his great ministry), but it will also be in the upper echelons of human society, in the upper levels of government itself, he will stand before kings. And furthermore, he will be a voice to the very people of Israel who had looked upon him as their champion against Christianity.

Did that happen? Galatians 1:16, let's put that in. To the Gentiles: "To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." And Paul says, "My message to the Gentile world was very explicit, but I didn't get it from human beings." And then he goes on and says, "Three years, I was out in the Arabian Desert, and God was saying to me, "Paul, I want to teach you all about the church. How different it is from Israel, its distinctiveness, and you are going to be the primary channel of communication about church doctrine. Not Peter, not James, not the other men, but you." So, indeed, he spoke to them.

He was to the kings. In Acts 26, you have the record of standing before royalty. Acts 26:1-2, "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, 'Thou art permitted to speak for thyself.' Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: 'I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee concerning all the things of which I am accused of the Jews.'" And Paul proceeded, indeed, to give a testimony.

Did he get to speak before the Jews, as God's decree said he would? Indeed, he did. Acts 21:40 indicates that, "And when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people [the crowd of Jews before him]. And when there was made a great silence, he spoke unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying, 'Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you.' (And when they heard that he spoke in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept more quiet: and he saith.)" So there you have Paul speaking to the Jews. So, indeed, he was a great testimony to the Gentiles, to the kings, to the Jews, just as God declared he would be.

Furthermore, did he suffer, or did he have a nice life? Was he able to travel comfortably? Was he able to exist? Did he have plenty of finances? Was he welcomed when he went from town to town? Did the Jews like him? Did the Gentiles like him?

2 Corinthians 11, Paul reminisces at this point in his ministry what it has been like in the fulfillment in the decree of God that says, "I've appointed you to suffering." "Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool. I am more." And he's talking about those who have been attacking him here in the Corinthian church who have paraded themselves as great ministers of Christ. And Paul says, "Let me talk like a fool for a while. I'm going to list my credentials and do a little boasting. It's not what I like to do, but let me just get a picture here to compare to with what these dudes are doing."

"I am more;" he says, "[a minister of Christ.] In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths often. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils by the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watching often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." So, indeed, the Apostle Paul did innumerate very clearly that what God promised him suffering, he got it. The decree of God was executed.

Now, Paul, having seen all this, could have at that point that God told him, "I'm going to give you a great voice, but you're going to suffer like a dog in the process," could have rejected God's plan. He could have said, "Hey, that's not for me. I'm going back to Jerusalem. I've got money, I've got prestige, I've got influence. I don't need this. No way . . . that is not for me." And he could have, of course, said exactly that, and he would have gone nowhere in the end.

**The Greatest Prize**

But Paul did not do that. Having explicitly been told what was in store for him, he went positive to the divine plan. And what's the result? He has secured fantastic, eternal rewards, and with the special, heavenly honor that only some Christians get: the crown of righteousness. A special medal of honor given to those who have a superior level of experiential sanctification. That is, those who have exceptionally executed the degree of God for them. And all through eternity, they shall walk around with this medal of honor on their person honoring them for having performed exceptional service in experiential sanctification. Having lived a godly life, which meant having lived according to the will of God. And Paul's rewards were something that he was deeply conscious of.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, we read, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it [and he's comparing this to a foot race, he says, now on a human level, they do it] to obtain a corruptible crown [a little crown woven out of leaves that soon wither and die]; but we an incorruptible [crown]. I therefore so run, not as [I therefore so run, not as] uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

In Philippians 3:13-14, Paul furthermore says this about living the life in God's plan. Philippians 3:13-14, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The greatest prize in life that you and I can reach for is the prize of executing the decree of God, his plan for us. That is the high calling in Christ Jesus.

And then, one more, at the end of his life, near the point of death, 1 Timothy 4:8, he says, "For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." And Paul says that there is a lifestyle, a lifestyle of physical exercise that has value, but godliness, which is living under the plan of God, that has value for all eternity.

