

John H. Gerstner, PhD, DD

Experience: Distinguished Professor Emeritus,
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary



This is lecture 7 in our series on Jonathan Edwards's theology, "The Decrees of God." Let us pray. O, heavenly Father, as we bow before Thy majesty and Thy sovereignty, we know that Thou art the Lord of heaven and earth and Thy counsel stands fast and Thou doeth Thy pleasure in all of Thy creation so we bow before Thee, and I ask only that we may know what Thy will is and honor Thy sovereign disposal of it in the affairs of mankind. Help us to understand what Edwards is saying on the subject and how that relates to what Thou hast revealed about Thine own counsel. For Christ's sake we ask it. Amen.

This is the first of two lectures on the decrees of God. We've been speaking about God and His nature and as we mentioned one of the great characteristics of the moral nature of God is His absolute sovereignty. We've mentioned repeatedly that that doctrine was repugnant to Edwards at the beginning and that his very conversion took place in connection with that doctrine as he realized that God is sovereign, has every right to be sovereign, and found a delightful pleasure in acknowledging and preaching that. So you can be perfectly sure that your anticipation that it loomed large in his whole ministry is quite a fact, and we will see how the decrees of God are understood by Edwards and even more significantly preached by Edwards.

It's surprising how many learned and unlearned people suppose that if a preacher believes in the defined decrees, especially predestination, he can't be an evangelist, or if he's an evangelist he certainly cannot believe in predestination. Predestination by God is thought to rule out the possibility of decisions by men. Decisions of men are thought to be inconsistent with the absolute decrees or determinations of God.

As a matter of fact, however, predestinarian preachers have usually been evangelistic preachers, I mean people who really understand the Reformed doctrine of predestination. I know some

people who understand a perversion of it and hold to a perversion of it who are antithetical to evangelism. I will not deny that there are some people that call themselves predestinarians who are anti-evangelistic, but what I do deny is that people who really hold the Reformed doctrine of predestination as they believe it to be taught in the Bible are not only not opposed to evangelism but are great practitioners of it.

Jonathan Edwards is probably the best example in this country of a predestinarian evangelist. This New England Puritan preached with equal vigor and an insistence the decrees of God and the responsibility of men. Indeed he preached the necessity of human response so vigorously that some scholars maintain that he had broken with a Calvinistic tradition. W. W. Sweet, for example, was once called a dean of American historians of religion, especially colonial American religion. Sweet was so impressed with the evangelistic appeals of Jonathan Edwards's preaching that he concluded that Jonathan Edwards had broken with New England Calvinism. It didn't prove that Edwards had broken with Calvinism; it just proved that William Warren Sweet didn't understand the nature of New England Calvinism or the doctrine of predestination. But it does go to show that people who ought to know better, scholars who ought to know better have an ingrained supposition. To be evangelistic, you've got to be anti-Calvinistic or to believe that it's strongly of the divine decrees you say goodbye to evangelistic preaching. Nothing could be further from the truth.

As far as Edwards is concerned, certainly from the beginning to the end of his ministry he maintained the absolute sovereignty of God, and he maintained it in the pulpit not just out of the pulpit. There are a good many people who believe the doctrine but act as if they believe it's a sin to preach it. I know some people who believe the doctrine as much as I do, but they wouldn't be found dead preaching it apparently. That's been a perennial problem.

All right, God says it, but is it wise for us to let the people know He says it? When you put it that way of course the blasphemy of the statement becomes perfectly obvious. If a person believes that Jonathan Edwards did believe that God did decree everything that comes to pass, including the salvation of men or their damnation, no minister who shares that belief dare be silent about it, and surely Jonathan Edwards was not silent about it.

