

## Matthew 10:29-31 (Part II)

### Introduction

In our last study we learned about the one thing that will completely eliminate *all* fear and *all* anxiety once and for all and forever. That one thing is what we call the *providence* of God, which flows from His eternal *decree*. To quote the Baptist catechism, God's decrees are "His eternal purpose according to the counsel of His will, whereby for His own glory, He has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass". Providence then describes how God accomplishes in *history* all that He has foreordained (or decreed) from *eternity* past. Again quoting the Baptist catechism, "God's works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving *and governing* all His creatures *and all their actions*". Jesus teaches us that not one sparrow will ever fall to the ground unless the death of that individual sparrow has been decreed and ordained from all eternity by the holy, wise, and good will of God. Not one antelope will fall to the lion unless it was specifically decreed and ordained by God, and then accomplished by His providence (Job 38:39-40; Ps. 104:21). Not even one hair will fall from our heads apart from the providence of God, by which He is *directing, disposing, and governing* all creatures *and things*, from the greatest *even to the least*. In His sovereign decree and providence, there is nothing at all concerning us (even down to the number of the hairs on our head) that has been left to the chance decisions of any man's will or to the fatalism of natural causes and effects (cf. Deut. 19:4-5 & Ex. 21:13; Prov. 16:33; 1 Kings 22:28-34; Ps. 75:6-7). And *all* that God has foreordained concerning us (which is all things) is for our good, tending *always* to our salvation and *always* to the glory of His *grace*. "Fear not, therefore"! May fear never again be named among us!

But if God has foreordained all things, whatsoever comes to pass, then several questions are raised in our minds. Did God foreordain the entrance of sin into the world and even the individual sins of men and women? And if He did, wouldn't this make God morally responsible for sin? If God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, then are we all puppets on a string with no true freedom to choose? And if there is no human freedom to choose, then how can we be held responsible for anything? Whatever our answers to these questions, they must not be self-contradictory or contrary to logic. (Example: Jesus cannot have only one nature, and yet also have a second nature. God cannot be three persons and also only one person.) We need to define things as precisely and carefully as possible. We need to faithfully reject all that cannot be true, and affirm all that is true. But at the end of the day, when it comes to the sovereignty of God, all of our careful definitions and biblical statements about what is true and not true should only bring us face to face with impenetrable mystery (just like the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation). If we achieve our definitions at the expense of *mystery*, then we can know that we have fallen into error. Something that can be logically true may also be infinitely beyond all our comprehension. Therefore, we need to pray both for *understanding* and for *faith*.

- ✓ Acts 4:27-28 – For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to *do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place*.

## **I. Has God decreed and ordained even the sins of men?**

God foreordained and predetermined that certain and particular men would commit the most wicked and sinful crime ever committed (Acts 4:27-28).

- ✓ 2 Samuel 16:11 – And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, “Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the LORD has told him to.

David, whose heart convicted him when he simply cut off a corner of Saul’s robe because Saul was the Lord’s anointed (1 Sam. 24:5), can now say that God told Shimei to curse David, the Lord’s anointed. Why? Because David believed that God Himself had predetermined what Shimei would do and that God Himself was now actively governing all of Shimei’s actions. We can say the same things of the following passage from 2 Samuel:

- ✓ 2 Samuel 24:1 – Again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go, number Israel and Judah.”
- ✓ Genesis 45:5, 8 – [Joseph said to his brothers:] And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for... it was not you who sent me here, but God.

When Joseph says that his brothers should not even be distressed or angry with themselves because it was actually God (and not his brothers) who sent him to Egypt, he clearly implies that God not only overruled his brothers’ sin, but that He actually ordained the sin of his brothers. The *reason* Joseph’s brothers should not be distressed or angry with themselves is because God ordained what they did. (However, this is not at all to say that Joseph’s brothers should not repent and have sorrow for their sin.) God did not leave the death of His Son to chance or the fatalistic results of cause and effect. God decreed from all eternity that His Son should die. God didn’t just decree the death of His Son, God decreed the means of that death, including the people who would carry it out. It wasn’t by chance that Judas betrayed Jesus, and it wasn’t by chance that it was Judas. It wasn’t by chance that Pilate delivered Jesus over to be crucified, and it wasn’t by chance that it was Pilate. It was all predetermined by the sovereign *decree* of God and carried out under the direct rule of His *providence*.

