



PRAYER, DECLARATION, AND “DECREEING PRAYER”

POSITION PAPER

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In recent years, a number of people in the Church have adopted the teaching of “decreeing prayer” or simply “decreeing.” This is the belief that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Church by its very nature, have been given authority and power to “decree,” and that this can be done in the form of prayer. “Decreeing prayer” is conceived of as an authoritative command or law issued by a believer to cause something to happen, most generally to bring what is in heaven into the earthly realm. Often “decreeing prayer” is spoken of and used in conjunction with a “declaration.” Because of this, it is the practice of some to begin or say in their prayer, “I decree and declare...” It is believed that through these words, and specifically “decreeing,” that Christians have authority and power to cause what is spoken to take place. Thus, people will say such things as, “I decree healing,” “I decree prosperity,” “I decree the salvation of...” It is the position of this paper that:

- (1) Prayer¹, declaration and decreeing are different things.
- (2) While prayer and declaration are taught and supported in Scripture, there is no teaching or support in Scripture for the practice of “decreeing prayer” or “decreeing” by Christians.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PRAYER?

Fundamental to the matter of “decreeing prayer,” as well as declaration, is the definition and nature of prayer. Related to this definition is:

- (a) the direction of prayer, or toward Whom or what is prayer spoken, and
- (b) the inherent authority of prayer.

These are in distinction to the direction and authority of making a declaration and “decreeing prayer.”

Prayer can be defined with two senses: general and restricted. In the most general sense, prayer is communicating and communing with God in some way. Most often, it is with words, speaking to God about anything one wants to say. Anybody who can speak can pray and talk to God, whether it is an infant who cries, “Daddy” or “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15) or an adult. However, sometimes known words are not possible, as Romans 8:26² states, “In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words.” Overall, prayer is an act of worship that includes praise and adoration for Who God is and thanksgiving for what He has done. However, in the more

1 As the next section on the nature of prayer states, it is prayer in the restricted sense that is different from declaration.

2 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Scripture are from NASB Updated (NASB95).

restrictive sense, prayer is a request, a petition, an asking God for something one desires.³

The English word “pray,” as well as “prayer,” comes from the Latin *precare*, which means “to ask earnestly, beg, entreat.” There are a number of Hebrew words translated “pray” and these include:

- (a) **palal** which means “to intervene, intercede.” The root idea is “fall” and means to “fall down to the ground in the presence of one in authority pleading a cause.”⁴ (Genesis 20:7; Numbers 11:3; Deuteronomy 9:20, 26; 1 Samuel 1:10, 27; 2:1; 7:5; 2 Chronicles 7:14)
- (b) **atar** which is used as a submissive modest request⁵ and is related to the word “sacrifice.”⁶ (Genesis 25:21)
- (c) **na** which means “please.” (Genesis 32:11; Numbers 14:17, 19; Deuteronomy 3:25; 2 Samuel 15:31)
- (d) **athar** which means “plead, supplicate, entreat. (Exodus 8:9)
- (e) **tefilah** which means “beg, beseech, implore.” (Psalm 69:14)

Also, a common metaphor for prayer is “to cry out.” (Numbers 12:13; Judges 3:9)

The Greek word translated “pray” is *proseuchomai* which occurs 90 time in the New Testament. It literally means “to want, desire, or wish toward.” This is why the classic definition of prayer given in answer to question 90 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “What is prayer?”, is “Prayer is an offering up of our desires to God.”⁷

There are numerous synonyms for prayer in the English translations of New Testament:

- (a) Ask - **aiteo** (Matthew 6:8; 7:7-11; 18:19; 21:22; John 14:13-14; 15:7, Colossians 1:9; James 1:5-6; 1 John 5:15). This was a primary word Jesus used for prayer (John 14:16; 17:9, 15, 20).
- (b) Petition - **deesis** (Luke 1:13; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Timothy 2:1)
- (c) Supplication - **deesis** (Philippians 4:6; Hebrew 5:7)
- (d) Entreat - **deesis** (1 Timothy 2:1; 5:5)
- (e) Request - **erotao** (John 16:26; Romans 1:10; Philippians 4:6; 1 John 5:15)
- (f) Beseech - **deomai** (Matthew 9:38; Luke 10:20)
- (g) Appeal - **parakaleo** (Matthew 26:53)
- (h) Implore - **parakaleo** (2 Corinthians 12:8)
- (i) Intercede - **huperentugchano** (Romans 8:26)
- (j) Intercede/Intercession - **entugchano** (Romans 8:27, 34; Hebrews 7:25)

As is evident from these words, a prayer, in the restrictive sense, is a plea, petition, and request of asking the sovereign God for what one needs, wants or desires. All the parables of Jesus concerning prayer are about requesting and petitioning, not declaring, let alone decreeing: the son asking his father for bread, the friend at midnight imploring his neighbor for food, the widow petitioning the judge for justice, the tax collector pleading for mercy. This is the nature of a prayer - to ask, plead, request.