It's the purpose of this particular tape to show how Edwards combined these two doctrines and this isn't artificial. I've indicated to you before that though this man was a theologian, he was a theologian of the pulpit. He was a preacher. He wasn't an academician reading lectures. He was a man preaching for the salvation of souls, every Sunday morning, every Thursday night, all that he said and all that he wrote. Some scholars think that the covenant doctrine of the early Puritans was inconsistent with the high Calvinism of John Calvin. These covenant theologians, it's supposed, unconsciously undermined the doctrine of the decrees, especially unconditional election, and prepared the way for Arminianism, which is a theology [that] denied the doctrine.

Jonathan Edwards is seen according to this theory as a pure Calvinist who called a New England tradition back to Geneva and away from covenant theology. Perry Miller was influential, probably more influential than anybody else, in spreading this notion in an essay in a publication of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts back in 1935. In his later work, *The Errand into the Wilderness* in 1956, Miller lamented what he felt was a misinterpretation of his essay and insisted that the New England Puritans "must be called Calvinists." The federal theology or covenant theology was not a distinct or antipathetic system. Granted Miller made that apology and correction before he died, but I'm afraid he still mistakenly maintained that Edwards was brushing aside, as he called it, the "rusty mechanism of the covenant."

Let me try to explain what Miller thought because it had had an incalculable influence on subsequent historical writing about the Puritans and about Jonathan Edwards. I have to explain in the first place, as I said once before, Miller was a professor of American literature. He was an expert on Emerson and a number of the earlier writers and transcendentalists and so on. It was almost an odd thing when he became interested in the Puritans; [he was] among the prophets when he was genuflecting before the shrine of Jonathan Edwards. But by the same token, he was not a theologian, he didn't understand all the fine points of theology, but he did immerse himself in a Reformed tradition of the Puritans enough that he knew a great deal about it. He had a fabulous style of communication, and as I say, his influence on American historiography has been tremendous. His basic theory was wrong at all points, I think, evenly naively wrong, but I repeat it now simply because it still has considerable influence. . . .

John Calvin was a great theologian of the divine decrees. He lived in a sort of theological stratosphere too fine and rarified for ordinary mortals to breathe, so his successors, the Puritans in England especially, who are men of the pulpit in everyday affairs and had to talk to ordinary people and had to make things plain to them and spell out their duty and so on, they introduced this concept of the covenant, an agreement between God and man where man had something to do. They couldn't breathe that atmosphere where God's sovereignty was absolute, and Miller seemed to think that the Puritans believed that it would rule out any serious human participation and they had to alleviate the discomfiture of that abstract theology by the very practical doctrine of the covenant.

Then we come to Jonathan Edwards. Several centuries after John Calvin, another gigantic figure whose head was in the heavens, who breathed a very rarified intellectual atmosphere, who was quite at home with a purist sovereignty decree thinking of the great Genevan and so being above this sort of patronizing almost compromising what Miller called "incipient Arminianism" of the covenantal Puritans, Edwards was a real throwback to John Calvin and a preacher of pure doctrine.

If I may mention one anecdote in this particular connection, I'll tell something that happened. I knew Perry Miller casually, and he'd asked me to do some work for him at one particular point and so on, and when I wrote the first seventy pages of the first book on Edwards that I ever published, I sent it to Perry Miller for two reasons: one, I wanted to get his expert criticism, and two, I wanted to offer some expert criticism to him. I knew when he read my chapter on Edwards's view of the covenant he would have to say, "Gerstner's out of his mind" or "I have goofed," one or the other. Miller didn't know the manuscripts very well. He knew them somewhat, and he was not really very greatly interested in the printed sermons either or even they could have headed him off on that particular mistake that Edwards was against the covenant in the interest of an abstract, pure Calvin as Miller conceived of it, predestinarianism.

