



Update

June 2019

Vernon & Martha Hedge

This newsletter is later than usual because Vernon has been in a hospital. He completed the draft of the following article the morning he had a mild stroke. After spending five days in the hospital, three of which were ICU, he is now in a rehabilitation hospital where therapists are helping him regain his speaking ability. He can walk and use his arms. As he said yesterday, I can think; I just can't express it. Many of you are already praying for full recovery—thank you. —*Martha*

God's Decrees

Over the years there has been a number of discussions about the decrees of God. Since I am busy writing a Systematic Theology curriculum for special training at Radiant Life Church, I thought I would share some thoughts on the subject of the "Decrees of God."

The questions that arise are such as "Did God decree sin?" "Will the ultimate will of God be done?" "What is the difference between an eternal purpose and a decree?" "Are there things God can't do?"

As a young man I had the impression that God had a long list of things He had decreed—they will happen no matter what people do or do not do. It seemed true enough that because God is sovereign, He can do whatever He wants to, but a study of the Scripture reveals that He will not do just anything that pops into His mind. The Lord has His own internal government He lives by and He will not make decisions outside His own just government.

To us believers, this makes the Lord dependable. We can count on Him to be consistent with His own justice within His own law.

To some degree it is true that He could do whatever comes into His mind, but His decisions are always in line with His eternal purpose and His own internal law. In a college philosophy class, a student who was overly proud of his own intellectual prowess asked the class, is God all powerful and all knowing; can He do whatever He wishes. To which the class said yes. Then, can He create a rock bigger than He can pick up. We were somewhat stunned, but I later learned that everything God does has purpose and He would have no purpose to create a rock bigger than He can pick up.

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This is the fallacy of making the intellect the highest court of appeal when searching for truth. **We know God because He reveals Himself to us.** The Lord mixes revelation in with our intellectual understanding and the result is we have spiritual understanding. With spiritual understanding we are in touch with the reality of God.

So, what is the difference between God's eternal purpose and His decrees?

He tells us in the Word that He has an eternal purpose, *To me [Paul] ... this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ... to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known ... according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord ...* (Eph. 3:8-11).

His eternal purpose is where He is going with things; His decrees are steps to get there.

His list of decrees is much shorter than mine was.

I have come to see that our relationship with God is just that, a relationship. His laws tell us when we are moving outside and violating our relationship with Him.

In a word study, the words translated "decree" are translated other ways. For example, the Hebrew word **chog** in the Old Testament is translated law, statute, ordinance, and decree. The root

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idea of the Greek word **dogma** in the New Testament is “an opinion of judgment expressed with authority,” so it is translated a doctrine, an ordinance, and a decree. Earthly kings can give a decree.

I began to see that His law is fixed, it is permanently true, it is an effective force. So, what happens when the enforcement of His law breaks the relationship with Him? Using a bookkeeping approach, within the makeup of His law there is a way to get our sin-debt off the books. The breaking of God’s law produces a debt of sin—we owe God. Just as at a business establishment one can go in and pay off the debt of another, so Jesus paid the debt of death to get our record of debt off the books. It’s ours if we accept it. Wow!

Let me begin with a generalization. God decreed everything that is. Theologians divide the decrees into two categories: *Efficacious* Decrees and *Permissive* Decrees.

If His decrees are in the form of an *efficacious* decree, they are final, they will happen. (Efficacious means to have the power to produce a desired effect.)

If His decrees are *permissive* (permission) decrees, then people are given the option to make decisions according to their own will; however, God requires people to make decisions according to His truth.

When God gives people an option, and they make a decision outside His will, God can Himself change His permissive decision. At Kadesh God told Israel to go in

and possess the land. He told Moses to send a man from each tribe as spies to study the land. When they saw the strong cities and the giants, they told Israel that *We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we* (Num. 13:31). As a result of the report, the faith of Israel melted away and they refused to go.

Because of their refusal, the Lord told Moses that they should not go into the land, but during the night they rethought the matter and decided to go. Moses warned them not to go, but they went anyway and were severely beaten.

God’s decree was for that generation of Israel to have the promised land, but He changed His mind and that generation did not possess their inheritance. (However, we know that another generation did, fulfilling His purpose.)

Even in the permissive decrees, He overrules all for His glory. He accomplishes this through His Providence, which is the skillful manipulation of events to arrive at a predetermined outcome while working with and through the free will of people.

In His *efficacious* decrees He has declared many things that will come to pass. He has decreed the Second Coming of Christ; He has decreed that Believers will be conformed to the image of Christ. He by decree set the boundaries of the sea, *Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded (the oceans in their place) and they were created. He also established them forever and ever; He made a **decree** which shall not pass away* (Ps. 148:5-6).

Remember, His eternal purpose is where He is going with things; His decrees are steps to get there. Those decrees embrace all that comes to pass. They include the past, present, and the future. They embrace the things which He efficaciously brings about and the things which He permissively permits.

Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure” (Isa. 46:10).

Bringing this home for personal application. God’s eternal purpose is for us to have personal relationship with Him. Because of sin, that became humanly impossible.

God’s efficacious decree was for Jesus to pay our debt of sin that keeps us from His presence.

But God gives people the choice to accept Jesus; that’s the permissive decree. To God is all glory! ✨
