

## ***The Church of the Servant King*** **Soteriology Series**

### **SO\_7\_The Divine Decree – Part 1 – Introduction and Definition**

There are two predominant paradigms of thought that have influenced theologian's approach to this doctrine. We have already studied the historical development of these two paradigms over the course of the past several lessons as we've studied the doctrines of predestination and election. It was necessary that we first study the doctrines of predestination and election prior to studying the doctrine of the divine decree since the doctrines of predestination and election are encompassed by the doctrine of the divine decree. Therefore, I will begin this study with an analysis of the doctrine based upon the paradigm I have previously developed which requires that any such doctrine be reconciled and synthesized with such truths as the doctrine of the angelic conflict and the essence of God.

Briefly, a full-orbed understanding of the doctrines of the angelic conflict and God's essence that provide us with an understanding of the necessity for the creation of man and human history requires that we consider the following points (at a minimum) in any study of the divine decree:

- The unified function of God's essence attributes
- The fall of Lucifer in eternity past as referenced in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28
- The evidentiary nature of human history in the appeal trial of Satan
- The necessity of the free will of man in the greater context of the appeal trial of Satan

Even though we have studied these points in depth in the past, I think that it will serve us well to briefly recap these points prior to moving forward in this study. These two major concepts are essential to one's paradigm if the believer is to ever have hope of making sense of God's plan as expressed in His decree from eternity past. Therefore, prior to developing the doctrine of the divine decree, we need to once again review these two concepts (God's essence and the relation of human history to a greater, pre-historic conflict).

#### **The Unified Function of God's Essence Attributes**

As we have previously noted, there have been other terms used to express and define God and I do not intend to limit God by using the ten attributes I have chosen below. However, these ten attributes seem to capture the idea or essence of every other term I have encountered apart from these ten. In addition, as we have previously noted in another series, to the extent that there is an ***unbalanced*** understanding of the manner in which these attributes function as an integrated whole or to the extent that they are ***not seen to function in an unified manner***, then to that extent there will be ***subjectivity*** in thought and application in the person's life. To the contrary, ***objectivity is essential*** to understanding God's plan and purpose for human history as expressed in the divine decree.

- **S – Sovereignty** = the will of God. God is in control of all of His creation (angels and man, nature and human history); however, God's control does not imply nor require God to override any creature's volition to accomplish His Divine Will. God permits a creature's volition to run its course (Permissive Will) and each creature's decisions have been foreseen by the omniscience of God prior to the creation of the first created being in eternity past. In regard to human history, God's sovereignty insures that His purpose will prevail so as to bring the appeal trial of Satan to its intended conclusion. The Sovereign Will of God includes the following aspects:
  - **Preventive** – (e.g. Gen. 20:6; Psa. 19:13) God uses parents, governments, laws, His Word, His Spirit (i.e. the Holy Spirit), and conscience (man's norms and standards) as means to impede the progress of evil and insure that human history will be the convincing evidence in Satan's appeal trial that it is intended to be.

- Permissive – (Deut. 8:2; 2 Chron. 32:31; Hos. 4:17; Rom. 1:24, 28) embraces that which God does not restrain, i.e. the free will function of His creatures.<sup>1</sup>
- Determinative – includes those actions of God apart from man's decisions (e.g. the creation of Adam and Eve, the timing of Christ's 1<sup>st</sup> Advent, the timing of the Rapture and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent, and the extent, nature, and timing of God's revelation to man in times past).
- Preceptive – His commands.

In connection with our study of soteriology, the sovereignty of God is the determinative attribute that governed the decision of just how God's righteousness would be met by a fallen creature. In the case of angels, no plan of salvation is revealed in Scripture; however, in the case of man, there is clear revelation that man's eternal salvation would be accomplished through a demonstration of God's love via the sacrificial death of His Son. Thus, in the provision of man's salvation, we see unified and consistent interaction between the sovereignty of God, the love of God & the righteousness of God.

