

# **EXPOSITION**

## **OF THE**

# **CONFESSION**

## **Chapter 3, "Of God's Decree"**

**By**

**Abel Morgan 1775**

The Association of elders and brethren of the several Baptist churches in Pennsylvania, and the colonies adjacent, held at Philadelphia, October 10th, 11th, and 12th, 1775,

To the several churches we are in connection with, send our Christian salutation.

Beloved Brethren – In the primitive times, when people were converted by the ministry of the gospel, and united together in church relation and fellowship, it was the practice of the Apostles to establish them in the truths which they had believed and professed (Acts 15:41) for their edification and comfort (Acts 9:31). We now, according to our measure, would endeavor to follow this worthy pattern, for the like excellent design.

The subject, which next in order comes to be considered, is the doctrine of God's Decree (Confession of Faith, Chapter 3.) Where on we observe:

First, That God, the Supreme, who is self-existent, and in every way an independent Sovereign, the Creator of all things, hath an absolute right to dispose of all His creatures as seems good to Him; and before His works of old, to appoint and determine ALL THINGS to a certain end. This article of our belief, both Scripture and reason do jointly and sufficiently confirm (Isaiah 46:10; Psalm 33:11; and Proverbs 19:21).

Second. The rule of His fore-appointment of all things, of what shall come to pass in time, is the wise counsel of His most holy will and good pleasure (Ephesians 1:11).

Third. In accomplishing His eternal purpose, no violence is offered to the will of the creature, either good (Psalm 110:3), or bad (James 1:13-14); nor the use of means taken away (Ezekiel 36:37); neither is God, in anywise, the author Q( sin, sin, though He decreed to permit it to be in His determinate counsel (Acts 14:16; Genesis 14:5; Acts 2:23).

Fourth. The special objects of God's Decree are angels and men.

Fifth. When all the human race, by the sin of the first man, were involved in guilt (Romans 5:12), and fallen under condemnation, and all become the children of wrath; it would manifestly be doing them no injustice, if they were, to every individual, left in that state, and eventually punished for their many sins. This would have been their proper desert, their just reward. But God, out of His mere free grace and love, without any moving cause in the parties chosen, hath predestinated some unto life, through a Mediator (Ephesians 1:4; Romans 11:5-6), (without any wrong done to others) together with all the means subservient to this end, that is, their redemption by the blood of Christ, and the renovation by the Spirit of holiness, to the "praise of His glorious grace; " the others left to act in sin, to their final destruction, to the glory of divine

justice (Romans 9:22-23).

The bounds of a letter will not permit us to enter on the discussion of the several objections carnal men raise against the determinate counsel of God over all things, and to remove out of the way the many cavils that are raised by men of different principles, in opposition to this Scripture doctrine; that has been repeatedly well done heretofore by others; but only add a word, with a view to relieve and support those distressed souls, whoever and wherever they are, while they acknowledge this awesome truth, but at the same time are greatly exercised about their interest therein; frequently raising objections against themselves, fearing they are not of the elect of God: and, should this be the case, they infer, that all their endeavors must be in vain, their acts of worship unacceptable. The consolations and promises of the gospel are proposed to them to little purpose. Their souls refuse to be comforted. Their hope flags, their expectations fails; they are greatly disheartened; yea, the very duties of religion become to them difficult, and oftentimes burthensome; briefly, they are ready to halt, and to sink down in the gulf of despair, believing the Decree of God to be immutable, which it is, but against themselves, which it is not, if they be sensible sinners.

So this solemn and grand truth, instead of administering joy to their souls, and exciting in them adoration and praise to God, becomes to them an occasion of tenor, discouragement, and great depression of spirit. The topics, whence they generally derive these gloomy apprehensions are such as follows, viz., the gross darkness of mind under which they are shut up; no signs of election; extreme ignorance of God and of Christ; finds no returns of prayer; so full of sin; manifold afflictions; cannot act faith; backslidings, unprofitableness, heart rising against God, and such like.

To remove these difficulties in ascertaining their election of God and place in God's good determinate counsel:

First, Let the parties consider that there may be very great and just reasons for the ground of these complaints, which without calling into question their election of God. They may be designs for them to "examine themselves to see if they are in the election of grace," and to "make their calling and election sure. " (II Peter 1:10).

Second, Let them seriously observe the frame and temper of their soul under all or any of these defects, whether a sense of their case excites in them more humiliation and sorrow for sin (Psalm 38:17-18), and more vehement cries and ardent wishes for seasonable help (Psalm 38: 4,5,21,22), a desire to be more spiritual minded, and have "the mind of Christ." If so, the evidence is in their favor, for such is not afforded the wicked that know not God.

