



# **The Westminster Confession of Faith Knowing God – Part 2**

# Decrees and Providence - Chapters 3 & 5

- I. The Freedom of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling
- II. The Purpose of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling
- III. The Extent of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling
- IV. Objections and Responses
- V. God's Sovereignty: An Experiential Postscript

# The Relationship Between Divine Decrees and Providence: Eternity and Time

## I. The Decree (“Immanent” Works of God) – in Eternity

**Chapter 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.

# The Relationship Between Divine Decrees and Providence: Eternity and Time

## II. Providence (“Emanent” Works of God) – in Time

**Chapter 5.1.** God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

# The Freedom of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling

## A Key Question:

Is God's Ordaining and Ruling an Action or a Re-Action?

## Answer:

- **Chapter 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.
- Psalm 33:11 – The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.

# The Freedom of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling

## A Key Question:

Is God's Ordaining and Ruling an Action or a Re-Action?

## Answer Cont'd:

- **Chapter 3.2.** Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions; **yet hath he not decreed any thing because he foresaw it as future, as that which would come to pass, upon such conditions.**

# The Freedom of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling

## A Key Question:

Is God's Ordaining and Ruling an Action or a Re-Action?

## Answer Cont'd:

- **Chapter 5.1.** God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.
- Acts 2:23 “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. . .

# The Purpose of the Triune God in Ordaining and Ruling

**A Key Question:** Why Does God ordain and rule as He does?

**Answer:** His Own Glory and the Good of His Church

- **His Glory:**

- **Chap. 3.3** “. . . for the manifestation of his glory. . .”
- **Chap. 3.5** “. . . and all to the praise of his glorious grace.”
- **Chap. 3.7** “. . . for the glory of his sovereign power. . .”
- **Chap. 3.8** “So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God. . .”
- **Chap. 5.1** “. . . to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.”



# The Purpose of the Triune God in Ordaining and Ruling

**A Key Question:** Why Does God ordain and rule as He does?

**Answer:** His Own Glory and the Good of His Church

- **For the Good of His Church**
  - **Chapter 5.7** “As the providence of God doth, in general, reach to all creatures; so, after a most special manner, it taketh care of his church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof.”

# The Extent of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling

**A Key Question:** Does God ordain and rule over ALL things or only some things? Does His ordaining and ruling include the fall, sinful acts and actors, and the salvation and judgment of men and women?

**Answer: All Things**

- **Chapter 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; . . .”
- **Chapter 3.3.** “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.”

# The Extent of the Triune God's Ordaining and Ruling

**A Key Question:** Does God ordain and rule over ALL things or only some things?

**Answer: All Things**

- **Chapter 5.1.** “God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.”
- **Chapter 5.4** The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in his providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first Fall, and all other sins of angels and men,

## Objection 1: Doesn't such a view make God the author or approver of sin?

**Answer: No, while God decrees and orders all things, He is NOT the author of sin.**

- **Chapter 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.*
- See Ps. 5:4; James 1:13-14; 1 John 1:5: “This then is the message we have heard of him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”

## **Objection 1 (cont'd): Doesn't such a view make God the author or approver of sin?**

**Answer: No, while God decrees and orders all things, He is NOT the author of sin.**

- **Chapter 5.4.** The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in his providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first Fall, and all other sins of angels and men, and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God; who being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin. See 1 John 2:16

## Objections 2: Doesn't such a view do violence to the will (free) of men and women?

**Answer: No, men and women still act in accord with their wills. They do nothing that they do not will to do.\***

**Chapter 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.” See Acts 2:23

\*The most helpful accessible discussion of this can be found in J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*.

## **Objection 3: If God ordains all things, do the actions of men and women matter?**

**Answer: While God's will is the ultimate reason for the outcome, He ordinarily generally ordains and uses means (second causes) to accomplish His will.**

**Chapter 5.2.** “Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, yet, by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.”

**Chapter 5.3.** “God, *in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means,* yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure.

## Objection 4: There is little to no benefit to the Christian who considers the Doctrine of Predestination.

**Answer: When rightly handled, it can be immensely beneficial when to the Christian.**

- **Chapter 3.8.** “The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled *with special prudence and care*, that men attending to the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter [create occasions] of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.”



# God's Sovereignty: An Experiential Postscript

**Chapter 5.5** The most wise, righteous, and gracious God, doth oftentimes leave for a season his own children to manifold temptations and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.

## **J. Newton, *I Asked the Lord***

1. I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In faith and love and every grace  
Might more of His salvation know  
And seek more earnestly His face

...

7. "These inward trials I employ  
From self and pride to set thee free  
And break thy schemes of earthly joy  
That thou mayest seek thy all in me,  
That thou mayest seek thy all in me."