I never got an answer to what I sent to Miller because he died shortly after. He was in Japan lecturing at the time, and I had sent this to Harvard where he was a resident professor and he died before . . . I don't whether he even read my document at all, but he had been getting criticism from other people as well, and he was recognizing his mistake, that's the reason I read that kind of

modification that he expressed in *The Errand into the Wilderness*, but that idea is still with us, that the whole concept of covenant [is] incompatible with the absolute decrees of God. According to Jonathan Edwards, it was not, according to John Calvin, it was not, but it's not so evident in John Calvin as it is in Jonathan Edwards. The covenant doctrine is there, and it's been shown by many scholars-to-be in the great Genevan but it spread all over. Jonathan Edwards was preaching it constantly and so never for a moment did he see any conflict between the idea of absolute predestination and the covenant doctrine.

Carl Bouge, [in] his work on the covenant doctrine of Jonathan Edwards, has particularly spelled this out fully and adequately in his treatise on that subject. Edwards was a both/and theologian, both a covenant and a Calvinistic theologian. He was neither merely a predestinarian nor merely an evangelist. He was a predestinarian evangelist. The fixity of the divine decrees in no way altered the responsibility of men, he contended. It was, he preached, a mark of human perversity and blindness or satanic guile to think so. He pressed his hearers for decision and warned them against procrastination because of theological quarrelings and quibbles about the decrees. He did not say, as Calvin had said, that hell was made for the overly curious, but he did certainly insist that once God had spoken it behooved men to listen to what He said and not argue about the rightness or wrongness of it.

How Edwards conceived the steps of salvation within the framework of the divine decrees and without any violation we'll consider. It may be in order here to show that Edwards was such a preacher, and this can best be seen by a glance at his preaching on the epistle of the Romans. Sermons on Romans were a natural occasion for Edwards to set forth the actuality of the divine decrees and the necessity of human action. A number of them are devoted to a consideration of the matter. The sermon on Romans 9:18 may serve to illustrate his approach. We've already noted its strong development of the divine attribute. This is the way he entitles it: "God Doth Exercise His Sovereignty in the Affair of Men's Eternal Salvation." That's a conclusion Edwards draws from Paul's instances cited in the preceding verses of "Divine Preferences" even among the descendants of Abraham.

After stating this doctrine, Edwards first asked what sovereignty is. He says, "It's God's absolute independent right of disposing of His creatures to His purpose. It is unconstrained as God acts according to His mere good pleasure" (always in consistence

with justice, you understand, and so on) “and this sovereignty is without any proper obligation because God has an independent right to His creatures. The implication of such a right is that God may bestow or withhold salvation without prejudice to any of His attributes. If He’s bound by anything such as keeping His promises, this is only because He has sovereignly chosen to make these promises.”

Edwards then shows that it may be consistent with justice, mercy, majesty, and truth for God to save or to damn. In this discussion he has in view the sacrifice of Christ which satisfies divine justice and repairs the divine majesty. This is the way he puts it. “Since Christ has wrought out the work of redemption and fulfilled a law by obeying, there is none of mankind whom He may not save without any prejudice to any of his attributes. Without this grace, God’s justice and other attributes demand damnation. What is God’s right to do is also His pleasure to do.” Edwards continues, “He not only may save some being determined solely by His good pleasure but He actually does so. He does so by giving the means of salvation to some nations and individuals while withholding them from others.”

This is Edwards, you see, and mind you this is a public sermon, preaching to these Northampton farmers. Going through this in perfect analytical detail just as he does in *The Freedom of the Will* or his essay on spiders or anything else, he notices every little detail, and since salvation never comes unless God has decreed the people will hear the Word of God, he makes it clear that God shows his sovereignty in the first place by seeing to it that some nations get the message and some don’t. He’s sovereign even in the circulation of the Scriptures and the exposition of it. Where God does give the means of grace, He’s sovereign first of all whether you [like] it or not, He continues to exercise His sovereignty by making the means effectual or not as He pleases. In the very same family He saves and He damns. In some instances, He saves where there are few means of grace and on the other hand He permits to perish in the midst of spiritual abundance. He saves some heinous indifferent sinners and permits some seekers not to find.

