

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 09/16/07
The Doctrine of the Divine Decrees. Part 4.

Point 4 in our study of the Divine Decrees: **The distinctions between what God permits and what He desires.** There is the distinction between God's desires in the decrees, like election, and the rejection of God's desires. For example, 1Ti 2:3 *"This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, God desires all men to be saved and to come to the [epignosis] knowledge of the truth."* God's desire is for the unbeliever to be saved; for the believer, God's desire is to learn and apply doctrine and live the Christian way of life. Obviously then, what He desires and what He permits are two different things, and this is why believers suffer loss of rewards. God desires to bless them, but they desire other things. God elected us to have His highest and best, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we will. Therefore, most believers will suffer loss of rewards at the bema seat judgment. 1Co 3:12-15, *"Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire."* God's desire was to bless them, and He did in eternity past (Eph 1:3-4). God's desire was to bless us, and He did. Unfortunately many do not believe this aspect of God's election. This is shown by their refusal to execute His plan and thereby glorify Him. We are back to human volition, the free will of man. We are all born in the slave market of sin, but we are all likewise offered freedom in Christ. Joh 8:31-32, *"Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, {then} you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* Joh 8:36 *"If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."* We enter the world with a sin nature, separated from God, and powerless through our human power, to do anything about it. On our own, we have no way to free ourselves from the captivity of our inherited depravity. However, the gracious decree of God for mankind calls for a Savior, a redeemer, that is the Lord Jesus Christ, to purchase our freedom from that slave market. Christ is the only Person qualified to make such a purchase. The only requirement for eternal release from the slave market of sin is faith alone in Christ alone.

So, 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. 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 the results of angelic or human free will acting contrary to God's desires. However, God will be glorified either way! The decrees include a lot of things which are not God's desires, because the decrees include all things we think, say, or do. 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 for those who reject the Lord Jesus Christ. 2Pe 3:9 *"The Lord is **not willing** for any to perish but for all to come to a change of mind [repentance]."* God does not desire the discipline of believers, but it is decreed for all carnality, apostasy, and reversionism. Human volition **can** and **does** reject the saving work of Christ, and the Christian way of life. Though mankind is decreed by God to be born in sin, free will can respond to the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ and enter into true freedom. Free will is also the most common cause for human suffering, including believers. Every human being must take the responsibility for his own decisions and his own actions in life. You must understand that you can never blame others for your misery, your unhappiness, and your suffering. You are to take full responsibility yourself, based on your own wrong decisions related to your associations, activities, motives, and functions in life. Human volition is the source of personal sins, human good, and evil. Therefore, this category of suffering deals with the natural consequences of sin, human good, evil, and bad judgment in our lives. At salvation all sins were judged at the cross, yet all our sins have natural consequences in life for which we

must take full responsibility. We must always link consequences with bad decisions, rather than blaming someone else. A short trip to unhappiness is the result of always blaming others for your problems, when actually they are the result of your bad decisions. The innocent often suffer with the guilty, being associated with someone else who made a bad decision. Gal 6:7 states the law of volitional responsibility: *“Be not deceived; God cannot be mocked. Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.”*

The consequences are generally classified as self-induced misery, self-imposed misery, and self-indulged misery. Under the law of volitional responsibility, the believer inflicts on himself unbearable suffering from the following categories: 1) Personal sins. 2) Function of human good. 3) Function of evil. 4) Function of moral or immoral degeneracy. 5) Living in cosmic one, grieving the Spirit. 6) Living in cosmic two, quenching the Spirit. 7) Lack of common sense and bad judgment. 8) Subjective arrogance, the overestimation of your own abilities, or failing to see yourself in the light of reality. Both believer and unbeliever function under the law of volitional responsibility, not only from sin, but also from the violation of the laws of Divine establishment, which are the operational laws for the entire human race within the Divine decrees, Col 3:25 *“For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of that wrong which he has done, and there is no partiality [from God].”*

So, God does not desire for sin to exist, but He permits it under the category of the fall of man! 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 simply be an 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. That's why we read three times in the book of Exodus that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exo 8:15, 32; 9:34). The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart by bringing in situations that He knew would cause Pharaoh to reject the warnings of God, and by that demonstration the whole multitude of the Egyptians came to know something of Jehovah (Exo 14:4).