The direction of prayer is toward God.⁸ Thus, for example, the Lord’s Prayer begins, “Father” (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2). This is expressed in the primary physical act and metaphor for prayer in Scripture of offering incense that ascends up to God (Exodus 30:8; Psalm 141:2; Luke 1:10; Acts 10:4; Revelation 5:8). While

3 Notice the distinction in Philippians 4:6, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” “Prayer” is “supplication and “request” and it is made “with thanksgiving.”

4 Jeff A. Benner, *Ancient Hebrew Research Center*

5 Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon

6 Harris, Archer, Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol.2, page 708

7 The answer goes on to say, “for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.”

8 “Pray” in the most inclusive use of the word can also be a request or petition to someone or something believed to have ability and power to answer the request. Thus, it can be the humble request to a person, especially one in authority, or an idolatrous prayer made to other gods. However, it always a request that one be please to answer.

Christians have authority to have access to God through the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit (John 14:6; Ephesians 2:18; Hebrew 10:19-22), we have no authority or power to cause a prayer to be answered. This is demonstrated in the Biblical language of God hearing or not hearing our prayer, and even hiding His face from us because of our sin. The LORD states this in Isaiah 1:15, “So when you spread out your hands *in prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.” And again in Isaiah 59:2, “But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden *His* face from you so that He does not hear.”

Prayer, in essence, is the humble expression of total dependence on God Who cannot be compelled or manipulated to answer prayer but grants answer to prayer as He is pleased according to His gracious will and holy purpose for His glory. While people speak of “the power of prayer,” prayer itself actually has no power. The power of prayer is God Who answers prayer. This was taught by the Lord Jesus in one of the most important principles on “the power of prayer” in Matthew 18:19: “I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.” Jesus did not say, “If two decree,” but “if two agree.” They agree about what “they may ask,” which is prayer to the Father. This is because the power that causes the prayer to be answered and “done for them” is God, “My Father who is in heaven.” This is why Jesus spoke of “faith as small as a grain of a mustard seed.” It is not how big the seed is but how big God is, for He is the power Who hears and answers prayer.

WHAT IS A DECLARATION?

The English word “declare” comes from the Latin *declarare*, the root being *clarus* which means “clear” and *de-* meaning “thoroughly.” Thus “to declare” means “to make thoroughly clear.” A declaration means “to say something in an emphatic way, proclaim, tell, formally announce, state, assert, affirm something that is, make known, reveal.”

The primary Hebrew word translated “declare” is *nagad* (63 times in KJV). Also *achvah* is translated “declare” once in Job 13:17.

There are a number of Greek words translated “declare” in the NASB:

- (1) *apoangelo* - “to announce” (Luke 8:47; John 4:23; Acts 26:20; 1 Corinthians 14:25)
- (2) *parangelo* - “to order, command” (Acts 17:30)
- (3) *anaangelo* - “to announce, report” (Acts 20:27)
- (4) *homologeō* - literally “to same word,” “to confess” (Matthew 7:23)
- (5) *apophthengomai* - “to speak out” (Acts 2:14)
- (6) *boao* - “to cry out” (Acts 25:24)
- (7) *horizo* - “to divide, separate, designate” (Romans 1:4)

The root of (1), (2) and (3) is *angelo*, which means “message,” and is the root of the English word “angel” which literally means “messenger.”

In Biblical terms, a “declaration” is a message or a word, spoken or written, which makes known the truth about something. Countries make a “declaration of war” which means that they make known that a state of war now exists.⁹ When a person enters a country, a customs agent requires the person to “declare” what they are bringing into the country, which means they are to make known and reveal what they have in their possession.

