

### **The Providence of God (3) Our Good God and His Decree of Evil in History**

Let us read a portion of God's Word that places the responsibility of sin fully upon us, exonerating God of all responsibility. We read in James 1 of God's good designs in the testing of His people and that He has no complicity in their sin. They alone are responsible for the sinful acts they commit.

<sup>1</sup>James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

<sup>2</sup>Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup>for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup>And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

<sup>5</sup>If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. <sup>6</sup>But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup>For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup>he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

<sup>9</sup>Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, <sup>10</sup>and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. <sup>11</sup>For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

<sup>12</sup>Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. <sup>13</sup>Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup>But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup>Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

<sup>16</sup>Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. <sup>17</sup>Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. <sup>18</sup>Of His own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. (James 1:2-18)

James, the half-brother our Lord Jesus, wrote this epistle to Christians who were in need of exhortation to persevere in their obedience to Jesus Christ their Lord. They were to order their lives in faith, conforming themselves to the law of God, and that specifically as taught to them by the Lord Jesus Himself.<sup>1</sup>

James addressed his readers as "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion." The ESV (English Standard Version) Study Bible gives this explanation regarding the opening words of this epistle.

Jesus chose 12 disciples to signify the **twelve tribes** and thus to identify the church as the new Israel (see note on Matt. 10:1). James reminds these Jewish Christians of their spiritual heritage as the people of God, gathered by Jesus the Messiah. **In the dispersion.** The tribes of Israel were scattered throughout the world by the Assyrians and Babylonians. They looked forward to being regathered as a people (Jer. 31:7-14; Ezek. 37:15-28). James implies that the true Israel is now also dispersed (away from its heavenly homeland) and oppressed, but assured of their final gathering to the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are a number of parallels and allusions with the contents of this epistle and our Lord's Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>2</sup> *The ESV Study Bible* (Crossway Bibles, 2008), p. 2391.

We saw in many places in our study of Romans that Paul regarded the church as the Israel of God over whom King Jesus, the Son of David ruled. So it is that James also viewed New Testament Christians to be the Israel of God. And although James does not state it overtly in these opening words, we who are Gentiles who have faith in Jesus Christ, are being led on a journey of faith, returning with the remnant of Jewish believers in their Messiah, travelling through the “wilderness” of this world to our heavenly “Canaan.” James was exhorting these Christians to live in faith while in their “Dispersion,” while they “journeyed” in faith, waiting for the return of the Lord and their gathering to Him.

This understanding of the Epistle of James is affirmed by another commentator of this epistle:

In using the phrase ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖ, (“the twelve tribes”) the author looks on the recipients of the epistle as the true Israel. The church has quite naturally appropriated the title, for it was the work of the Messiah to re-establish the twelve tribes (Jer. 3:18; Ezek. 37:19-24; Psa. Sol. 17:8), and Christians recognized themselves as the true heirs of the Jewish faith (Romans 4; 1 Cor. 10:18; Gal. 4:21-31; Phil. 3:3). While such a term for the church would fall quite naturally from the lips of a Jewish Christian, Paul also uses it in his letters to gentile Christians.<sup>3</sup>

James opened his epistle asserting that as God’s people in exile they were being tested, and that they were in need of God’s wisdom to know how to live rightly, not succumbing to temptation to sin. God would grant them this wisdom through prayer. But the believer must have faith in the Lord that He will give to him the wisdom that he needs.

But there are threats to the Christian, the chief being that of the “world.” The world poses a threat to the Christian’s faith. It would lead him to be “double-minded,” drawn away from full commitment to his Savior. And one of the great dangers the world poses to the Christian is that of the lure or the possession of wealth. It will draw him away from the Lord if he is not watchful and responsive, if he does not obtain the “wisdom” essential to withstanding the temptation.

James makes it clear that the trials the Christian encounters, even the temptation to sin, is not designed by God to cause his fall, but rather God tests His people to prove their faith to be genuine, that it is true saving faith. God was trying them and testing them in their exile. The outcome of their successful endurance of their testing was the “crown of life”, the reception of the gift of eternal life, presumably at the resurrection.

