

Therefore in light of God's nature, let us consider the nature of His purposes or His Decrees.
God's Decrees are

- **Glorious** - The end or final cause contemplated in all God's Decrees is His own glory. Because God is infinite and perfect, it is plain that the revelation of His glory and excellency as God is the highest purpose that can exist, and that all other purposes of creation are properly subordinate to that end.

Romans 11:36 - 36 **For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever.** Amen. NASB

- **Many and one** - They are all reducible to one eternal purpose. All of the manifold events of History form one great purpose or plan. Because God's knowledge is perfect of past, present and future in one simple thought, He therefore necessarily approves of the plan which he has made in its fullness, from beginning to end. Consider this quote from Hodge.... *"It is inconsistent with the idea of absolute perfection, that the purposes of God are successive, or that He ever purposes what He did not originally intend: or that one part of His plan is independent with other parts. It is one scheme and therefore one purpose."*

- **Free** - They are free and sovereign, determined by the counsel of His own will. Another quote from Hodge.... *"God adopted the plan of the universe on the ground of His own good pleasure, for His own glory, and every subordinate part of it in reference to the whole. His decrees are free, therefore, in a far higher sense than that in which the ordinary purposes of men are free."*

Psalms 135:5-6 - 5 For I know that **the LORD is great, And that our Lord is above all gods. 6 Whatever the LORD pleases, He does.** In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. NASB

Isaiah 46:10 - 10 **Declaring the end from the beginning** And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, **'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';** NASB

Isaiah 40:13-14 - 13 Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him? 14 **With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge, And informed Him of the way of understanding?** NASB

- **Relate to all things** - They comprehend all events. Whatever God does, He certainly planned to do and whatever God permits He certainly planned to permit. This is necessary from Divine Foreknowledge. Nothing can happen that God did not know from eternity, and therefore nothing can happen that God did not intend. It is plain that if God is providentially controlling Nature and History, that His purposes and plans are equally comprehensive.

Psalms 139:16 - 16 Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; And **in Thy book they were all written, The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.** NASB

Matthew 10:29-30 - 29 "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet **not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.** 30 "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Isaiah 22:10-11 - 10 Then you counted the houses of Jerusalem, And you tore down houses to fortify the wall. 11 And you made a reservoir between the two walls For the waters of the old pool. But you did not depend on Him who made it, **Nor did you take into consideration Him who planned it long ago.** NASB

- **Immutable** – His plans are perfect and therefore cannot change. This is to say that whatever God has determined will come to pass, because He has also determined the means by which they come to pass.

Jeremiah 4:28 - 28 "For this the earth shall mourn, And the heavens above be dark, Because I have spoken, **I have purposed, And I will not change My mind, nor will I turn from it.**" NASB

Psalms 33:11 - 11 The **counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart** from generation to generation. NASB

- **Inclusive of the ends and the means** – God ordains all of the means by which His purposes are established. Since God's purpose is being carried out in an infinitely complex world of causes and effects, the ends of His purposes include all of the manifold happenings of causes and effects to accomplish them. Therefore it is plain

that His eternal plan included all of the means by which His ends are attained. Consider the *Westminster Confession on Providence*, articles 1, 2 and 3.....

Westminster Confession on Providence

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

Consider how even the free choices of people ultimately accomplish the eternal purposes of God. These choices of people are the means to fulfilling God's Decree. This can be seen in many places and events in Scripture.

Acts 4:27-28 - 27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 **to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.** NASB
Ephesians 3:11- 11 This was in accordance with **the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,** NASB

- **Efficacious** – God's Decrees will surely come to pass. Consider how predictive prophecy has proven this time and again.

Daniel 11:36 - 36 "Then the king will do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods; and he will prosper until the indignation is finished, **for that which is decreed will be done.** NASB

Lamentations 3:37-38 - 37 Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, **Unless the Lord has commanded it? 38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?** NASB

Isaiah 25:1 - O LORD, Thou art my God; I will exalt Thee, I will give thanks to Thy name; **For Thou hast worked wonders, Plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness.** NASB

Consider how **the Decrees of God speak to the certainty of all of His promises and threatenings** in the Bible. When God threatens the wicked with destruction, He is not playing games. He will bring to pass what He threatens, should they not heed His warnings.

Psalm 145:20 - 20 The LORD keeps all who love Him; But **all the wicked, He will destroy.** NASB

Genesis 6:13 - 13 Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and **behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.** NASB

Matthew 10:28 - 28 "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather **fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.** NASB

And when God promises to bless His own people, He will surely do it. The promises of God are as sure as the sun is bright! God will bless His people, and they will glorify Him for it. This is all according to God's eternal purposes which He has purposed in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:28 - 28 And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God,** to those who are called according to His purpose. NASB

2 Corinthians 1:20 - 20 For **as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes;** wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. NASB

1 Peter 1:3-6 - 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 **to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,** 5 **who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation** ready to be revealed in the last time. NASB

Consider if God has purposed to save you dear Christian, what will be the outcome?

Divine Sovereignty and Prayer

One common objection to the idea of the foreordination of all things is the argument that if all things are decreed or ordained from before time, that there is therefore *no reason to pray* because we cannot change the outcome of events. It is evident from the things that we have been learning that this cannot be true, for God has decreed and foreordained all things, and yet has told us to pray and made prayer a means of communication with Him and a means by which His Sovereign will is to come to pass. A few things to consider in this matter are....

