

1646 WCF, 3.1

God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

1689 LBCF, 3.1

God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree.

Wilhelmus À Brakel:

We understand the decree of God to be the eternal, volitional, all-wise, sovereign, and immutable purpose of God concerning all and every matter, comprehending both the time and the manner in which these matters will occur.

Louis Berkhof:

~~... [God] has sovereignly determined from all eternity whatsoever will come to pass, and works His sovereign will in His entire creation, both natural and spiritual, according to His pre-determined plan.~~

R.C. Sproul:

God's decretive will is sometimes described as the sovereign, efficacious will by which God brings to pass whatever He pleases by His divine decree.

Interview with John MacArthur:

PHIL: ...the decree of God is His eternal purpose according to the counsel of His own will whereby for His own glory He has unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. And I think that's...I think that's borrowed...the language is borrowed from the Westminster Catechism...Do you believe Scripture teaches that?

JOHN: Absolutely. Yeah, I think that is exactly what the Bible teaches...

Is this true?

- Did God ordain / decree WHATEVER come to pass?
- If so, how is He not the ultimate cause of sin?
- How is He righteous if He will for sin to pass?

God's Decree Is:

1. Eternal

- His decree is eternal in that it was determined before the creation of time
- Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Isa. 46:10
- Everything that happens in time conforms to His fixed purpose(s) before time

2. Unconditional

- Nothing external to God moved Him to decide to do one thing as opposed to another
- It would actually be impossible for something to influence His decree
 - Nothing existed before creation
 - Col. 1:17
- His decree was not influenced by anyone or anything because there was no one and no thing
- Every one of His decisions was made most freely by His own will
 - Ps. 115:3; 135:6; Dan. 4:35

3. Unchangeable

- Ps. 33:10-11; Isa. 14:27; Job 42:2

4. Exhaustive

- Eph. 1:11; Ps. 115:3; 135:6
- This is not a general control over all things though
 - It is a specific and meticulous control
 - Sproul: If there is one single molecule in this universe running around loose, totally free of God's sovereignty, then we have no guarantee that a single promise of God will ever be fulfilled.
- He the cause of:
 - Snow to fall - Job 37:6-13
 - Grass and plants to grow - Ps. 104:14
 - The Sun rise and rain fall - Matt. 5:45
 - Food to be produced - Ps. 104:27
 - Worthless birds to live or die - Matt. 10:29
 - National borders - Acts 17:26
 - Times and seasons to change and kings to be removed and raised up and wisdom and knowledge to be given out - Dan. 2:21
 - The King's heart to go wherever He turns it - Prov. 21:1
 - The falling of lots - Prov. 16:33
 - Needs to be met - Phil. 4:19
 - The number of our days - Ps. 139:16
 - The completion of our plans - Prov. 16:9
 - Who is saved - Eph. 2:8-9
 - The selling of Joseph into slavery - Gen. 45:5-8
 - Addition and subtraction of blessings - Job 1:21

The conclusion to this must be that God is the ultimate cause of all things, both good and evil

How Should We Speak About God's "Decreeing" Of Sin?

1. Avoid "Permission" Language

- Permission can be defined as the idea of allowing to pass through; non-interference
- This does not make sense biblically because there was nothing external to Him when His decree was established
- If there was nothing, then there could be no tendency for something
- There was no agent to ask for permission
- There was nothing for God to refrain from interfering with, nothing outside of Himself to which to "acquiesce"
- The temptation to use this language comes in our desire to make sure sin isn't blamed on God
- Is there a better way???
- Use the language Scripture does
- Don't try to get Him off the hook for something He has said in Scripture

2. Be Comfortable To Say What The Bible Says

- The Bible makes it clear that:
 - God is righteous
 - God ordains sinful events and actions
 - You are always better off affirming the incomprehensible rather than changing it and affirming the heretical
- Scripture speaks of God's role in evil in a much more active way than we like to
 - Amos 3:6; Lam. 3:37-38; 1:5, 12, 14, 15; 2:17; 3:43-44; 4:11; Isa. 45:5-7
 - Joseph and his being sold into slavery
 - Gen. 50:20; 45:5, 7, 8
 - Eli's sons' rebellion and disobedience
 - 1 Sam 2:25
 - Saul and the evil spirit that tormented him
 - 1 Sam. 16:14
 - Absalom's incest
 - 2 Sam. 16:21-23; 12:11-12
 - Eschatological apostasy
 - 2 Thess. 2:11
 - The crucifixion of Jesus
 - Acts 2:23; 4:27-28

So How Do We Explain God Decrees Evil Without Doing It?