Their testing involved their temptation to sin against God, that is, to be drawn away from faith and obedience to their Lord. But *James wanted them to understand that their temptation to sin was in no way the design or work of God.* No, rather, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (v. 17). And so, God tests His people with respect to their faith, but in doing so He does not tempt people to sin. That temptation comes from within, from the sin principle that is in the heart of every human being. God is good, essentially good. Evil has no place in Him. He is not the author of evil, the cause of evil, the source of evil. It was God’s will that every one of His elect would be saved. “Of His own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (v. 18).

In our consideration of the theme of this series on the providence of God, we have already expressed that we must recognize and appreciate the presence and degree of mystery in this doctrine. We spoke of this when we addressed the experience of Job and his three friends. We have too limited a perspective so that we cannot discern exactly what God is doing through the details of our lives. And so, we asserted that in assessing God’s works in providence, there is an element of mystery that cannot be penetrated in this life. But there is another aspect of this mystery of providence that we need to consider. *How can God be sovereign in governing His world according to His eternal decree, which involved God’s purpose for every event in history to unfold in the way He intended, and yet He remain a good*

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James* (Eerdmans, 1982), p. 63.

***God who in no way is the cause or promoter of the evil in His creation?*** This the problem of theodicy, a term we mentioned recently one Sunday (although it was not in our notes.) Theodicy is the theological effort to explain the “problem” of a good and loving and sovereign God and the existence of evil in the world that He has created. How can God be omnipotent and benevolent (all-powerful and loving) and have brought evil to exist in His world? Theodicy from a Reformed perspective is the effort to vindicate our sovereign God of wrong doing. The word itself—theodicy—is from the Greek words *theos* and *dikē*. *Theos* is translated is the Greek word for “God” and *dikē* is translated as either “just” or “right.” Theodicy literally means “justifying God.” And this is what we want to consider today, ***our good God and His decree and resulting providence respecting evil in history.***

First, let us recall what the definition of God’s providence. We cited the short but accurate statement found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

Question #11: What are God’s works of providence?

Answer: “God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures, and all their actions.”

Providence speaks to the nature and manner of God’s active involvement in His world. God preserves all that exist. Moreover, He governs all that exists according to and for the purpose of achieving His will that He has purposed for His creation. We quoted the explanation of this doctrine by **J. I. Packer**:

If Creation was a unique exercise of divine energy causing the world to be, providence is a continued exercise of that same energy whereby the Creator, according to His own will, (a) keeps all creatures in being, (b) involves himself in all events, and (c) directs all things to their appointed end. The model is of purposive personal management with total “hands-on” control: God is completely in charge of his world. His hand may be hidden, but his rule is absolute.<sup>4</sup>

But here is the “other” mystery of God’s providence. How is it that we can speak of God’s providence in every event that transpires in history, if God is not the author or cause of temptation and sin? Here in James 1 we have a clear declaration that God is not involved with evil, He does not promote evil, participate in evil, or cooperate with evil. And yet our understanding of God’s eternal decree and the working out of that decree in all things in history asserts that God has decreed ***all*** that transpires in history, both good and evil. And so, the mystery of God’s providence should be seen in this manner, not only are we unable to understand what it is God is doing specifically, we acknowledge this mystery: that although God is the sovereign Planner and Ruler of all that occurs from the least to the greatest event in history, He is not the chargeable author of sin or evil.

This brings into focus the reality and nature of ***secondary causes***. God has so decreed the existence and works of secondary causes that God is able to remove Himself as the chargeable author of sin and all evil and yet be the Sovereign Ruler over all evil people and spirits. We may affirm, therefore, that although evil is present and manifest in the world God created and controls, God is a good God and only good gifts; in fact every good gift, comes from His hand.

This aspect of God’s providence is stated in **The Baptist Confession of 1689**, Article 5, paragraphs 1-4:

1. God the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto his infallible foreknowledge,

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<sup>4</sup> J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Foundation for Reformation, 1993), p. 54.

and the free and immutable counsel of His own will; to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.<sup>5</sup>

2. Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly; so that there is not anything befalls any by chance, or without his providence; yet by the same providence he ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.<sup>6</sup>

3. God, in his ordinary providence maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them at his pleasure.<sup>7</sup>

4. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in his providence, that his determinate counsel extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sinful actions both of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, which also he most wisely and powerfully boundeth, and otherwise ordereth and governeth, in a manifold dispensation to his most holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness of their acts proceedeth only from the creatures, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.<sup>8</sup>

Let us attempt to understand clearly what is stated here about our God and examine the biblical evidence that substantiates these assertions. First, let us consider the biblical doctrine:

### **I. God's decree in eternity regarding all that takes place in history.**

Paragraph 1 stated above speaks of God's providence, the working out of God's decree. Paragraph 2 speaks directly to the fact that providence is the working out of God's decree. Again it reads, "Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly..."