Now, please do not take that verse and say, "Well, I'm not going to exercise anymore. The Bible says that it profits little, and as I look at myself, I can see that that is true." That is not true. It is valuable. It is important. So, don't misinterpret the Bible. I can assure that it is in the decree of God, I have consulted this personally, for you to exercise and to be as healthy as possible. It is healthy people who execute the plan of God. It is healthy people who are able to serve the Lord in maximum ways.

So, Paul said, "Yes, I'll take the plan." And indeed with it, he took the suffering, he took the consequences, but he earned that tremendous medal of honor, the crown of righteousness, because he was positive toward the will of God.

**I Have Fought the Good Fight**

And when he wrote his last letter to his beloved Timothy, he reviewed his positive volition toward the will of God. His attitude, how he viewed it, how he executed it, how he performed God's decree for him. You find that in 2 Timothy 4:7. Paul says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." "I have found the good fight." What's he talking about? He's talking about the fact that he was a good soldier of Jesus Christ who carried out the mission that was assigned to him for his life.

In 2 Timothy 2:3-5, he puts it this way, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully." So, the Apostle Paul said being a good soldier means you have singleness of purpose. That is, to execute your mission, to reach your objective, to not give up until victory has been achieved.

Paul came to the end of his life, the Lord has come to him and said, "This time, Paul, Nero is not going to release you. This time, they're going to kill you." And so, Paul is tying up loose ends, getting ready for his own death, and he knows it's imminent. And as he reviews his life to Timothy, in order to encourage Timothy to follow the same pattern, he says, "I have fought the fight. I was a soldier who was in the angelic conflict. I did not give up."

**I Have Finished the Course**

The second part, he says, "I finished my course." That is, pursuing the assigned course to the end of life and not being a drop-out. Not being erratic. The race that was set before him, he followed. He didn't go half-way around the course and then quit; and how many Christians do that.

Ephesians 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them [and indeed, sometimes run in them]." We have a pattern of good works. That is what God said you are to run. That is what we are to execute, and you don't drop out half-way around. You keep fighting. You keep breathing. You keep taking in the breath. You keep putting one foot ahead of the other. You keep making the aching muscles make one more effort until you hit that, until you hit that finish line, and across your chest comes the string of victory.

**I Have Kept the Faith**

And, the last thing is, he fought a good fight as a soldier, he's run a good race as an athlete, and then he says, "I have kept the faith. I have been positive to the body of Bible doctrine. I have been the defender of the truth." He knew it, and he could defend it, and he stood by it.

Titus 1:9 says, "Holding fast the faithful word as it hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to confute the opposers." He has kept the faith. Now, that is a summary of a Christian who is in the decree of God who is open to the leading of the Holy Spirit because he is in a status of spiritual fellowship. He is in a status where he can be led, and he knows enough about the Word of God that the Spirit of God can guide him.

Now, if you are the type of person who spends more time in Jane Fonda's exercise program and hearing the latest thing that she has to say, or in front of anything else that some entertainer has to say that's being interviewed, than you do in preparing yourself to execute your mission in the decree of God, then you're a very unwise person. It takes a lot of time to learn the Word of God. There is no excuse for this congregation not to realize that if you don't know doctrine, you don't have leading. So, just wipe yourself out. Don't pretend you're something. Don't have hopes that you're never going to realize. Because the moment you get doctrine, the moment you get into God's viewpoint, into God's pattern for your life, you're going to find yourself in service. You're going to find yourself functioning. You're not going to find yourself picking up excuses why you should not do something, why you should not go someplace for the Lord, why you should not give something for the Lord. You're going to be in there doing it.

That's a consequence of finding the will of God welling up within you through the movement of the Spirit of God as He uses the Word of God to direct you. That's the combination that wins, and that's why Paul could say, "I have kept the faith." That's the most important part of everything he did. Without that, he could not have battled as a soldier; he could not have run as the athlete.

Now, this view of Paul, the relationship of Paul to the decree of God is fascinatingly tied up in the book of Romans that we are studying. He makes a statement at the beginning of the book, he makes a very dramatic statement at the end of the book that just ties together this whole concept of God leading the believer. And we shall look further at that next time.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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