

Grace Bible Church
Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

The Tree of Life is a weekly teaching summary.
The Tree of Life from the week ending 09/09/07
The Doctrine of the Divine Decrees. Part 3.

In our study of the Divine Decrees we have seen the other orders of the five elective decrees in contrast to Biblical Lapsarianism.

	Supra-lapsarianism	Sub-lapsarianism	Infra-lapsarianism	Armanian Lapsarianism
1	Elect some	Create	Create	Create
2	Provide Salvation	Permit Fall	Permit Fall	Permit Fall
3	Create	Elect	Provide Salvation	Provide Salvation
4	Permit Fall	Provide Salvation	Elect	Salvation by Works
5	Save the Elect	Save the Elect	Save the Elect	Election in time

We are now going to view Biblical Lapsarianism or the correct order of the elective decrees. It is as follows: **First, God decreed the creation of all mankind with free will in the status of perfection.** This was done for two reasons: 1) To resolve the prehistoric angelic conflict. 2) To bring many sons into glory. God had to decide to create us, before He could decide to save us. Heb 2:10 *For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.* This means there is a Christian way of life, a way to glorify God after salvation, experientially. **Second, God decreed to permit the fall of man through the function of his own determination, and his own volition, as the extension of the angelic conflict into human history.** Angels had a fall; therefore man must have a fall to resolve the conflict. This duplicates Satan's fall and the subsequent existence of fallen angels. In the end, God will use fallen mankind to show His grace, His mercy, and His fairness to Satan. **Third, God decreed to provide eternal salvation for all of mankind under the doctrine of Unlimited atonement.** God is fair and provides for all. God doesn't arbitrarily assign any of His creatures to Hell. We have seen that the Unlimited atonement means that all sins in human history were imputed to Jesus Christ on the cross and judged, so that Christ is the issue, and not sins. **Fourth, God decreed to leave the reprobate to their just condemnation** (those who reject Christ as Savior). God will not violate any man's free will, and if a man chooses to not be with Christ, and not accept God's gift, then he chooses the opposite of God and heaven, which is the lake of fire. **Fifth, God decreed simultaneously in eternity past both election and predestination for believers only.** We have also seen what Election means, and the fantastic privileges God has called us to in Christ.

So, the sub-Lapsarianism order is a really a rebuttal of the supra-Lapsarianism order. The distinction between the infra-Lapsarianism and sub-Lapsarianism is that infra-Lapsarianism places the decree to provide salvation before the decree to elect, while the sub-Lapsarianism places the decree to elect before the decree to provide salvation. The infra-Lapsarianism order, which places the decree to provide salvation before the decree to elect, allows for the doctrine of the **unlimited atonement**, whereas the sub-Lapsarianism order, which places the decree to elect before the decree to provide salvation, favors the theory of a limited atonement. Now, it is true that the doctrine of a limited atonement is one of the five points of Calvinism, but not all who are rightfully classified as Calvinists accept that doctrine. This subject has been very technical and complex and you might wonder why it is so important. The answer is that it must be understood in order to understand the Purpose and Plan of God. The Plan of God has to do with God gathering into one all-inclusive plan, all the objects of salvation, whether in heaven or earth, in Christ. Eph 1:9-10, *“He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.”* It is also called the mysterious purpose or plan. Eph 3:4-11, *“And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,”*

The order of the Divine decrees are based upon God being glorified, and therefore all His attributes bringing glory to Himself. This is one of the reasons why it is easy to see that the Biblical view of the Elective decrees is correct. It is the order that glorifies God the most. This order shows the tremendous grace and mercy of God the most, which is the very grace and mercy that Satan denies. Remember one of the definitions we noted in point 1: **The decrees of God are His eternal purpose according to the counsels of His own will whereby for His own glory He has foreordained whatever comes to pass.** Everything in the Divine decrees ultimately will bring glory to God. Whether elect angels or fallen angels. Whether believers or unbelievers. Whether loser believers or winner believers. God's purpose will stand! If you want to see God's glory, look at God's grace. Remember what God said to Moses when he asked God to show His glory to him? Exo 33:19 *And He said, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.”*