- Prayer is fundamentally an acknowledgment of God's Sovereignty
- Prayer is a humble expression of our dependence
- Prayer changes things as we see them in time and space

Prayer is fundamentally an acknowledgment of God's Sovereignty – Prayer is first for the honor and glory of God. Consider when you pray the fundamental thing that you recognize is God's Sovereignty, His power and will. You are firstly **(1)** recognizing His being and seeking to align your own thinking and willing to His divine purposes, and secondly **(2)** making an appeal to His power and ability to meet your needs and wants.

Matthew 6:8-13 - 8 "Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. 9 "Pray, then, in this way: **(1) 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.** 10"Thy kingdom come. **Thy will be done,** On earth as it is in heaven. **(2) 11'Give us this day our daily bread. 12'And forgive us our debts,** as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. NASB

Therefore in prayer we are not seeking to be the divine authority and tell God how to run His world, but in humble acknowledgment of His Sovereignty appeal for His willingness to care for us and meet our needs and desires. Consider *when you pray for your needs to be met*, you are not seeking to inform God of your needs, for Scripture says He already knows them, but you acknowledge God's ability to meet those needs. Further *when you pray for someone to be saved*, you acknowledge God's Sovereign authority to save and grant repentance and regeneration (spiritual life) to a sinner who is dead in transgressions and sins. If you do not believe this, but rather believe that God has already done everything needed for someone to be saved, and He is waiting for them to respond, then why do you pray and appeal to God for someone's salvation?

Prayer is a humble expression of our dependence on God – Consider here the posture of prayer. *When we pray we humble ourselves before God* and seek His approval, and His acknowledgment of our dependence. We do not seek to dictate to God what His Divine will ought to be, but rather seek to know His all-wise and powerful, loving and good will so that we can align our thinking with it. Shall we dictate to God what He is lacking in His wise plan? Shall a worm of the earth tell the Almighty God how to better govern His world? Silliness! Consider that prayer is rather a confession of our weakness, at times even our helplessness to help ourselves, so we appeal to the Almighty for His gracious hand! Consider further that there is nothing in us to merit God's favor, but rather a long list of sin and rebellion against Him by which His holiness could be provoked and our destruction secured! Therefore the *posture of prayer is obvious, it is one of submission to His Holy will and humble dependence on His gracious hand of provision* for our needs. As the Scripture plainly declares, He supplies our need.

Acts 17:24-25 - 24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, **since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things;** NASB

Consider the tax gatherer and the Pharisee of Luke 18, which prayer was heard?

Luke 18:9-14 - 9 And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. 11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. 12'I fast twice a

week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' 13 "But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' 14 "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted." NASB

James 4:10 - 10 **Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord**, and He will exalt you. NASB

Learn then that prayer bows itself before the Sovereign Authority of God seeking to submit itself to God's loving grace and provision!

Prayer changes things as we see them in time and space – The **Scripture plainly declares** that God responds to prayer and acts either in favor or denial of our requests.

James 4:2b - You do not have **because you do not ask**. NASB

Consider that often times in Scripture God makes conditional promises based on the prayers and obedience of His people to His commands and or warnings.

2 Chronicles 7:13-14 - 13 If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, 14 and My people who are called by My name **humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways**, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. NASB

This kind of interaction between God and mankind is evident in many places in Scripture. But does the fact that God responds to prayer and free choices of mankind negate the fact that all things are foreordained? It is plain that these are both expressly taught in Scripture. The fact is that prayer and free moral choices are the means by which God brings to pass His Sovereign will when prayer and free moral choices are involved. God has ordained or approved of the reality that in time and space as we pray and make choices that these bring to pass His plan for the ages. Divine Sovereignty and free moral agency exist side by side on the pages of Scripture. One common example is the story of Jonah. Consider how the God is providentially ruling over the sea and the weather, because of Jonah's disobedience. When the men in the ship realize this, they pray to God for deliverance, and they are saved by throwing Jonah into the sea. Then, Jonah is swallowed by a fish and prays to God for deliverance. Then God hears Jonah's prayer and the fish spits him up onto dry land.

Jonah 1:4, 14-16, 2:1, 10 - 4 And **the LORD hurled a great wind on the sea** and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up..... 14 Then they called on the LORD and said, "**We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish** on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; **for Thou, O LORD, hast done as Thou hast pleased.**" 15 So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, **and the sea stopped its raging**. 16 Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. 17 And **the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah**, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights. 2:1 Then **Jonah prayed to the LORD** his God from the stomach of the fish, 2 and he said,.....10 Then **the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up** onto the dry land. NASB

What Scripture reveals to us, and what Jonah himself realized, was that God was bringing about his plan through the willing choices of real human beings who were morally accountable for their actions. In a way not understood by us and not revealed to us, God *caused* them to make a *willing choice* to do what they did. See also **2 Chronicles 33:10-13, Acts 2:23, 4:27-28**

Learn then that the **Scripture plainly declares** that God's Sovereign Authority in the outworking of events is accomplished as He interacts with the prayers and free choices of moral agents.

Divine Sovereignty and free moral agency exist side by side on the pages of Scripture. Oh the wonderful mystery of God's eternal purposes and His Providence working in the choices of millions of people everyday! It is plain then that we should live our lives in such a way that we humbly acknowledge the Sovereignty of God and His Lordship and entreat Him often for an understanding of His will and requests for our needs and desires. This we should do in a humble dependence on His gracious love and a knowledge of His desire to be our God and meet our needs so that we will glorify Him and thank Him for His goodness and Mercy!

Deuteronomy 4:39 - 39 Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, **that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other**. NASB