While declarations can be and are to be an essential aspect of prayer in the general sense because they are speaking to God, in the restricted sense of the definition of prayer, a declaration is not a prayer because it is not a petition, it is not an asking God for something one needs or desires. To declare is to make something known, to acknowledge what exists, to proclaim the truth of what is. For example, concerning God, Deuteronomy 4:13

⁹ For example, the words of United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed to the Congress after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 were, “I ask of the Congress declare a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.”

states, “So He declared (*nagad*) to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, *that is*, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.” God made known the covenant and terms of the covenant that He established between Himself and His people. In the general sense of prayer, when one confesses their sins to God, they make known and acknowledge the truth of what has existed, which is that they have sinned. Then, in the more restrictive sense, one prays and asks God to forgive their sins.

To “declare” God’s word is to make known or acknowledge the truth of what God has revealed in His word. Such a declaration does not make it truth or create a new reality. It acknowledges and makes known what already is reality. A change can take place in a someone who hears it. However, this is simply a change in their awareness and comprehension of that truth, not a change in the reality of what has been declared . Thus, a declaration does not create something or bring into existence that which it declares, other than the awareness and alignment of someone’s comprehension of it. It is, in essence, a word about what already exists, the truth about what is. To declare and proclaim God’s word is to make known the truth about what God has already said, which is the truth.

The practice of declaring or making a declaration of the truth of what exists is clearly supported in Scripture. Through the prophet Isaiah the LORD said, “Let them give glory to the LORD, and declare (*nagad*) His praise in the coastlands” (Isaiah 42:12). And again through Isaiah He says, “And they will declare (*nagad*) My glory among the nations” (Isaiah 66:19). To declare the glory of God is to make known what already is and to proclaim the reality of it. The Psalms are full of declarations concerning the truth of Who God is, what He has done, is doing and will do. Psalm 9:11 says, “Declare (*nagad*) among the peoples His deeds,” and Psalm 19:1 states, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring (*nagad*) the work of His hands.”

When a declaration is directed toward God it becomes an aspect of prayer in the general sense because it is speaking to God. The last statement of the Lord’s Prayer is not a prayer request but a declaration: “For Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory” (Matthew 6:13). The first part, and most of the prayer of the church recorded in Acts 4:24-28 in response to persecution began with declarations.¹⁰ It is then, after the declarations are made that the requests, or prayer in the restricted sense, are offered in verses 29-30.¹¹

Declarations do not create something about God or a new reality but acknowledge and proclaim the truth about Who He is and what He has done. Christians can make declarations in order to make known these truths. This can be spoken to God as a part of prayer in the general sense, to people as an aspect of worship or witness, and to the spirit realm. Christians can, in effect, clear, establish and align the spiritual atmosphere of a particular place and environment by making declarations concerning the truth of Who God is, what Christ has done, Who Christ now is, and what He will do, as well as who they are in Christ. Or Christians can declare to the Satanic spirits the truth about who and what Christians are in Christ and Christ’s victory and dominion over Satan and His kingdom. In making these declarations, Christians do not create something new or bring into exist a new reality but rather they orient, bring a shift and align themselves and the spiritual realm to and with the truth of God as it is revealed in His word. While Christians have a delegated authority in Christ,¹² the source of authority of such declarations is not the person making the declaration but God Himself Who has given and revealed His word in Scripture.¹³

10 Acts 4:24-28 = “And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, “O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them,²⁵ who by the Holy Spirit, *through* the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, And the peoples devise futile things?’²⁶ ‘The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.’²⁷ 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,²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.”

11 Acts 4:29-30 = “And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence,³⁰ while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”

12 For example, Jesus gave authority to His disciples (Matthew 10:1; Luke 9:1).

13 The Westminster Confession, chapter one, *Holy Scripture*, paragraph 4 states, “The Bible speaks authoritatively and so deserves to be believed and obeyed. This authority does not depend on the testimony of any man or church but completely on God, its author, who is himself truth. The Bible therefore is to be accepted as true because it is the word of God.” *The*

WHAT IS “DECREEING PRAYER”?