Edwards’s words are, “Some are converted and saved who never had so great strivings as some who notwithstanding perish.” This whole concept of seeking evangelism I’m going to devote a couple of tapes to later on, but right now I’m saying that some people are aroused . . . enough to be actively concerned about their salvation who nevertheless perish.

There are two basic reasons (let me say this also may interest you) that Edwards talks about: circumstantial unbelief, that is, people whose circumstances are such that they can't believe. They haven't any opportunity to believe. They never hear the message. They're sinners and are condemned on the basis of their sin, but God is sovereign in not giving them the means by which they could be saved. Edwards doesn't want you to miss a single aspect of the divine sovereignty which applies to every aspect to the whole salvation question. . . .

There are two basic reasons for God's exercise of sovereignty in the salvation of men. A fundamental reason is God's purpose to reveal all His attributes in the creation. Here again I remind you we work through many of the attributes as Edwards has developed them, we've shown you how he's tried to be faithful to every aspect whether it's the wrath of God or whether it's the mercy of God, whether it's a natural attribute or a moral attribute, but what he [says] that I haven't mentioned before and his end for which God created the world and so on is it's for the revelation of all God's attributes. That's what it's all about, and so here with respect to human salvation which is the thing which concerns us humans most of all of course, a fundamental reason [is] it's God's purpose to reveal all His attributes, He can reveal no one attribute perfectly in intensity, argues Edwards, but He does make an extensive revelation of His total being. He is beyond our understanding. I keep coming back to the basic theology of Edwards. God is knowable but He's not comprehensible. We can know Him in part but not fully, and insofar as we are able, God has been pleased to reveal Himself, and so He makes an extensive revelation of His being but not intensively as He could were we an infinite being capable of receiving Him.

One ingredient of His deity is sovereignty, absolute and independent, and since the whole purpose of creation is to reveal the attributes of God and sovereignty is a part of the divine nature, it must be revealed and it is going to be revealed in the decrees pertaining to man's salvation.

The second reason he gives is only a modification on the first: the greater the creature over which the sovereignty is exercised, the clearer the revelation of this sovereignty. Hence, God exercises it over the souls of men and angels as well as over the lower creation. No sparrow falls without your God's knowledge. God decrees the fall of the sparrows. That's a revelation of God's sovereignty. One sparrow falls and one doesn't, one sparrow lives and one doesn't,

but what Edwards is saying is a far greater revelation of the same sovereignty that one man lives and one man dies and God's sovereignty is truly applicable to the human situation as it is to the lower world.

Since Edwards found this doctrine a peculiarly successful means of conversion, we're interested to see how he makes application of it to his hearers. You get the irony of that? As I was saying earlier, many people suppose that if you believe in predestination, you can't even preach evangelistically. Edwards not only preached evangelistically but also found the preaching of predestination particularly useful and successful in preaching. It's almost as if he's laughing at that particular type of criticism of people who think of predestinarianism incapacitates a person for preaching when as a matter of fact it's especially adapted to successful evangelistic preaching.

Edwards found this doctrine particularly successful. First, people are to learn how utterly dependent they are on God. Second, they are to adore the awful and absolute divine majesty. It's like that girl I was telling you about in the last lecture: never so close to not being a Christian when I realize about his sovereignty, and I saying you're never so close to being a Christian. We must come to adore the awful and absolute sovereignty of God. Third, says Edwards, they are to exalt God in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for His sovereignty is the aspect of His grace most honored in Scripture. Here again, I can't repeat too often this theology of Jonathan Edwards as Jonathan Edwards conceived it is a biblical theology. What he's preaching from beginning to end is the Bible as he understands it. Divine sovereignty is not only taught in the Bible, it is stressed in the Bible. It's most honored in the Bible and he as a minister of God's Word is certainly going to do justice to that doctrine. "Let us marvel," he says, "at the condescension of a sovereign God who has chosen to bind Himself in covenant. Avoid presumption on the one hand for God is sovereign."

