

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

STUDY GUIDE

Module 2:
THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

Lecture 9:
GOD'S DECREE



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Module 2

The Doctrine of God

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Module 2: THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

Lecture 9: God's Decree

Introduction

In the world today, a Christian believer may often wonder, “What is God doing in these events? Where will this lead? What will be the outcome? What are his intentions?” Though we may not always see clearly the immediate answers to questions about specific events, believers today do have more fundamental truths revealed to them, which provides a foundation upon which we can rest our faith. We know that God is at the helm of history. We know that nothing is outside of God’s control. We know that his perfect plan will certainly come to pass, and we know that his plan will serve to his glory and the advance of Christ’s kingdom. Our sight may be blurry in viewing present circumstances, but our faith sees clearly the God behind those circumstances.

Theme: *The Decree of God*

I. Scriptural Basis

“Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” (Isaiah 46:9–9)

1. The connection between who God is and what God does.
 - a. Who God is informs our understanding of what God does outside of himself in the created cosmos.
2. Before anything happens in history, God declares all that will come to pass, clean through to the end of all things.

“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

3. God’s sovereign will of decree, which is secret in God himself.
4. God’s revealed will in his Word.

Questions:

1. Who is the Lord of the whole of history? Meditate on the doctrines drawn from Isaiah 46:9–10. Does God need reasons outside of himself to do anything?

2. In Deuteronomy 29:29, what is meant by “the secret things” and “those things which are revealed”? What is the difference between the two? What does this truth teach us?

II. Doctrinal Overview

As summarized in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 3, paragraph 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.”

1. The term, “decree” refers to the act of God, by which he determines the existence and future of all that is outside of himself.
2. The decrees of God, as defined by *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question #7.
 - a. The divine decree is eternal.
 - b. The divine decree is a free act.
 - c. The divine decree is not conditional.
 - d. The divine decree is immutable, unchangeable.
 - e. The divine decree is comprehensive.
3. The doctrine of concurrence.
 - a. The first cause and all second causes.
 - b. Man acts freely in accordance with the scope of his volition.
 - c. God accomplishes his purposes perfectly, immutably, eternally.

Questions:

1. What is a divine decree? How does *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* define the decrees of God?

2. What is meant by the statement, “God’s divine decree is eternal”?

3. Where does the divine decree originate? What does it mean to say it is “a free act”? Where do we see this in the Bible?

4. What does it mean to say that God’s decree is not conditional? Does God decree things in response to something that occurs in creation?

5. How is it that the divine decree is immutable? How does that relate to the fact that God is unchangeable?

6. How does the divine decree include everything that comes to pass? What Bible passage reveals this truth to us?

7. What is the *doctrine of concurrence*? What is the first cause and the second cause of providence? How does God's divine decree affect the free agency of man?

III. Polemical Exposition

Objection 1: *This doctrine makes God the author of sin.*

Objection 2: *This doctrine eliminates the freedom of man.*

Objection 3: *This doctrine breeds human apathy, passivity, a lack of motivated exertion.*

Questions:

1. Who is really the author of sin? How should we understand the relationship between God's divine decree and man's sin?

2. How can we answer Objection #2? How does the free agency of man run concurrent with God's divine decree?

3. What is a good way to answer Objection #3? When you think about this objection, what implications does it have for the Christian?

IV. Practical Exposition

1. The doctrine of divine decree must be handled with wisdom and discernment.
2. This doctrine strengthens man's responsibility, evangelism, and the advance of the kingdom of Christ.
3. This doctrine should destroy our pride and stimulate humility.
4. This doctrine should produce lifelong gratitude to God.

Questions:

1. What amount of care should we take when dealing with this doctrine of God's decree? Why?

2. Why should this doctrine fuel our dependence upon God for all things? What effect should it have on us with regard to worrying about outcomes?

3. What other practical applications can we make from this doctrine?

V. Self-Reflection

From all you've learned in this lecture, how should we view the Christian's reasonable service in light of God's decree? Rather than yearning to fit in with the world, how can we devote the whole of our lives, mind and body, to learning and doing God's will? How can a Christian live today as a priest, offering daily sacrifices to God? How does studying this doctrine bring you comfort and strength?
