

of fire (20:15). in Revelation 17:8 we find that those whose names are in the book of life had them written there from (or since) the foundation of the world. And here in Revelation 13:8 the book is called the book of life of the slain Lamb; and those who worship the beast are identified as those whose names have not been written in the book of life from (or since) the foundation of the world. This emphasis comports with that found in Ephesians 1:5 and I Timothy 1:9.

C. Development of the Doctrine

1. The decrees are one divine plan or purpose

The Scriptures consistently represent God's plan as being single. Yet the Bible also recognizes various aspects, parts, or phases, of that single plan. Thus, for example, we distinguish between the creative, providential, redemptive, and judgmental aspects of God's single plan and purpose.

2. The decrees are from eternity, yet are most free

The phrase "from eternity" may mean at least three things. It may mean that the decrees are eternal (i.e., that they never had a beginning, and were never formulated or framed). Or it may mean that the decrees were formulated in eternity: (i.e., before physics time began). Or it may mean that the decrees were formulated before the first act of creation (i.e., before the foundation of the world).

A number of theologians appear to lean in the direction of the first meaning, usually because of their view of God's alleged timelessness. However, if one takes the view that the decrees are eternal, and that there was no point in God's self experience when the decrees had their inception or began to be framed, then it would seem to follow that the decrees are in some sense necessary. If the decrees are necessary, then it would seem to follow that those items included in the decrees (i.e., those items that were decreed; e.g., creation and redemption) are also necessary. This means that it was necessary for God to create and to redeem, a conclusion that is rejected by orthodox theology.

If on the other hand the phrase "from eternity" simply means before the first act of creation, then the decrees can be seen to have been formulated most freely by God's own free determination and sovereign good pleasure, rather than out of some necessity imposed on Him from outside of Himself or from His nature.

3. The decrees are divine *opera ad extra* ("works to the outside")

They are distinguished from the purely immanent works of God (*opera ad intra*) which speak of the dynamic interrelationships of the persons of the Trinity. The *opera ad extra* are works of the triune God which are realized in the works of creation, providence, redemption, and judgment. The decrees pertain to those works of God that bear directly on created reality.