It's almost as if Edwards is pointing his finger at the Arminians and says get that idea out of your head that you are the sovereign determiner of all things. Recognize God is sovereign, that's the very first thing. Avoid presumption, God is sovereign, but avoid discouragement also for God is sovereignly gracious. The greatest sinner among you may be saved, Edwards preached, if God please. Men will be saved, he infers, when they recognize that God alone can save them but only if He pleases. The sermon ends on a note of encouragement: "Let you be what sinner you may. God can if

He pleases greatly glorify Himself in your salvation.”

Here again I remind you that when Edwards preached to a congregation he did not assume that all his people were converted. I know some churches where they have a worship service in the morning for the saints and then they have a popular service in the evening for the sinners, and I know some ministers who wouldn't think of making an evangelistic invitation in their morning sermon assuming that all the people there have already accepted Jesus Christ. That would amuse Puritans. Puritans always maintained that there should be a high standard as we'll notice when we come to qualification for communion or church membership, but that no matter how thoroughly an applicant was examined, he still might not be a converted person and a Puritan pastor and certainly Edwards was an example of it would preach to his people as professed Christians who may or may not be, and this kind of statement which I have read was preached to that congregation of Northampton saints, professed believers. I'll read it again. "Let you be what sinner you may. God can if He pleases greatly glorify Himself in your salvation." This would be said to people who came to communion as well as people who did not come.

The unpublished sermon on Romans 8:29 is entitled "The Things Which God Doth for the Salvation and Blessedness of the Saints Are Like an Inviolable Chain," but this inviolable chain begins with the eternal covenant of redemption. Edwards is using a very favorite metaphor of the Reformed theologians concerning Romans 8:28 and 29. William Perkins called it "the golden chain." It's a chain which has one anchor linked in heaven and the other in eternity by means of which the elect of God are bound to God from eternity past in His decree to eternity future in their glorification, so Edwards uses the same language. The first link in this chain that he sees is the covenant of redemption, that is, the agreement among the persons of the Godhead and the fullness of time that the Son would become incarnate of Mary and be delivered up for the offences of God's people and the Holy Spirit would be that salvation home to the elect.

Its next links are the creation of the universe and the plan of man and his fall in time. At the moment of the fall the actual application of this covenant to the elect begins. We shall later see how it's applied in the outward call of the Word of God and through the various workings of the Spirit of God from conviction to conversion. We shall note all the intermediate steps between

the ways men take that do not issue him salvation at all although they begin hopefully in that direction; we'll consider the way of seeking and the use of means. We shall see how the Word of God comes alive in the elect in the moment of illumination as they are regenerated and saving faith is wrought in them that this faith is a true faith and if so that it's a persevering faith. We shall also notice there are marks of a genuine work of grace in the soul, what they are, and how we may judge them. These are Edwards's links or steps to salvation, and they're all set within the divine framework of the eternal decree.

Concerning the decrees, we read, "It is objected that this is a speculative point." Edwards remarks, "So might they say, 'Jesus being the Messiah' is a speculative point." As I [asked in earlier lectures,] "Did Edwards had a sense of humor?" That strikes me as humorous, you see. If you're going to object to the decrees on the ground it's speculative, you better note you're going to have to object to the incarnation of Jesus Christ on the ground it's a speculative point, and it's a point that you have to understand with your mind and it requires mental energy and intellectual acumen. You don't have to be a PhD, you don't have to be a genius, but you do have to use the brain in order to understand the person of Jesus Christ.

Speaking of Whitby, Daniel Whitby, "as typical of the Arminians in their efforts to avoid the Calvinistic teaching of the decrees," Edwards writes, "but everyone must be sensible of the unreasonableness of such shifting and varying and turning into all shapes to evade the force of Scripture." Edwards is saying here that though this is a speculative point, though you have to think (you have to think about even the messiahship of Jesus), but at the same time if you do think honestly, Edwards is maintaining, you will see that the Bible teaches the decrees, absolute decrees that ultimately determine men's salvation and damnation and that the Arminians (and he cites Daniel Whitby as one of them, contemporary of his in England and so on) what they're doing is trying to escape what's so manifestly clear. They're using their heads, but they're using their heads in order to avoid an escape what their heads teach them is clearly what the Bible says.