So again, which order glorifies God the most? Supra-lapsarianism says that God is unfair because He selected some people to be saved and the rest are lost, no matter what they do or think. They don't have a choice. How could God let people be born in sin, strictly by the relationship to the first sinner Adam, and then not offer them a solution? Supra-lapsarianism not only limits the grace of God, but it makes God seem to be ungracious. Sub-lapsarianism teaches the limited atonement. Again if all men inherited sin, how could a Just and Righteous God only offer salvation to some? Arminian lapsarianism makes election synonymous with experiential sanctification and depending on foreseen human virtue, faith, and obedience (works). Rom 11:6 *“But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.”* That's why Arminianism is so evil, it twists the Word of God into earning salvation by our works, and that is the evil of religion. It is Biblical lapsarianism that puts Election last as the crown jewel of God's grace and love by cap stoning the decrees with unfathomable escrow blessings. After Job went through suffering in the angelic conflict he said to God in Job 42:2 *“I know that Thou canst do all things, And that no purpose of Thine can be prevented.”* Isa 46:10-11 says, *“My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure”; Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned {it, surely} I will do it.”* Rom 8:28

tells us we “*are called according to His purpose.*” Rom 9:11 “*for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His election might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls.*” Arminians are like Esau who was self-sufficient, thinking he could do it himself. Esau would not give “*Him who calls*” the credit. We must ask ourselves “Who do we give the credit to, ourselves, or the Lord who created us?”

One of the most important principles being communicated in this doctrine of the Divine decrees is the fact that we need to understand the purpose and the plan of God. This has do with God glorifying Himself not glorifying us! It has to do with what we read in EPH 1:10, that God did all this “*with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.*” We are told that there was an eternal purpose that God the Father had in mind when He created all things. Eph 3:11 says, *This [mystery] was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” As always, the Lord Jesus Christ is the central figure in the Cross and the purpose and plan for the ages (Joh 12:27-28). Decreed in eternity past for us is the privilege of serving our Creator in this life. Even the sufferings and testing, the thorns in our flesh that bother us the most, these were all decreed and graciously given to us! Because God knew they would help us glorify Him! In the end they will help us reveal His grace! Phil 1:29 “*For to you it has been (graciously) granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.*” God decreed all suffering by allowing it to pass, and He designed a reason and a benefit to them all. God knows our hearts, God knows our weaknesses, and God also knows what we are able to bear for Him. Therefore He decreed these things for our lives, as a gracious gift, because He knows the end from the beginning. He knows the fruit that will follow in our lives, that only comes from the pruning that takes place. Don't ever forget, God has a divine purpose, decreed from eternity past. Rev 2:10 “*Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*” If you stay faithful to the Lord and His plan in your suffering, you can be a witness for God, against Satan.

Point 4 in the Doctrine of Divine decrees deals with the distinctions between what God permits and what He desires. First of all, distinction should be made between God's laws and God's decrees. For example, laws regulate human conduct, while decrees are God's plan and action in eternity past. Laws can be broken; the decrees of God can never be broken. Then there is the distinction between God's desires in the decrees, like election, and the rejection of God's desires. 1Ti 2:3-4, “*This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*” God's desire is for all men to be saved; that's why we believe in the unlimited atonement. The Lord Jesus Christ atoned, or paid for, all mankind (unlimited). God knew of all the rejections, as well as the acceptance. Therefore, when a person rejects Christ as Savior, God knew all about that in eternity past. The believer who rejects the PPOG, God knew all about in eternity past, but He still willed His highest and best for that person. This is why believers suffer loss of rewards. They didn't earn rewards and then lose them; they were elected to have them, but rejected that aspect of God's election. 1Co 3:15 “*If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss [escrow blessings for eternity]; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.*” Peter tells us in 2Pe 1:10 “*Be motivated even more to make certain about His calling and election;* So, God's desire is to bless you, and He has, however your desires can cause you to reject His blessings. God knows all your negative acts, but doesn't interfere with your free will; for this would prevent the angelic conflict from ever being settled. While sin and death are displeasing to God and incompatible with His divine nature, nevertheless, they belong to the decrees under the category of the fall of man. God decreed to allow them to happen. While loser believers are displeasing to God and incompatible with His sovereign will, nevertheless, they belong to the decrees, having a printout from their own free will. Many things that occur are results of angelic or human free will acting contrary to God's desires. He nevertheless decided or willed that these things would take place, thus making our volition truly free.