- **EL – Eternal Life** = There has never been a time when God did not exist, nor will there ever be a time when God does not exist. He has no beginning or end. God's omnipresence and His eternity are sometimes expressed by the term *infinity*.
- **L – Love** = God is perfect love, i.e. His love does not depend upon the response of the recipient. God's love is His motivator. Divine love motivated God to provide a solution to the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden, i.e. to send His Own Son in the form of a man to be the payment of the penalty of sin. God's love is never expressed independently from His other attributes, i.e. there always exists a perfect affinity or balance between all of His attributes. In regard to our subject of soteriology, it is this attribute of God that is most distorted in man's understanding. The distortions almost always begin with the question – "How could a God of love...?" Such a question reveals man's inherent lack of understanding of the integrated nature of all of God's attributes (see Isa 55:8-9 – "*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.'*")
- **J – Justice** = the attribute of God's essence that provides for the requirements of His righteousness, i.e. what the righteousness of God demands, the justice of God executes. For instance, it is the justice of God that pronounced judgment upon man at the Fall and it is the justice of God that imputed the sins of man to Christ on the Cross.
- **R – Righteousness** = God's inherent standard of perfection by which His creatures are evaluated. God's R and J constitute His absolute holiness. With regard to the category of doctrines known as soteriology, it is God's righteousness that demands satisfaction and is the attribute to which man must be reconciled.
- **O – Omniscience** = all knowing. Because God is eternal, there is nothing that God has not known or will not know. He is constantly occupied with all things at once. His omniscience knows the actual and the possible. Therefore, He knows every event, causation, and succession as well as all other possible events, causations, and

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<sup>1</sup> By "free-will function of His creatures", I do not mean to imply that there is no influence upon man's volition by unseen factors; however, such influence (either divine, human viewpoint, or Satan or demonic) is the result of one's decision to be so influenced. That decision is sometimes an active, conscious choice or it is sometimes the passive, default option such as in the case of human viewpoint and cosmic thought.

successions. The Bible only reveals a fraction of that which God knows. Every detail of all creation and history has been known by God from eternity past. His omniscience is not subject to development and no development of human history ever surprises God. The omniscience of God is the attribute that is perhaps most involved in the soteriological issues of predestination and election and the divine decree, not to mention God's knowledge of a need for a provision of salvation before the need ever arose.

- **O – Omnipotent** = all-powerful. God's power is infinite. God can do all He wills, but He may not will to do all He can. God is only limited by His other attributes, e.g. He will never make right wrong because of His holiness. He cannot do things which are self-contradictory to His own nature, e.g. God cannot cease loving even those His justice must condemn because they have not satisfied His righteous requirement of trusting only in the work of His Son for their eternal salvation. The omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit sustained Christ as He executed God's plan for His life to include dying on a Cross.
  
- **O – Omnipresence** = God is everywhere. God's omnipresence allows His omniscience to know even the thoughts of every man. Omnipresence is not pantheism since pantheism denies the person of God. God is not restricted to the time/space dimension in which we live. God's omnipresence is not limited because of man's limitation in describing His activities, e.g. Scripture uses anthropomorphisms to describe God's actions, but it doesn't mean that God possess an eye, hand, arm, etc. Scripture also uses anthropopathisms to describe the function of a number of God's attributes, but it doesn't mean that God is limited to time and space. With regard to soteriology, Jesus as God was omnipresent while at the same time limited to a human body. This could be an example of what some have termed the "mysteriousness" of God.
  
- **I – Immutability** = unchangeable. God does not change. Sometimes the Bible describes God's actions using anthropopathisms; however, since God is omniscient, He is never taken by surprise so as to be angry, remorseful, sorrowful, etc. God's essence doesn't change in the midst of change.