## **II. Can man be held morally responsible for committing sins that God has ordained?**

- ✓ Matthew 26:24 – The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”
- ✓ John 19:11 – Jesus answered [Pilate], “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

Jesus holds Judas and Pilate and the Jewish leaders morally responsible for the things that God had predetermined and foreordained from all eternity that they would do – even to the point of saying that it would have been better for Judas if he had not been born. The Lord told Shimei to curse David, and yet David gave the following instructions to Solomon before he died:

1 Kings 2:8-9 – And there is also with you Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a grievous curse on the day when I went to Mahanaim... do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man. You will know what you ought to do to him, and you shall bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol.”

God Himself incited David to number Israel, and yet we read in 1 Chronicles:

- ✓ 1 Chronicles 21:7 – But God was displeased with this thing [David’s census of Israel], and he struck Israel.

### **III. Does God’s decree depend on Him seeing things ahead of time?**

We cannot say that God predetermined that Judas should betray the holy Son of God to His death because He looked ahead and foresaw what Judas would do. This idea is nowhere to be found in all the Scriptures (the Scriptures overwhelmingly teach the opposite; cf. Rom. 9:11, 16, 18; Amos 3:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rom. 8:29-30). God cannot look ahead and see what He has not first determined. How does God know the exact number of the grains of sand on the seashore, the number of the hairs on our head, and the number of clouds and stars in the sky at every moment of every day? How does God know these things? Because God foreordained and predetermined these numbers from all eternity! The source of all of God’s knowledge is **Himself** and His own will. All of our knowledge is second-hand and comes ultimately from outside of ourselves. This is true of every single thing that you know. But we must not think this way about God!

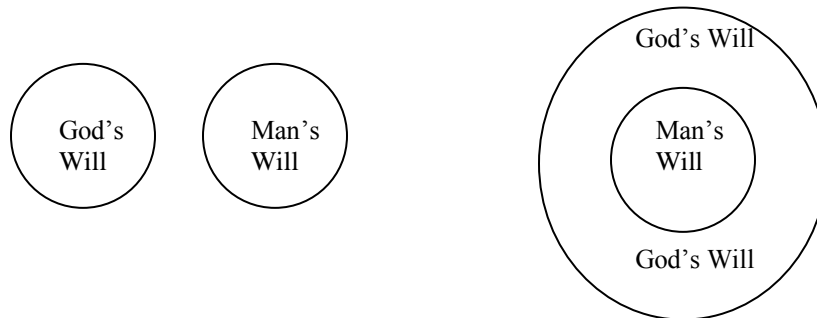
- ✓ Isaiah 40:13-14 – Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?
- ✓ Romans 11:34 – For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?

When *we* know something, it can be the simple awareness of a fact. But we must never think of God’s knowledge like this! God’s knowledge is always an expression of His *wisdom* – of His holy purposes and plans. How does God know what will happen in the future? Because God Himself is the one who has *ordained* before the foundation of the world all things that will ever happen!

### **IV. Does man have a free will?**

Judas *had* to betray Jesus because, and *only* because, His actions had been predetermined and ordained by God. In a very real sense, Judas was not free to take any other course of action (and neither were Shimei, or David, or Joseph’s brothers). **And yet when Judas betrayed Jesus He did so freely – without ever being coerced or having his arm twisted.** We know this because Judas is held morally responsible for His actions (just like Shimei, and David, and Joseph’s brothers – Acts 7:9). Of course, the definition of freedom that most people have is that we are free to act unpredictably or that we are free to act *outside of* or *independently* of the predetermining will of God. But this would mean that both God and man are equally and ultimately free, both God and man are equally and ultimately autonomous, and both God and man possess equally and ultimately sovereign wills. This is logically contradictory and so

therefore it cannot be true. Only one will can be absolutely free and ultimately sovereign and that is the will of the Creator God. Man's will is free, but not in the same way that God's will is free. We are wrong if we think of God's will and man's will as two separate circles competing against each other with God's will ultimately prevailing over man's will. No, man's will is just a circle *within* the circle of God's will. Man's will serves always and only God's purposes and accomplishes always and only what He has predetermined before the foundation of the world.



