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GODS DECREES COVER MEANS & ENDS | *By John Dick*<sup>1</sup>

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*“Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.” Acts 27:24*

*Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” Acts 27:31*

**I**t is worthy of observation, that although Paul expressly foretold, that there should be no loss of lives during the voyage, yet when the sailors were attempting to escape by means of the boat, he said to the centurion, “Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.” How shall these things be reconciled? If God had determined to save Paul and his companions, should not his purpose have been accomplished, whether the seamen had left the ship or had remained in it? Are the divine decrees dependent upon circumstances, and liable to be reversed by the volitions and actions of men? The objection is not peculiar to the present case, but has been advanced against the doctrine of predestination in all its extent. If the counsels of God are absolutely fixed, it has been said, they will be executed, whatever may happen; and, consequently, exhortations to duty are preposterous, and the use of means to avoid one thing, and obtain another, is idle labour.

The objection has a specious appearance, which dazzles superficial thinkers; but it is founded in mistake, or intentional misrepresentation. It proceeds upon the idea, that the decrees of God are determinations respecting certain ends or events, without a reference to the means; and thus it attributes a procedure to Him who is wonderful in counsel, which would be unworthy of any of his creatures, endowed with only a small portion of reason. The objection first separates things, which cannot, in fact, be disjoined, the means and the end; and then holding up the doctrine of the decrees in this mangled and distorted light, pronounces it to be absurd. With whatever parade and confidence, therefore, it has been brought forward, it has no relation to the subject, and is only of use to destroy an extravagant and senseless theory, which has been substituted in the room of the genuine doctrine of Scripture.

When God decreed an event, he, at the same time, decreed, that it should take place in consequence of a train of other events, or as the result of certain previous circumstances. Thus, he did not propose to save Paul and his companions unconditionally, but by means of the seamen remaining on board to manage the ship, till it should be driven on the coast of Malta. . . . To say, therefore, that unless the means be employed, the ends will not be accomplished, is to assert a very simple and self-evident truth, that the purposes of God will not be fulfilled, unless they be fulfilled. . . . Let us always remember, that the means make a part of the divine decrees as well as the end.

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<sup>1</sup> From *Lectures on the Acts of the Apostles*, second ed. (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857), pp. 393-95. John Dick, 1764-1833, Professor of Theology of The United Secession Church, Glasgow, Scotland.