(Personally, I don't like to use the term *mysteriousness* as a description of one of God's attributes since on many occasions, it is used to describe God's activity when the person using it doesn't understand that activity. The result is a view of God as One Who is changeable and not immutable. Therefore, I use it cautiously and advisedly, but I will concede that it has its place when properly related to things not revealed in Scripture or beyond our capability to understand.

For instance, who has ever experienced omniscience or eternity. We can know about it, but there is a sense in which all greater understanding and appreciation in life occurs only through experience. I believe that the experience of such things about which we only have partial knowledge now will be part of the joy we have in heaven when we more fully comprehend the Person of God. We experience some of that joy and peace now as the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit about such things, but the completion of that experience will only occur in heaven. I believe that this is what Paul alluded to in 1 Corinthians 13:12 when he wrote – "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."

The term "mystery" is also the word Paul used to describe the truths of the Church Age which had not been revealed by God until the Apostle Paul – Ephesians 1:9 – thus refers to truth possessed by God the Father and not made known to man for at least two millennia prior to Paul.)

- **V – Veracity** = perfect truth. God has never lied. What He has promised will occur. There is a vast body of truth which we will not know until eternity; however, everything He has revealed to man is absolute truth. Veracity is uncomplicated by any individual set of circumstances, i.e. it is not relative. God's veracity guarantees His absolute freedom from compromise, contradiction, or falsehood.

### **The Angelic Conflict – The Reason for Man's Creation<sup>2</sup>**

Scripture does not provide us a specific reason for God's creation of the first creature nor of the universe.<sup>3</sup> However, we know that all things were created for God's glory (Psa 19:1; Rom 1:20). In addition, Scripture does provide us with a reference to the creation and fall of the most magnificent creature to ever come from the hand of God, i.e. Lucifer. In Ezekiel 28:11-19, the magnificent nature of this creature is mentioned during a section of Scripture in which Ezekiel excoriates the king of Tyre for his arrogance and compares the king of Tyre to Satan as Ezekiel predicts the fall of the king of Tyre.<sup>4</sup> In Isaiah 14:12-17, the basis for Lucifer's fall is described in a section of Scripture in which Isaiah denounces Babylon – the center of power and false religion during Isaiah's ministry to Israel.

Ezekiel 28:12b – Thus says the Lord God; you were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. (28:13) You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created. (28:14) You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. (28:15) You were perfect in your ways from the day you

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<sup>2</sup> For a more extensive analysis of the fall of Lucifer in eternity past and the ramifications of that event in terms of the angelic conflict, see the notes from the prior series – “Satan: His Person and Strategy.” I have found various components of the doctrine of the angelic conflict in the writings of each of these men even though I have not found a clearly articulated synthesis between God's essence and the concept of the angelic conflict in any of these men's writings to date. See Renald E. Showers, ***What On Earth Is God Doing? Satan's Conflict With God*** (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1973); Donald Grey Barnhouse, ***The Invisible War*** (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965); Lewis S. Chafer, ***Satan, His Motives and Methods*** (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1990); Stanley A. Ellisen, ***Biography of a Great Planet*** (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1975). In addition, see Lewis S. Chafer, ***Systematic Theology*** (Dallas, Texas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), Volume II, 78-81, 85, 100-101, 103-104, 108, 110, 120-121.

<sup>3</sup> Although not supported by any specific Scripture, I believe that it would be a reasonable conclusion that God's initial acts of creation prior to human history were for the purpose of manifesting the unified function of His attributes. By manifesting the unity of His attributes in His dealings with His creation, God is glorified. This reasoning has a logic that is supported by God's express purpose in creation, i.e. His own glorification, and it reconciles with God's purpose in creating man as a result of Lucifer's likely response to God's sentence at His fall. This point will be developed more fully in the paragraphs to follow.