So, God's decree rendered all things as certain to occur, and He decided that they would exist. In doing so, He did not interfere with angelic or human free will. In fact, He decreed that we would have free

will. In giving us volition, He also decreed that our decisions, whatever they might be, would certainly take place, even those that are contrary to His desires. So, the decrees include a lot of things which are not God's desires, because the decrees include all things you think, say, or do. Many things in the decrees are not the desires of God. Sin, human good, and evil are not the desires of God but are in the decrees because they are performed by our free will. God desires His perfect will and sovereignty, but both angelic and human creatures use their God-given free will and self-determination to violate the desires of God. God does not desire to cast His creatures into the Lake of Fire forever, but it is so decreed under the printout of retribution for all who express negative volition at God-consciousness and at Gospel hearing (over and over again). God does not desire the discipline of believers, but it is decreed for all carnality, apostasy, and reversionism. Unlimited atonement is the demonstration that the sovereignty of God desires that no one should perish. Yet human volition can and does reject the saving work of Christ. Therefore, the alternative is the lake of fire.

We all have a print-out with our name on it, expressing our positive or negative volition toward God's sovereign will for our lives. God's eternal and sovereign will for every believer is expressed in the Divine decrees, having printouts such as election, glorification, justification, and predestination. Therefore, your life and the decisions that you would make were read by God but not altered. You have privacy and you can make good or bad decisions. The divine decrees contain all data or facts regarding the function of the free will of man in history. The facts include everything you ever think, decide, or do in the past, present, and future. All logistical grace, and those who would be blessed and their blessings, were fed into the Divine decrees. God knew every problem, heartache, and situation you would face before you ever existed. Mat 6:8 *"Your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him."* The Divine decree then prints out facts about believers under the categories of election, foreknowledge, predestination, justification, and glorification. It also prints out facts on the unbeliever under the categories of reprobation, condemnation, and retribution.

So, under this point, let's note the distinctions between what God permits and what He desires. First of all there is the permission of sin. Theologians have made a distinction in the Divine decrees by dividing them into two combinations, the decrees which are efficacious and those which are permissive. Efficacious meaning effective by God. The efficacious decrees are those which determine the affairs of this life directly by physical causes, such as in Job 28. The efficacious decrees are also those which determine the affairs of this life directly by spiritual forces. Phi 2:13 *"for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."* Eph 2:8-10, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* On the other hand, the permissive decrees allow those things which are evil and sinful. The term permissive means that God does not actively promote the execution of the decrees even though they have been determined by Him to take place. This is in contrast to His efficacious and Divine purpose which works to the end that men will and do His good pleasure. By way of permission, *"God, in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways"* (Act 14:16). This is also why He gave the rebellious children of Israel their own evil desires (Psa 78:29; 106:15). In respect to His permissive will, God determines not to hinder the course of action which His creatures pursue; but He does determine to regulate and control the boundaries and the results of such actions. God's permissive will is His will to permit whatsoever He thinks fit to permit or not to hinder; while what He wills or determines to permit, He also intends to regulate and not to behold as an idle unconcerned spectator. The divine permission of evil in the human race also extends beyond the one sin of Adam. For example, it is written that God hardened Pharaoh's heart to the end that a demonstration of His divine power might be fully displayed. This does not mean that God reached down in the heart of Pharaoh and made his heart hard. It means that God brought in circumstances and situations that He knew would cause Pharaoh to harden his heart! And that's why we read three times in the book of Exodus that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exo 8:15, 32; Exo 9:34). So, the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart by bringing in situations that he knew would cause Pharaoh to reject the warnings of God. By that demonstration the whole multitude of the Egyptians came to know something of Jehovah (Ex 14:4).

The greatness and majesty of God, giving His creatures free will, and yet using their negative decisions to

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glorify Himself, turning curses into blessings on a regular basis in the lives of those who love Him.

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