"The decree of God is His purpose or determination with respect to future things."<sup>9</sup> Although we tend to think in terms of the "decrees" of God, since there is an innumerable number of events in history, nevertheless the singular word, "decree" is often used to describe God's one eternal purpose of all that would transpire as a singular event in the mind of God. This is in accordance with the Word of God. In Psalm 2:7 the Lord Jesus prophetically declared, "I will tell of *the decree*: The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'" This was prophetic of the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus to be seated on the throne of David in heaven.<sup>10</sup> Here the single decree of God's purpose is referenced.

We may also consider the singular decree of God in the words "eternal purpose" that Paul used in Ephesians 3:8-11.

<sup>8</sup>To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup>and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, <sup>10</sup>so that through the church the manifold wisdom of

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<sup>5</sup> The confession cites these verses to substantiate this statement: Hebrews 1:3; Job 38:11; Isaiah 46:10f; Psalm 135:6; Matthew 10:29-31; Ephesians 1:11.

<sup>6</sup> See Acts 2:23; Proverbs 16:33; Genesis 8:22

<sup>7</sup> See Acts 27:31, 44; Isaiah 55:10, 11; Hosea 1:7; Romans 4:19-21; Daniel 3:27.

<sup>8</sup> See Romans 11:32-34; 2 Samuel 24:1; 1 Chronicles 21:1; 2 Kings 19:28; Psalms 76:10; Genesis 1:20; Isaiah 10:6, 7, 12; Psalms 1:21; 1 John 2:16.

<sup>9</sup> This is the definition of Arthur Pink in *Gleanings in the Godhead* (Moody Press, 1975), p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Although dispensationalists teach that the Lord Jesus will only be seated upon the throne of David upon His Second Coming, on a literal physical throne in an earthly Jerusalem, the Bible declares this event was at the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Cf. Acts 2:7, Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5.

God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup> This was according to *the eternal purpose* that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord...

The “eternal purpose” refers to the singular decree of God in which He determined in eternity all that would come to pass in history.

In Acts 2:23 Peter spoke of the crucifixion in terms of God’s decree:

<sup>22</sup>“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know-- <sup>23</sup> “Him, being delivered by *the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God*, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death...”

The ESV translates the phrase as “the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.” God knew all and planned all and purposed all that would come to pass in one singular act, the decree of God.

In Ephesians 1:5 we read of God’s decree respecting the salvation of God’s elect.

<sup>2</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup>Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, <sup>4</sup>just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, <sup>5</sup>having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, *according to the good pleasure of His will*, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:2-6)

And we read in the following verses several other expressions that could only refer to God’s eternal decree.

<sup>7</sup> In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace <sup>8</sup> which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, <sup>9</sup> having made known to us *the mystery of His will*, according to *His good pleasure* which He purposed in Himself, <sup>10</sup>that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth-- in Him. <sup>11</sup> In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined *according to the purpose of Him* who works all things according to *the counsel of His will*, <sup>12</sup> that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. (Eph 1:1 NKJ)

Here we see four more phrases or terms that refer to God’s decree in which He determined before creation what would come to pass in history.

Again, we affirm that God’s decree should be understood to encompass all that takes place in history.

The decrees of God relate to all future things without exception; whatever is done in time, was foreordained before time began. God’s purpose was concerned with everything, whether great or small, whether good or evil...

God did not merely decree to make man, place him upon the earth, then leave him to his own uncontrolled guidance. Instead, He fixed all the circumstances in the lot of individuals, and all the particulars which comprise the history of the human race from commencement to close. He did not merely decree that general laws should be established for the government of the world, but He settled the application of those laws to all particular cases. Our days are numbered, and so are the hairs of our head.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Pink, pp. 15f.