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel prophesied for a period of approximately 22 years (ca. 593 to 571 B.C.) surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and subsequent Babylonian captivity. Ezekiel lived as an exile in Babylon. On the other hand, Isaiah lived and ministered around the period of the Assyrian captivity – about 150 years prior to Ezekiel (740 to 681 B.C.).

were created, till iniquity was found in you. (28:16) By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones. (28:17) Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you. (28:18) You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your trading; therefore I brought fire from your midst; it devoured you, and I turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all who saw you. (28:19) All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; you have become a horror, and shall be no more forever.

Isaiah 14:12 – How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! (14:13) For you have said in your heart: '*I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; (14:14) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.*' (14:15) Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.

From these passages we have an understanding of the nature of Satan's fall at a point in eternity past as well as the judgment that was pronounced upon him at the time of his fall. Obviously, the execution of his sentence is yet future since he has not yet been cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:10).<sup>5</sup> The fact that there has been a delay between the pronouncement of the

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<sup>5</sup> Several passages either relate to or establish the fact that Satan's sin (fall) in eternity past did not immediately result in him no longer having access to heaven, thus they establish the fact that there has been a delay between the pronouncement of the sentence and the execution of the sentence.

By the abundance of your trade you were internally filled with violence, and you sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. (Ezek. 28:16) [Note: This is a prediction of judgment and does not teach that Satan was cast out of heaven at the time of his sin.]

How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! (Isaiah 14:12) [Note: This is a description of the final judgment of Satan at the end of his career.]

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. (Job 1:6) [Note: This passage discloses the fact that Satan still has access to heaven even after his "fall" in eternity past.]

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat. (Luke 22:31) [Note: This passage also substantiates Satan's access to heaven.]

Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. (Eph. 6:11)

sentence and the execution of the sentence that is equivalent to human history establishes the relationship between the angelic conflict and human history. Evidently, Satan appealed his sentence. Satan's position as the "anointed cherub that covereth" (Ezek. 28:14) demanded that God conduct a trial with all of the heavenly host in attendance.

God was the judge and the prosecution; Satan was the defense. What was Satan's appeal argument? What case could he possibly construct to legitimately question the verdict of a perfectly just, omnipotent, omniscient, and righteous God? Why would God even consider entertaining an appeal from a creature of His? We can speculate regarding the content of Satan's argument from a common objection that is voiced today by many who have yet to believe. That argument follows this line of reasoning: "How can a God of love cast any of His creatures into an eternal place of torment?" Such a question in the presence of all of the heavenly hosts had to be substantiated with incontrovertible evidence so that for the remainder of all eternity no creature could ever doubt the essence of God. In their observation of humans, angels will witness proof after proof of Satan's own culpability and proof after proof of God's perfect justice and grace (Job 1:6; 2:1-3; Luke 15:7, 10; 1 Cor. 4:9; 11:10; Eph. 3:10; 1 Tim. 3:16; 5:21).

War has been declared. The great, governing cherub had become the malignant enemy. Our God was neither surprised nor astonished, for, of course, He knew before it happened that it would happen, and He had His perfect plan ready to be put into effect. Although the Lord had the power to destroy Satan with a breath, He did not do so. It was as though an edict had been proclaimed in heaven: "We shall give this rebellion a thorough trial. We shall permit it to run its full course. The universe shall see what a creature, though he be the highest creature ever to spring from God's Word, can do apart from Him. We shall watch this experiment, and permit the universe of creatures to watch it, during this brief interlude between eternity past and eternity future called time. In it the spirit of independence shall be allowed to expand to the utmost. And the wreck and ruin which shall result will demonstrate to the universe, and forever, that there is no life, no joy, no peace apart from a complete

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Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. (Rev. 2:12-13) [Note: These passages establish the fact that Satan has free access to earth and heaven.]