Rom 9:14-18, *“What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.’ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.”* This does not mean that He violates human volition; it simply means that He brings in the events which He knows will cause certain responses. That's His wisdom; those are His ways. As a revelation concerning God's attitude toward sin, the fact is obvious that God commanded Adam not to sin, and yet, unless Adam did sin, there would be no need for the Savior who was decreed to die in eternity past. Act 2:22-24, *Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this {Man}, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put {Him} to death. And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.* Again we see that the will of God will be accomplished even through man's negative volition! Would we ever realize the tremendous impact of God's grace, mercy, love, forgiveness, patience, and kindness, if mankind had never fallen? This is not to say that God needed sin to reveal His glory. He decreed for sin to exist from the free will of His creatures, and then He turned the curse into a blessing. Rom 5:18-20, *“So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,”*

God said to King Saul that if he had kept the commands given to him, his house would have been established forever (1Sa 13:13). Yet, by decree it was determined, and prophecy foretold, that the everlasting throne and kingdom for Israel was to come through the tribe of Judah and not through the tribe of Benjamin, to which tribe Saul belonged (Gen 49:10). To the same end it may be perceived that, in the controversy between Jehovah and Satan as recorded in the first two chapters of Job, Satan admits that he can bring no testing upon Job apart from the permission of Jehovah; and it is stated that Jehovah gave Satan this permission. Even the experience of an individual who sins is suggestive. After the sin has been committed, the one who sins could say: God is to be blamed; He could have prevented me from sinning, but He did not. However, the sinner cannot say

that, because there is within him a consciousness that he alone is responsible. Even Christ Himself could have prevented an uncounted number of men from the measureless sin of the crucifixion of the Son of God, had He come down from the cross. All this suggests the obvious fact that the mere avoidance of sin is not always the primary issue. This is what the kingdom of darkness tries to get believers side-tracked with; however the avoidance of sin is not the primary issue; if it was God would not have created the human race. The primary issue is that God is glorified. It may be concluded, then, that sin is in the universe by the permission of God who hates it perfectly and Who, being sovereign, had the power to keep it from manifestation, had He chosen to do so. That He did not hinder the manifestation of sin, demonstrates that He, being what He is, must have a purpose in view other than the averting of sin. Here as nowhere else in the affairs of the universe, the end, which is the glory of God, justifies the means. 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.”*

You are an example of something that God willed to exist. You are a rational, freewill individual, and you and your freedom were decreed billions of years ago. God does 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, nothing is more important than understanding God's decrees for your life. No one can execute God's plan for their life until first of all they understand what that plan is and what the purpose behind the plan is. If you really understood what the purpose and plan of God was all about, you would never put anything ahead of Bible doctrine. Without motivation you will never be consistent, and the main problem of having no motivation is wrong priorities. When you put anything before Bible doctrine you are putting those things before the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, 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. Look at the servant Job. This upright, and godly man's life was nearly taken from him, and he was definitely shaken up, and we can see why: 1) All of his sons and daughters perished in a mighty windstorm (Job 1:18-19). 2) Job lost all of his family's livestock to nearby raiders (Job 1:13-15). 3) Job lost all of his servants to a firestorm (Job 1:16). 4) Job was inflicted with painful sores from head to toe. However, through all of his tribulation and all that came upon him, he was still able to maintain his integrity and his steadfast faith in God. And through his perseverance, God made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before (Job 42:10). God was glorified and His goodness prevailed, even through His permissive will. In Job 1:6-12, Satan had to seek permission from God in order to destroy Job's household and to inflict pain upon him. This conversation between God and Satan teaches us an important fact about God: He is fully aware of every attempt by Satan to bring suffering and difficulty upon us. Even when it seems like He's not there, He is. God may allow us to suffer for reasons that are beyond our understanding and comprehension, but in the end, it's all for a good reason. He will never allow us to suffer more than what we can handle (1Co 10:13). As the Lord Jesus Christ said in Joh 13:7 *“What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter.”* This requires our faith-rest in His love, character, integrity, and faithfulness. Lam 3:22-23 tells us, *The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. {They} are new every morning; Great is Thy faithfulness.*