Third, Let such know and learn, that the way for their relief is not by laboring to pry into the secret purpose of God, or in their thoughts to dwell upon it to their own discouragement, but abide by, and cleave to, His revealed will, which directs all indigent ones to Christ the Mediator for supply, and to the use of those means prescribed for the satisfaction and peace of laboring souls. The whole counsel of God includes one making his "calling and election sure" (II Peter 1:10) that his praise might be to God, and his confidence in himself destroyed. In so doing shall the fearful be able to look back, and know their election before time in God's determinate counsel, and forward, and view their salvation to come as a certainty, when time shall be no more. This glorious truth is not, therefore, designed to deter troubled souls from coming to Jesus Christ. It shows the absolute sovereignty of God's eternal will in the salvation of sinners, and soul-trouble is a good evidence of one's need for salvation.

Fourth. It directly tends to administer support to the laboring soul, when we find those very springs of complaint, doubts, and fears, from which they argue to their disadvantage, are no other than

what the Scripture declares to have been the case with every elect of God; for instance, these complain of darkness, so did they, "Why hidest Thou Thyself?" (Psalm 10:1. Job emphatically, in 23:8,9, also Isaiah 1:10). Do these sorrowful ones lack tokens of their election? Certainly they do. But hath not God in special mercy hedged up their way, to keep them from sin, and made it bitter to their souls? (Hosea 2:6,7 and Lam. 3:19,20). Do they not find themselves thirsting after Christ? (Psalm 42:1-3). Do they not groan earnestly, and are burdened, because of their depravity, &c.? (II Corinthians 5:2). These are given as encouraging tokens, and are the very characters of the elect; who also in their day bewailed their ignorance of God. (Proverbs 30:2,3). So why so discouraged with God's determinate counsel over all things, if such includes the tokens of your own hope in Christ and His salvation? The exhortation "to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ," intimates their deficiency therein, and what the remedy is for longing souls. How pathetically did they expostulate with God about His deferring to answer their prayers: "Will the Lord cast off forever? Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" (Psalm 78:3-7). "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and Thou wilt not hear? " (Habakkuk 1:2). How feelingly did they acknowledge themselves full of sin; "Mine iniquities are gone over my head," said David (Psalm 38:3-8). Or as Paul, "Wretched man that I am" (Romans 7:18,24). Do these saints fear because they cannot put forth acts of faith? Consider the case of the godly; "I am shut up, and I cannot come forth" (Psalm 88:8). In God's determinate counsel over all things, it is evident that Christ would have men to know their own insufficiency, (John 15:5 and 6:44); who Himself is the author and finisher of faith. Hence, "Draw me." (Song 1:4). Sore afflictions are ordained the very portion of the dear chosen ones in the world, to "bring many sons unto glory" (Psalm 78:10,14; 34:19; I Corinthians 11:32; Hebrews 12:6-8). Let these languishing souls hear the gracious word of promise to backsliders (Hosea 14:4). Christ teaches all the elect to esteem themselves unprofitable (Luke 17:10). Do these perplexed ones lack faith because they find

in themselves heart-risings against God? "Lord, I believe. Help Thou my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). This indeed is very alarming and dreadful in its consequences; but there is on sacred record an instance of this sad case, in one that was undoubtedly a chosen vessel, an elect of God (Jonah 4:3, 4, 9), whose heart not only rose up against God, but also in his reply vindicated himself therein, "I do well to be angry," said he. This is probably by far a higher degree than any of these dejected ones are got to. Hence we observe, that not one distressed soul hath ground to argue against himself from any of the above-mentioned cases, or the like, that he is passed by, and, without hope, left to perish in his sins. None can conclude his preterition but from final impenitence, and the sin against the Holy Ghost, which none of God's dear children will ever be allowed. From the former he cannot, because he is yet in this life; nor from the latter, because final impenitence is an inseparable ingredient of that sin.

Fifth. Guard against every device of Satan, who aims to prevent people profiting by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and would have them exclaim against God's eternal purpose in Him. (I Peter 5:8).

Sixth. Inasmuch as we are authorized to encourage the weak, the feeble, and fearful to be strong, (Isaiah 35:3,4) we therefore exhort and charge all those into whose hands this may come by the good providence of God, who are, and have been sorely afflicted on the aforesaid account, that they would press forward in the ways of godliness, seek the Lord Jesus unfeignedly, pray without ceasing, and faint not, (Luke 18:1,7), endeavor for satisfactory experience of grace in their own souls; that hereafter they may rejoice in this, and every other truth of God, that God reigns sovereignly over sin, so that "all things work together for the good" of His people (Romans 8:28).

Lastly, We would earnestly caution all persons, on the other hand, who confidently conclude themselves to be the elect of God, to

beware at all times of living a dissolute, vain, irreligious life, or giving themselves liberty to continue in sin, because election is unalterable; pleading or thinking they shall be saved, let them live and act as they will (This truth hath been thus horribly abused.) Such corrupt principles, wicked practices, and black characters, are inconsistent with the pure doctrines of the gospel. Remember that holiness becometh the house and people of the Lord forever, and is indispensably enjoined on every one that nameth the name of Christ (II Timothy 2:19; II Thess. 2:13; I Peter 1: 14,16). Let none of God's children speak or act in such a way as to deny the determinate counsel of God over all things, on the one hand, or imply that in some fashion He is the author of their hideous sins.

"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

Elder John Gano, Moderator  
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Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1775