Man fell because, and only because God foreordained the fall. And yet we also know that man fell, being left to the freedom of his own will. Pharaoh's heart was hardened because *God* hardened it (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17). God hardened Pharaoh's heart because this was according to His predetermined plan and purpose (Rom. 9:14-20). It was then *because* of God's unconditionally predetermined plan that Pharaoh freely chose to harden his own heart (Ex. 8:15, 32; 9:34). Some people will say, "Look! The Bible says both things: God hardened Pharaoh's heart *and* Pharaoh hardened his own heart." This *is* true, and we *must* always be careful to affirm both things. Otherwise we will fall into the extreme of either Arminianism (man's will is ultimate) or of Hyper-Calvinism (man has no free will). On the other hand, we have to be equally careful not to say that God's act of hardening and Pharaoh's act of hardening are *both* ultimate. This is logically contradictory. One *must* flow from the other. And we know from the Bible that Pharaoh freely chose to harden his own heart *because* God had sovereignly ordained to harden His heart. This is not at all contradictory (it breaks no rules of logic), but it *is* *mysterious* and beyond all our comprehension!

- ✓ Proverbs 21:1 – The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.
- ✓ Revelation 17:15-17 – And the angel said to me... "the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.
- ✓ Proverbs 20:24 (cf. 16:9) – A man's steps are from the LORD; how then can man understand his way?

### **V. Can God be held morally responsible for the evils that He has ordained?**

While God predetermined in His absolute freedom that Judas *must freely choose* to betray His only Son, God Himself cannot be held morally responsible for what Judas did. It was not God who entered into Judas, but Satan (Luke 22:3; John 13:27). Samuel can say that God incited David against Israel and told him to number Israel because he knew that God had predetermined

what David would do and was actively governing his actions. But the Chronicler can say that it was Satan who incited David to number Israel (1 Chron. 21:1) because he knows that Satan was the tool God used to accomplish His good pleasure (cf. 1 Kings 22:20-22; Job 1:20-22). God did not plant any jealousy in the hearts of Joseph's brothers. This jealousy arose from within their own sinful hearts.

- ✓ James 1:13 (cf. 1:17) – 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.
- ✓ 1 John 1:5 – God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

It was not God's moral will that Judas should betray the holy Son of God to His death (or that Shimei should curse David, or that David should number Israel, or that Joseph's brothers should sell him into slavery). Judas ought not to have betrayed Jesus, for it was to break the clear commandments of God. And yet when Judas betrayed Jesus, He did so because it had been predetermined by the sovereign purpose and will of God. In recognition of the biblical testimony to this mystery, we acknowledge both God's decretive will (His sovereign plan and purpose) and His preceptive will (the Ten Commandments). These are not two *different* wills, but just two different aspects of the *one* will of God.

- ✓ Deuteronomy 29:29 – The secret things belong to the LORD our God [what God has decreed that man *will* do, among other things], but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever [what God has said that man *ought* to do], that we may do all the words of this law.

## **VI. If God has ordained sin and death, does this mean that God delights in sin and death?**

Since God predetermined what Judas would do, we can also conclude that God predetermined Judas' end – including his violent suicide and his eternal destruction. Indeed, God *delights* in the *holy* and *just* manifestation of His *wrath* (cf. 2 Samuel 17:14; Gen. 15:16; 1 Kings 12:10, 15).

- ✓ 1 Samuel 2:22-25 – [Eli] said to [his sons], “Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people... *But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death.*
- ✓ Joshua 11:19-20 – There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel... *For it was the LORD's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the LORD commanded Moses.*
- ✓ Romans 9:15-16, 18, 22-23 – For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy... So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills... What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.

God has foreordained and predetermined even the wickedness of man (which therefore includes his eternal destiny) because God *delights* in the holy and just manifestation of His wrath – and the corresponding display of His mercy. However, this is not the same thing as saying that God delights in the *death* of the wicked.

- ✓ Ezekiel 33:11 – Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

God has predetermined the destinies of all men (Prov. 16:4; 1 Pet. 2:8; Jude 4; Rom. 9:17), and yet He takes no delight in the death of the wicked.

## **VII. Can God do anything “beforehand” since there is no before and after in God?**

Some will say that all of our talk about what God has predetermined before the foundation of the world is irrelevant because God transcends time – with God there is no such thing as eternity past or eternity future. We completely agree with this. But when the Bible uses language, it always uses it for a reason. So when the Bible says that God *predestined* or that God chose us *before* the foundation of the world we have to ask *why* it uses this language if there is no before and after in God! The *reason* that the Bible uses words like “predestined” and “before the foundation of the world” is to show us that the *determining* reason for all that happens is God’s will, not man’s will (Rom. 9:10-12). God did not freely will that Judas betray Jesus because Judas freely chose to do so. No, Judas freely chose to betray Jesus *because* God willed that He would.