The question that needs to be answered concerning the divine decrees is **Point 5: To what extent is the human will free?**

Scripture teaches that there are restraints upon human volition. For example, concerning unbelievers it is declared that they, being children of disobedience, are energized by Satan in Eph 2:1-2, *“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.”* In Joh 8:44 the Lord said to a group of unbelievers, *“You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.”* We are also told that in Col 1:13 that we have been *“delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son.”* Phi 1:6 *“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”* Or Phi 2:13 *“for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”* So, in reality there is an outside influence or a system of domination at work within us. The entire human race, saved and unsaved, believers and unbelievers, are not really free from a superior influence. The mystery is the fact that this influence, as potent as it is, is totally unrecognized within the range of human experience. The Bible even plainly asserts that God influences the unbeliever to some extent, and that Satan and his power influences believers. The influence of God upon the unbeliever must be exercised if they are even going to turn to Him in saving faith. The Lord declared in Joh 6:44 *“No man can come to Me, except the Father which has sent Me draw him.”* Much confusion is caused by the statements that God, at times, hinders spiritual vision and hardens hearts, but there is a purpose. Concerning Israel, God said in Isa 6:8-10, *Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!”*

And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.' "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Lest they see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed." Or in Rom 9:17 "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, [quoting Exo 9:16] 'For this very purpose I raised you up [I have caused you to continue in history]' Here is a person who was anti-Israel to the core and very evil. Yet the Lord said, "I have caused you to continue in history." Then the purpose clause is stated, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you [or by means of you]." When we find ourselves in jeopardy, whether personal, national, or international, these things are permitted to continue in history that the power of God may be demonstrated. From that comes some major principles: Many times in human history God has demonstrated His power by means of some evil ruler, or by means of some evil people. Many times God has demonstrated His power by means of believers who are negative toward Bible doctrine. Of course this is simply another way of saying that "God uses the wrath of man to praise Him," (Psa 76:10).

So what does this verse mean when it says, "I have caused you to continue in history that I might demonstrate My power by means of you?" By means of the hardness of Pharaoh's heart, God is going to demonstrate His power in such a way that it will have an effect on not only two entire generations, but the entire world. But here, it is the Exodus generation and the generation that followed. Rom 9:17-18, *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth."* So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. Remember that the doctrine of heathenism teaches that if anyone in any part of the world, no matter how geographically isolated, at the point of God-consciousness expresses in his soul a desire to know God, and to have a relationship with God, then God will provide, some way and some how, that information. Whatever it takes, the person will have the opportunity to hear the Gospel and to respond to it. Apparently there was such a situation in the time of Pharaoh Amenhotep the second. Egypt at that time dominated all the Middle East and most of North Africa. Therefore, there were a large number of people under the control of the eighteenth dynasty. In that area there were a tremendous number of people who were positive at the point of God-consciousness. Instead of God using the internet or satellite radio, or television, He used the hardness of one man's heart to get the Gospel message and His power throughout this region. This is a perfect illustration of the Divine decrees bringing glory to God even through man's negative volition.

Our human limitations constantly restrict our ability to know and understand God. What kind of people can God use to accomplish His purpose? Pro 16:4 "The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil." The Lord will allow some wicked person in your life to do things spitefully to you for the purpose of making you stronger spiritually. The Lord will even use the wickedness of people and angels to bring his plan and purpose to pass. Job 21:30 "For the wicked is reserved for the day of calamity; they will be led forth at the day of fury." Remember the woman caught in adultery and the wickedness of the self-righteous Pharisees? God used the wickedness of self-righteousness to magnify His grace. We also saw it in Gen 50:20, with the evil and jealousy of Joseph's brothers. So, the Lord will use the hardness of an unbeliever's heart and the hardness of a believer's heart to bring glory to Himself.

Inevitably the Lord will be glorified even when men perform the greatest evil which they are capable of performing. 2Co 13:8 "For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth." So God used the most powerful man in the world at that time, the Pharaoh of Egypt, in order to evangelize the entire inhabited world. One of the most fascinating things that will ever come to us when we learn the divine decrees is to see history strictly from the divine viewpoint.

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