

I. INTRO: [Theology]: God's essence, His names, His attributes, His persons, and now His works.

A. God's works are divided into His works in eternity and time

1. Eternity

- a. God's work is His eternal counsel: In eternity God planned every detail of history so that everything would serve *one great goal*: His own glory in the salvation of His elect Church in Jesus Christ.
- b. God's eternal counsel consists of *His decrees*. They are His eternal thoughts, what He has purposed to do and to be done. They are also called His will, His good pleasure, His counsel and His purpose.

2. Time

- a. God's works which occur in time: they are the outworking of His eternal decree, so that nothing occurs in time which He did not plan in eternity.
- b. God's three great works in time are *creation, providence and salvation*.

B. Errors

- 1. Deism:** God, the "divine Watchmaker" is no longer active; He made the world & leaves it to run by itself.

2. Fate:

- a. The world is governed by blind, impersonal force; all things happen by necessity. *Que sera, sera* ("What will be will be").
- b. But we believe that all things are under the control and purpose of our Father, who planned and now governs all things for His own glory and our salvation (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11).

- 3. Chance, luck or fortune:** the idea that there is no purpose, and that all things happen at random. There is no such thing as chance.

II. GOD'S COUNSEL

A. God's counsel is the purpose and sovereign will of God; it is *God willing and purposing*. You cannot separate God's counsel from God Himself.

1. God's counsel is eternal and therefore unchangeable (Heb. 6:17; Acts 15:18).

- a. Everything God willed and planned, He willed and planned *from eternity*. God therefore did not wait until He had created and some of history had occurred before He decided what to do.
- b. He never changes to adapt to what men do b/c even all the actions of men were in His plan from eternity.
- c. When the Bible speaks of God's "repentance" it only speaks of what appears to be a change from our perspective: in reality God never changes.

2. God's counsel is sovereignly free, independent and efficacious (Rom. 11:33-36; Dan. 4:35; Is. 46:10).

- a. God's plan was something He alone determined *by Himself*. No one gave Him advice on what He could do, and no one told Him what He should do.
- b. God was completely free: He could choose to create or not create; in His mind were an infinite number of possibilities and He chose to do what pleased Him.
- c. *What God plans to do He actually does*. Nobody can stop Him; He is not disappointed or thwarted in anything He does (Ps. 115:3; Ps. 135:6; Is. 46:10).

3. God's counsel is wise and good.

- a. Because God is wise He uses the best possible means to accomplish the highest goal. The goal to which He aims all things is His own glory in the salvation of His Church by Jesus Christ.
- b. God has so determined everything that His purpose will be realized. Our comfort is that the whole of history has been planned by our good and wise God who loves us and who aims *at our good*.

4. God's counsel is all-comprehensive (Eph. 1:11).

- a. Absolutely everything is included in God's counsel: every moment of history has been eternally and unchangeably planned down to the smallest detail.
- b. This includes the rise and fall of nations, the birth and death (and every aspect of the life) of every human being (Acts 17:26); the decisions of men and angels; the death of the lowliest sparrow and even the falling of the hairs of our heads (Matt. 10:29).

B. GOD'S COUNSEL AND SIN

1. **Sin did not take God by surprise when it entered God's creation. God did not have to meet in emergency session to work out Plan B after Adam and Eve fell.**
 - a. God's plan was not that Adam and Eve should live forever on Paradise earth, but His plan was *Christ crucified* from the very beginning (I Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8).
 - b. Since the cross was planned from the foundation of the world *sin itself* must have been planned because there would be no need for the cross if there was no sin. In fact, without sin the cross would be impossible. Why? (There needed to be a sinful world to crucify the sinless Son of God).
 - c. But why would God plan the difficult way of sin and grace? We answer because *God determined* that this way would be the best and wisest way for Him to show His own glory both in His amazing grace and in His strict justice and wrath (Rom. 9:22-23).
2. **Nevertheless, although God planned sin and included it in His unchangeable counsel God cannot be called the author of sin which is blasphemy.**
 - a. If God were the author of sin that would mean that God *approves* of sin, that God *delights* in sin, that God is the one actually *doing* the sin; but the Reformed Faith has always abhorred such a notion.
 - b. God never approves of sin; God never delights in sin; even when He ordained sin He ordained it as something which He hates and as something for which man alone is responsible.
 - c. God never tempts a man to sin; He never tries to make man imagine sin is good; He never forces a man to sin. Man sins because he wants to. Yet, God includes sin in His counsel.
3. **God included sin in His eternal counsel and He uses the sin of men and devils to accomplish His purposes in such a way that the sinner alone remains responsible and is guilty of the sin. Is. 10:5ff.**
 - a. Joseph understood this (Gen. 45:4-5, "God did send me;" Gen. 50:20, "Ye thought evil against me but God meant it unto good"). The wicked deed of Joseph's brothers was planned by God as a means to preserve Israel during the famine. God planned it but the 10 brothers were responsible for the sin.
 - b. The book of Ruth is another example. Elimelech and Naomi left Israel to dwell in Moab. This was sin for them, but God planned it so that Ruth would be converted, brought into the nation of Israel and even become part of the line of Christ.
 - c. The greatest example is *the cross*: God planned the death of His Son at the hands of wicked men. Every detail was planned and yet the hands which killed Christ were wicked (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28).
4. **The Bible and Reformed Theology make an important distinction between God's will of decree and God's will of command.**
 - a. *God's will of decree is what God has purposed shall happen.* This includes even the sinful deeds of men. That will is irresistible and sovereign. For example, God's will of decree included the refusal of Pharaoh to let Israel go so that God could show His power in the 10 Plagues; that will of decree included the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot and all of the sinful deeds which are associated with the cross. God's decree always happens.
 - b. God's will of command is His Law which He reveals for us. God's will of command is not what He has purposed shall be done but what is the duty of men to do regardless of what God might have purposed. God's will of command is often disobeyed. For example, God's will of command to Pharaoh was "Let my people go!" and that was Pharaoh's duty to obey. God's will of command to Judas and the others around the cross was, "Honor my Son" and that was their duty to obey. God's will of command rarely happens because of sin.
 - c. Man is responsible for his sin because he refuses to obey God's will of command. God's commandments are the only rule for a man's life. A man cannot say, "Well, God purposed in His will of decree for me to sin, and therefore I am right to sin." It is always wrong for a man to sin and God punishes a man for his sins even though all of a man's sins are included in God's eternal decree.