## **VIII. Since God has predetermined everything beforehand, does it matter what I do?**

Jesus knew that the time and manner of His death (down to the minutest detail) had all been planned and determined by God before the world ever began. It was impossible for Jesus to die “prematurely”. It was impossible that Jesus should die any other death than the death of crucifixion. And yet even though Jesus knew these things, He did not throw caution and common sense to the wind. When the Jews in Judea were seeking to kill Him, Jesus withdrew to Galilee (Jn. 7:1). When Jesus went up to the Feast of Booths in Jerusalem, He went up not publicly but in private (Jn. 7:10). When Jesus planned the Passover, He kept the location secret from Judas (Lk. 22:7-13). When His life was in danger in Jerusalem, Jesus withdrew to an isolated town called Ephraim (Jn. 11:54). Why is this? If everything has been predetermined, why did it matter what Jesus did? If the car accident was predetermined, then why did I drive carefully? If the date and manner of my death have been predetermined (Job 14:5; Ps. 139:16-18), then why should I ever work to “extend” my life? Why shouldn’t I jump in front of a semi truck to see if it is my predetermined time? If the exact number of God’s elect has already been predetermined (Eph. 1), then why should we witness or send out missionaries? The answer is in the question! If God has predetermined the end, and if God has predetermined all things, then God has also predetermined the *means* to the end. This is what gives *meaning* to all of our actions and actually *motivates* us to use common sense, to take precautions, to pray for the salvation of our children, and to witness and send out missionaries.

- ✓ 2 Samuel 10:12 – Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our God, and may the LORD do what seems good to him.”
- ✓ Psalms 31:14-15 – But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, “You are my God.” My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!
- ✓ James 4:15 – You ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

It is *only within* the predetermining and all-encompassing decree of God that all of our free actions can have true *meaning and significance*. Paul knew that God has unconditionally predetermined the exact number of those who are to be saved. Paul also knew that God has predetermined the means of witnessing and missions to bring in the full number of His elect (Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Therefore, Paul freely and zealously devoted himself to the work of evangelism, knowing that within God’s sovereign decree, all of his actions had true *meaning*.

- ✓ 2 Timothy 2:10 – Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

There are many who would say that unless there are some things that God has left to be determined by the will of man, then man’s actions can have no real significance. And yet we know from the Bible that all of our free actions have real meaning and significance precisely *because* of God’s unconditional and sovereign decree.

## **Conclusion**

There are many times when we are quick to acknowledge and celebrate the providence of God because it makes sense to us or because we see the ways in which we have benefited. But when God’s reasons and purposes are not obvious to *us* (especially in situations where things are not going our way), *then* we are not so quick to see the providential hand of God. Or if we do see it, then it’s only because we’ve been inventing reasons or presumptuously speculating about God’s secret purposes (this is *very common* among Christians). We need to guard against both of these extremes. We need to see God’s hand of providence in *every* situation and circumstance. And yet where God’s ultimate plan and purpose are not obvious, it is not our place to fill in the blanks (“The secret things *belong* to the Lord our God”).

There is much here to think about. I would encourage you to spend time reviewing this study and especially the many Scriptures that we have referred to. But at the end of the day, the main point is this: If we can humble ourselves before the truths of God’s sovereign decree and providence, then we will never again have any fear, anxiety, or worry – *ever – at all*. Instead, we will only and always be able to exclaim with the Psalmist and the Apostle Paul:

- ✓ Psalms 92:5 – How great are your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep!
- ✓ Romans 11:33 – Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

## **Teaching our Children**

Some of the concepts in this message will be too advanced for younger children. But on the whole, they are accessible and important for even our younger children to understand. Each of the eight main sections begins with a question. Ask your children the questions that you feel are appropriate (reword the questions as necessary) and then focus especially on the Scriptures that are cited. Refer regularly to Acts 4:27-28 at the bottom of page 1. May our children truly begin to see the unfathomable greatness of God in His sovereign decree and providence. May they learn to live always without fear!