God's Word knows only the complete sovereignty of God over all the works of His hands through all of history. We read in 1 Chronicles 29:11 and 12:

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness,  
The power and the glory,  
The victory and the majesty;  
For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours;  
Yours is the kingdom, O LORD,  
And You are exalted as head over all.  
<sup>12</sup>Both riches and honor come from You,  
And You reign over all.  
In Your hand is power and might;  
In Your hand it is to make great  
And to give strength to all.

God's authority is absolute; His sovereign control is complete. "O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?" (2 Chron. 20:6). God's purposes are never frustrated nor is He ever defeated. "Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps" (Psa. 135:6).

But this knowledge of God is not acceptable to fallen human beings. They want to be the determiners of their own destiny. They insist for themselves the authority that the devil offered Adam and Eve, "You will be your own gods, determining for yourselves what is good and evil." Fallen man refashions the God of the Bible into a "god" that he can manage, manipulate, and deny, without consequences. Here is Arthur Pink's apt description of the "god" of fallen men both in and out of the church:

Of old, God complained to an apostate Israel, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself" (Psa. 50:21). Such must now be His indictment against apostate Christendom. Men imagine the Most High is moved by sentiment, rather than by principle. They suppose His omnipotency is such an idle fiction that Satan can thwart His designs on every side. They think that if He has formed any plan or purpose at all, then it must be like theirs, constantly subject to change. They openly declare that whatever power He possesses must be restricted, lest He invade the citadel of man's free will and reduce him to a machine. They lower the all-efficacious atonement, which redeems everyone for whom it was made, to a mere remedy, which sin-sick souls may use if they feel so disposed. They lessen the strength of the invincible work of the Holy Spirit to an offer of the Gospel which sinners can accept or reject as they please.

The god of this century no more resembles the Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle the glory of the midday sun. The god who is talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday school, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called Bible conferences, is a figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality. The heathen outside the pale of Christendom form gods of wood and stone, while millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a god out of their carnal minds. In reality, they are by atheists, but there is no other possible alternative between an absolutely supreme God, and no God at all. A God whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to deity, and far from being a fit object of worship, merits nothing but contempt.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp. 28f.

That is direct, but true.

However, here again is the problem. How is it that God has decreed everything that would take place in history and in His providence is realizing His full purpose in history, how can He not be accused of being the source or responsible for the evil that exists? Or another problem also arises, if given this understanding of God, how are we to regard human beings as anything but programmed robots doing the bidding of God? The answer is second causes.

## **II. God's decree in eternity regarding all that takes place in history included secondary causes, removing God from the charge of being the author or approver of sin.**

Again, our confession states the biblical truth clearly:

2. Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly; so that there is not anything befalls any by chance, or without his providence; yet by the same providence he ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

Consider the teaching of Proverbs 16:33 that essentially teaches there is no such thing as random chance in God's creation: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." The Lord orders all things, even those things that seem to be "random" to us. And consider Proverbs 16:1:

The plans of the heart belong to the man,  
But the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.

There are those who reject the Reformed understanding of the sovereignty of God because they wrongly believe it makes God the author and promoter of sin. But we affirm over against those who would argue against our teaching, man is responsible for his own actions. Those who reject our understanding of a sovereign God assume that man cannot be free to act according to his will if what we say about God's providence is true. This is wrong. Sinful man devises and chooses out of a principle of evil to act, but God overrules His actions in that they fulfill what God has decreed from eternity. The evil designed and carried out came forth from his fallen heart and mind, acted out according to his own will. We believe the Bible speaks of the free agency of men and angels. They are ones who determine for themselves to do evil, in that they are not forced or coerced by God to commit acts of evil. Evil comes forth from them. Nevertheless, we affirm that the Lord had decreed from eternity the whole of all events in history, both good and evil.

Two stories in the Holy Scriptures are commonly cited to substantiate this truth. The first is the actions of Joseph's brothers who intended to bring evil upon their brother Joseph by selling him into Egypt. But God had decreed their actions in order to eventually empower Joseph to save his family from famine and death. After Jacob, their father, had died, the brothers were fearful of Joseph's retaliation. But Joseph said to them these words:

<sup>18</sup>Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants." <sup>19</sup>Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup>***But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.*** <sup>21</sup>Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (Gen. 50:18ff)

Of course the event that displays best this truth that God in His sovereignty has decreed even the evil that men do but He is not the chargeable author of their sin, may be seen in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Peter declared this truth in Acts 2:22ff.