What are the decrees of God then, according to Edwards? The very definition is the proof. Here's the way Edwards puts it: "Whether God has decreed all things that ever come to pass or not, all that admit the being of God admit that He knows all things beforehand." He continues, "It is self-evident that if God knows

all things beforehand, He either approves of them or He does not approve of them.” That is, He’s either willing they should be or He’s not willing they should be. What could be plainer than that? I’m reading it very slowly, and I’m even changing the language just slightly so you’ll understand it a little bit more immediately, before he comes to his punch line.

Let me read that once again. Just follow the way Edwards would spell out to his congregation, the way he would spell out to his seminary class if he were teaching it or something like that, the self-evident nature of the divine decrees. Let me go over this just once again and then I’ll read his punch line. “Now whether God has decreed all things that ever come to pass or not, all that admit the being of God [that there is a God], they admit that God knows everything beforehand.” You Arminians, you admit foreknowledge as much as we do, okay? All right. “Now it is self-evident that if God knows all things beforehand, He either approves of them or He does approve of them.” What could be plainer, okay? That is, He either is willing that they should be or He’s not willing that they should be. Okay?

Here’s the punch line: “But to will that they should be is to decree them.” That’s all there is to decrees. Saying “Let it be.” It sounds like the Beatles. “Let it be.” “Que sera sera.” But we have in the picture here that neither the Beatles or the popular song have in mind is a God who absolutely controls what shall be or not be and if He knows it all beforehand, . . . and certainly all Christians admit that He either likes them or doesn’t like what He sees, and He either lets it be or doesn’t let it be, and if it is it must be what He wants it to be. If He didn’t want it to be, it would not be.

So to decree is to will. To will is to permit things to be which will be. God permits all things that are to be. Therefore, God decrees all things. Edwards has the Arminians on the hook from which he never permits them to escape, and that hook is their fatal but inescapable admission that God knows all things beforehand or is omniscient. To grant that is to grant everything. That’s Jonathan Edwards. That’s also Martin Luther. That’s also John Calvin. That’s also Augustinus Aurelius. That’s also Loraine Boettner. It’s just about every Reformed theologian who has ever appeared in the scene, but nobody ever presented it any more simply or acutely than has Jonathan Edwards. That is the point at which on the other hand every Arminian departs from the self-evident where he cannot even be an Arminian. To him that has not the decrees even the foreknowledge which he does have shall be taken away

from him.

Let me explain that a little bit more fully here. I personally, this is Gerstner speaking now, I think I'm being utterly true to Jonathan Edwards, I don't think I have any right just to express my own opinion on these points. This is your lecture on the theology of Edwards and while I may give some of my own expiations, I do so only because I think they are a further elucidation [or] clarification of the Edwardsian viewpoint and incidentally an indication that there are people living who still believe this.

I have always maintained that whence an Arminian thinks very sharply and very clearly about this point that Edwards is making here, he will realize that Edwards is absolutely right. Now he has to do one of two things. He either has to go along with Edwards and affirm the decrees as Edwards does, or he does have to deny that God does know everything's going to come to pass, and as soon as he does that, as soon as he denies the foreknowledge or omniscience of God, he knows he's denying God.

There is no such thing as a finite God. An ignorant deity is a contradiction in terms. He doesn't need Jonathan Edwards to remind him of that, and I have seen Arminians who once becoming aware of that have gone either way, either into Reformed truth or right straight out of the Christian religion. Most Arminians don't do either, but they don't do either because I don't think they think along these patterns and if they think along these patterns, I personally don't know any more than Edwards knew, how they could possibly avoid the conclusion that God must have decreed everything that comes to pass for the obvious reasons given.