And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Rev. 12:7-9) [Note: This is the first reference to Satan actually being banished from heaven. Satan is evidently to be cast out of heaven during the middle of the Tribulation period to initiate what is known as the "great Tribulation". One thousand, two hundred and sixty days in verse 6 is equal to three and one half years.]

dependence upon the Most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth.”<sup>6</sup>

Why Satan is thus allowed to continue his reign is perhaps but partly revealed. The real Church which is the Bride of Christ, is to sit with Him upon His throne (Rev. 3:21; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Matt. 19:28), and the present age [the Church Age] must continue until that glorious heavenly people are gathered out from the world [Rapture of Church Age believers to rule and reign with Christ during the Millennial Kingdom]. Again, it seems the course of God’s purpose to make a sufficient and final trial of every claim of His adversaries; and when this age, with all its developments, shall have passed by, every mouth will be stopped, and the whole world and Satan will know their own failure and sin before God. They will stand self-condemned, and nothing could accomplish this but the testing, by actual trial, of all the self-sufficient claims of Satan and man.<sup>7</sup> [Italics and bold are mine]

God responded to Satan’s objections by creating a creature lower than Satan or the angels with the desire of providing evidentiary material in Satan’s appeal trial. That evidentiary material consists of the obedient acts of a lower creature, i.e. man, combined with the unified function of God’s essence attributes in dealing with the lower creature. If the lower creature with less intimate knowledge of God than Lucifer had at his disposal can make decisions consistent with the will of God, then certainly Lucifer had an even greater capacity to do so.

God in His rebuttal phase of this trial has presented incredible evidence of the integrity and unified function of His attributes. God’s perfect love was manifest in His sinless Son’s undeserving death on the Cross in total satisfaction of God’s righteousness and justice. Satan had desperately attempted but failed to prevent the 1<sup>st</sup> Advent of Christ during the formal trial phase. These Satanic attempts to thwart God’s plan and prevent Christ from coming to offer the kingdom of God began with the fall of Adam and manifested themselves in many ways up to the death of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

### **Man’s Free Will is a Necessity For the Resolution of the Angelic Conflict**

The God ordained resolution of Satan’s trial in the angelic conflict requires man’s free will. In order for God to demonstrate the perfect balance, harmony and unity of His essence attributes and in order for the evidentiary material to provide incontrovertible proof, man must be free to exercise his volition. If God in any way overrides man’s volition so as to pre-determine

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<sup>6</sup> Barnhouse, *The Invisible War*, 51.

<sup>7</sup> Chafer, *Satan: His Motives and Methods*, 24.

<sup>8</sup> Exmples include: 1) the motivation of Cain to murder Abel thus hoping that the human race would quickly eliminate itself; 2) fallen angelic infiltration of the human race prior to the flood in Gen. 6; 3) the attempt to annihilate the nation of Israel (and the Jews) through the Pharaoh of Egypt; 4) destruction of the nation of Israel via apostasy and amalgamation into the surrounding cultures during the period of the Judges and Kings; 5) attempts to exterminate the Jews through the evil plans of Haman, prime minister of Persia; 6) inspiration of Herod to kill the infant Jesus; 7) influence via “religion” upon the Jewish leadership to reject Christ as the Messiah; 8) plus many other examples too numerous to mention here.

man's destiny, then Satan certainly has an objection in the appeal trial since the evidence (man as the lower creature choosing God's will) is tainted. If God overrides or ignores man's volition, then God has not answered Satan's objections. Any view of the divine decree that does not balance the sovereignty of God with the necessity for the free will of man in view of the greater context of the angelic conflict is deficient in my opinion.

### **The Divine Decree – A Definition**

We will develop and expand (and possibly refine) this definition in upcoming lessons, but here is a brief definition (subject to further refinement) of the Divine Decree:

**Definition:** The decree of God is His eternal, holy (expresses the unified function of His attributes – His integrity), wise, and sovereign purpose, that comprehends simultaneously all things that ever were or will be in their causes (predecessor circumstances), conditions (current status or circumstances), successions (subsequent events or conditions), relations (inter-relationship between all things), and determining their certain futurity.