- In order to answer this, we must make a biblically accurate and careful distinction
 - God is the ultimate cause of all things, but He is never the proximate, or efficient, cause of evil
 - Scripture regards only the efficient cause of evil as the chargeable or blameworthy party
- Some clear examples of this include:

1. Assyria and Israel

- Isaiah 10
 - v. 1-2 - God determines Israel will be disciplined for idolatry and injustice
 - v. 3 - God will bring this destruction
 - v. 4 - Israel will join the prisoners and the dead
 - v. 6 - God sends Assyria to do this
 - v. 5 - God judges Assyria for why they did this
- How can God be just in sending Assyria to judge Israel and then judging Assyria for doing it
 - v. 6 shows the insufficiency of permission language
- The answer is found in a necessary and biblical distinction
 - God is the ultimate cause
 - Assyria is the efficient
 - Also, we must admit that God did not have Assyria do anything against their will
 - In fact, their judgment lies in their evil motives
 - God willed the thing they did
 - He willed it for good reasons
 - v. 7a
 - God wanted to rid evil of wickedness and idolatry
 - They willed it for evil reasons
 - v. 7b-8
 - Assyria wanted to flex their muscles and make a name for themselves
- Assyria meant it for evil, but God meant it for good
- God is not chargeable because He willed this for good reasons and there is no evil on His part

2. David And Numbering His Men

- David sinned when he counted his army
 - 2 Sam. 24:10
 - It seems he did it for prideful reasons
- God judged this sin by killing 70,000
 - 2 Sam. 24:15
- God's anger caused him to do it
 - 2 Sam. 24:1
 - This is made clear from the beginning
- Parallel account shows that Satan was how this was accomplished
 - 1 Cor. 21:2
 - Samuel says God incited David
 - Chronicles says Satan incited David
- God was the ultimate cause by decreeing that it will happen
- Satan was the proximate cause by being the instrument used by YHWH to do it
- David was the efficient cause by carrying it out according to his own sinful inclination
 - David is responsible for this sin because he did it with sinful desires
- God is not to be blamed because he had good reason / motives to do it

3. The ultimate example of this is found in the crucifixion of Jesus

- The crucifixion of Christ is the greatest evil in human history
 - Acts 2:22-23; 4:27-28
- There can be no question that the men involved are worthy of blame
- There is also no question that they did exactly what God decreed
- God was the ultimate cause of this because He decreed it
- Jews were the proximate cause because they used Rome to accomplish it
- Romans were the efficient cause because they crucified Him
- God is not to be blamed for this evil because He decreed it for good reasons
 - God decreed this evil for all the good that it brought
- The men involved are blamed for it because they did it for sinful reasons
- God does ordain all things that come to pass, and the evil that He ordains is ALWAYS ordained for a good reason

Jonathan Edwards (Concerning the Divine Decrees, Works, 2:527):

God does not decree the actions that are sinful, as sin, but decrees them as good. . . . By decreeing an action **as sinful**, I mean decreeing it for the sake of the sinfulness of the action. God decrees that they shall be sinful, for the sake of the good that he causes to arise from the sinfulness thereof; whereas man decrees them for the sake of the evil that is in them.

Why Would God Do This?

1. For His Glory

- Rom. 9:20-23

2. For Our Good

- Our happiness is proportionate to our grasping of God's glory
- The more of God we know and understand, the more our joy increases
 - You will never learn more about God that will not bring you to more satisfying joy
- Our knowledge of God would be imperfect without His decreeing of sin
- 2 Corinthians 3

Riccardi:

God ordains sin and evil—He even ordains the eternal punishment of the wicked—to *make known to His elect the riches of His glory*... God is not *less* glorious, but *more* glorious, because He ordains evil. And the more He magnifies His glory, the greater is His love to us. Surely God cannot be charged with unrighteousness for doing that which amounts to the greatest benefit for us who are His.

Jonathan Edwards (Concerning the Divine Decrees, Works, 2:528):

“It is a proper and excellent thing for infinite glory to shine forth; and for the same reason, it is proper that the shining forth of God’s glory should be complete; that is, that all parts of his glory should shine forth, that every beauty should be proportionably effulgent, that the beholder may have a proper notion of God. It is not proper that one glory should be exceedingly manifested, and another not at all. . . . “Thus it is necessary, that God’s awful majesty, his authority and dreadful greatness, justice, and holiness, should be manifested. But this could not be, unless sin and punishment had been decreed; so that the shining forth of God’s glory would be very imperfect, both because these parts of divine glory would not shine forth as the others do, and also the glory of his goodness, love, and holiness would be faint without them; nay, they could scarcely shine forth at all. If it were not right that God should decree and permit and punish sin, there could be no manifestation of God’s holiness in hatred of sin, or in showing any preference, in his providence, of godliness before it. There would be no manifestation of God’s grace or true goodness, if there was no sin to be pardoned, no misery to be saved from. “How much happiness soever he bestowed, his goodness would not be so much prized and admired. . . . So evil is necessary, **in order to the highest happiness of the creature**, and the completeness of that communication of God, for which he made the world; **because the creature’s happiness consists in the knowledge of God**, and the sense of his love. And **if the knowledge of him be imperfect, the happiness of the creature must be proportionably imperfect.**”