Edwards's grandson, Timothy Dwight, was to observe later that even if God had not decreed foreknowledge would be fatal to Arminian freedom, just the same Edwards did so, too, of course. If God had no influence over creatures at all, yet since He would have foreseen their actions, these actions would be certain. Arminianism has always tried, however, to interpret certainty unlike necessity as consistent with freedom. That's Fletcher, the great Arminianizer of a bygone century.

In his reply to Toplady [he] has affirmed certain futurity but rejected Toplady's infallible futurity as fatalistic. That's certain futurity and inevitably, what's the difference? If it's certain, then it's going to happen. There's no possibility it will not happen. Nothing that anybody does would be anything otherwise than it

is certainly foreknown to be. You're playing with words here if you try to make a difference between inevitable futurity and certain futurity. It's perfectly true I may assert that the word *certain* is less troublesome than say the word *necessary* or *inevitable* because sometimes people associate with the idea of *inevitable* or *necessary* a compulsion or forcing or violating of human agency and choices.

That's the reason Charles Hodge, for example, who believed the decrees as much as Jonathan Edwards, was never comfortable with the use of that language *necessary*. If God has decreed something, it's necessary to come to pass because he seemed to feel that that would suggest a bulldozing, a reducing of men to puppetry, a taking away of any free responsible activity on their part. Jonathan Edwards never for a moment believed that, and people who use that language don't believe that, and I'm suggesting that any of you listening on the tapes here don't get the impression that this involves compulsion any more than the word *certainty* does, and what Edwards is trying to point out here, he don't care what words you use here, as long as you recognize that if anything comes to pass, it must be the will of God, because if it weren't the will of God it would not come to pass.

What could be more self-evident than that is what Jonathan Edwards is saying and what I'm saying as well that grows right out of a doctrine which every theist, not to mention every Christian Arminian theist, who believes in God immediately recognizes. The futility of attempting to reconcile certainty and contingency—contingency's the favorite Arminian term here, it's meant to suggest something other than certainty, it's means to suggest that things depend on ultimate actions here and that somehow or other that precludes the possibility of their being certain before the actions are taken, okay?

You see, the Arminian has his problem. He wants to believe in God and he wants to affirm that God knows everything and, as Edwards says, if He knows everything and He permits everything to come to pass and it's His will that comes to pass and it cannot be otherwise, the Arminian still wants to get out of what he feels is a debacle even though if he's in a corner he's painted himself into the corner himself, and so he uses the word *contingency*, and the word *contingency* means that it isn't certain, that it depends on the power of contrary choice and so on.

This is what Edwards absolutely decimated and said of Borden P. Bowne once, when he engages an opponent in debate he not only annihilates his opponent but he dusts off the spot where he stood. Edwards's great treatise on the freedom of the will is a dusting off of the spot where Arminianism once stood. It is by far the most thorough refutation that Arminian anthropology has ever had in respect to the divine theodicy and decrees.

I'll have to close this particular part of the discussion of the decrees with one statement from *The Freedom of the Will*, and then we'll take up with that in the next tape.

This is the way Edwards puts it in his *Freedom of the Will*. "This is most certain that if there are any things that are so contingent or dependent that there is an equal possibility both of there being or not being so that they may be or they may not be. God foreknows from all eternity that they may be and also that they may not be. . . we need no revelation that teaches this and furthermore, if God knows all things that are to come to pass, He also foreknows whether those contingent things will come to pass or knows at the same time that they are contingent and that they may or may not come to pass."

I don't even have time to read the rest of the paragraph. Do I need to read any more than that? Is anything more patent than that? Is anything more absurd? And to suggest the opposite position, that God foreknows and yet it's uncertain. If you say it's uncertain, how can God foreknow? He foreknows it may or may not be. If it may or may not be, He cannot foreknow that it will be or He cannot foreknow that it will not be. If He knows then it's going to be or not to be according as He knows it. Anything other than that, according to Jonathan Edwards, would be, alas, absurdity.