<sup>22</sup>Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know-- <sup>23</sup>Him, *being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death...*

These men were guilty for their egregious crime against an innocent man, but what they did was according to God's eternal decree.

We acknowledge the difficulty, we would say the "mystery" of this whole matter. But it is an issue that every honest theologian or philosopher, or thinking person must address. Consider **Herman Bavinck's** words about this matter:

Now Reformed theologians all agree that sin and its punishment are willed and determined by God. It is also perfectly true that words like "permission" and "foreknowledge" in fact no way contribute to the solution of the difficulties. The questions, after all, remain precisely the same: Why did God, knowing everything in advance, create human beings with the capacity to fall, and why did he not prevent the fall? Why did he allow all humans to fall in the fall of one person? Why does he not have the gospel preached to all humans, and why does he not bestow faith on all? IN short, if God foreknows a thing and permits it, he does that either willingly or unwillingly. The latter is impossible. Accordingly, only the former is a real option: God's permission is efficacious, an act of his will. Nor should it be supposed that the notion of permission is of any value or force against the charge that God is the author of sin, for one who permits someone to sin and hence to perish, although he is in a position to prevent it from happening, is as guilty as he who incites someone to sin. On the other hand, all agree also that sin, though not outside the power of God's will, is and remains contrary to his will, that it is not a means to the ultimate goal, but a serious disruption of God's creation, and therefore that Adam's fall [into sin] was not a forward step but most certainly a fall. It also has to be granted that, though we can with good reason take exception to such terms as "permission," "foreknowledge," "preterition," and "dereliction," no one is able to come up with better ones. Even the most rigorous supralapsarian cannot dispense with these words, either from the pulpit or from behind an academic theological lectern. For though one may assume that there is a "predestination to death," no Reformed theologian has ventured to speak of a "predestination to sin." Every one of them (Zwingli, Calvin, Beza, Zanchius, Gomarus, Comrie, et al.) has maintained that God is not the author of sin, that humans were not created for perdition, that in reprobation also the severity of God's justice is manifested, that reprobation is not the "primary cause" but only the "accidental cause" of sin, that sin is not the "efficient but the "sufficient" cause of reprobation, and so forth.<sup>13</sup>

We affirm that man is a free and responsible agent of his own evil thoughts and actions, and is culpable for his actions before a holy God who has created him and has decreed all that comes to pass in his life. And so...

### **III. The eternal and immutable decree of God being realized through God's providence in history, does not remove or even lessen man's culpability and guilt for his sinful actions.**

God has ordained all things that comes to pass, but man is responsible and accountable for every one of his sinful actions. Sin was mankind's doing which came into existence through the subtlety of the

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<sup>13</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 2: God and Creation (Baker Academic, 2004), pp. 387f.

devil. The wise man once wrote, “Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes” (Ecc. 7:29).

Sinful man cannot shift his blame to another, especially to God. But man attempts to do this. “He made me the way that I am; therefore, I cannot be held responsible and certainly not condemned because of who I am and what I do.” This possible objection to God being just in His judgment of the ones He sovereignly rules was addressed by Paul in Romans 9:

<sup>18</sup>Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. <sup>19</sup>You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” <sup>20</sup>But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?” <sup>21</sup>Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? <sup>22</sup>What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, <sup>23</sup>and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, <sup>24</sup>even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (Rom. 9:18-24)

No, the Scriptures declare that man is responsible for his own actions. He cannot dismiss the idea that he is guilty and culpable before God because God is sovereign and he made him to be a sinner and therefore God is responsible. As we read in James 1:

<sup>13</sup>Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup>But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup>Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

God has created all things and certainly all people. But man’s sin is due to himself, due to the sin that resides in him. Each of are responsible before God. Each of us will stand before God in judgment. When we do we will have no excuse, no plea. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only hope that sinners may have with view to being judged by their Creator.

#### **IV. Thankfully God has decreed that in history He would secure the salvation of His chosen people.**

God decreed in eternity that He would not have the world wholly condemned. He purposed to save a people out of the world, from their sin, unto Himself. In eternity He chose them to be saved. In eternity gave to His Son so that He might redeem them from their sin. He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. It is the eternal and immutable decree that God of His own free will has purposed to save His people through Jesus Christ. “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (2 Cor. 9:15)