“Decreeing prayer” is conceived of as a means or “tool” to cause something to become a reality, take place, or happen. Most often it is said to be a tool by which Christians cause what is in heaven to manifest in the earthly realm, to cause God’s will and purposes to come to be, or to destroy the work of Satan. For example, a person is sick and one “decrees” that they be healed. The decree is believed to be a tool that causes the person to be healed. A person is in need of provision and so one “decrees” that their needs be met, or even that abundance of wealth be theirs. The decree” is believed to be the cause that brings about prosperity. People are engaged in spiritual warfare in some way and a “decree” causes the enemies plans to be destroyed. A “decree” is spoken toward a situation or circumstance and is believed to cause that situation or circumstance to change according to what has been decreed. While it is usually said that every believer, as well as every church, has authority to make a decree, sometimes it is said that certain conditions are required for a believer to decree.

As should be evident from this definition, “decreeing prayer ” is not prayer, either in the general or restricted sense. While prayer is directed toward God, a “decree” is directed toward a situation or circumstance. Whereas in prayer the authority to cause the prayer to be answered is God Himself, because prayer is a humble acknowledgement of dependency upon God, in “decreeing” it is believed that God has given authority to the believer to make decrees. While the power to answer prayer is God, a “decree” is believed to have inherent power to cause what is decreed to become a reality.

And a “decree” is not declaration. While a declaration is an affirmation of truth that already exists, a decree is conceived of as being a cause, power or tool that creates a new reality. Even though some may speak of quoting Scripture as a “decree,” to quote Scripture is actually a declaration and not a “decree.” Humans do not “decree” the reality of Scripture into existence, for only God Himself is the authority to issue His word.

An accurate understanding of the meaning of the word “decree demonstrates that a “decree” is neither a prayer nor a declaration. The English word “decree” comes from the Latin *decretum*, meaning “something decided,” and the word *decernere*, meaning “to decide.” In its common usage, a decree is an official decision issued by a legal authority, such as a court of law, a head of state, or a governmental body. As such, the decision has what is called “the force of law,” and what has been decided is then made known and issued as a command, edict, or order. The decree is what was decided by the authoritative body.

The English word “decree” is used 50 times in 49 verses in the NASB translation of the Old Testament. It is the translation of various Hebrew and Aramaic words, or no word at all:

- (a) **dabar** = “word, thing” (2 Chronicles 30:5; Daniel 9:25)
- (b) **teem** (Aramaic) = “judgment, understanding, report, advice” (Ezra 4:19, 21[2x], 5:3, 9, 13, 17; 6:1, 3, 8, 11, 12, 14; 7:13, 21; Daniel 3:10; 6:26)
- (c) **taam** = “taste, feeling, discernment” (Jonah 3:7)
- (d) **nistwean** = “letter” (Ezra 7:11)
- (e) **dath** = “order, law” (Esther 2:8; 3:15; 4:3; 8:14, 17; Daniel 2:9, 13, 15; 3:1, 29)
- (f) **gazar** = “divide, decide” (Esther 2:1, Job 22:28)
- (g) **gezerah** = “an authoritative announcement” (Daniel 4:17, 24)
- (h) **kathab** = “writing, document” (Esther 3:9; 8:8)
- (i) **emer** = “word, appointed” (Job 20:29)
- (j) **chaqaq** = “cut, inscribe, carve” (Proverbs 8:15; 31:5; Jeremiah 5:22)
- (k) **haq** = “portion, prescription” (Psalm 2:7; 94:20; 148:6; Zephaniah 2:2)
- (l) **charas** = “to threaten, fix, determine” (Isaiah 10:23; Daniel 9:27; 11:36)
- (m) **hatak** = “determined” (Daniel 9:24)
- (n) **no word** (Ezra 6:13; Job 23:14)

A decree is an order, directive or command issued by one in authority such as King Cyrus (Ezra 4:19), King Darius (Ezra 6:1) King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:21), King Ahasuerus (Esther 2:8), the King of Nineveh (Jonah 3:7), and God (Psalm 2:7). Proverbs 8:15 states, “By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice.”

The word “decree” is used 6 times in the NASB translation of the New Testament.¹⁴ Each time it is the translation of the Greek word *dogma*. These are official orders, rules, and/or regulations from:

(a) Caesar:

- Luke 2:1 = “Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.”

- Acts 17:7 = “and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.”

(b) The Jerusalem Council of Apostles and Elders

- Acts 16:4 = “Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.”

(c) Moses

- Colossians 2:14 = “having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

(d) Legalistic Christians

- Colossians 2:20–21 = “If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,²¹ ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’”

In none of these verses in the Old and New Testaments is a decree conceived of as being a prayer. A decree is not a prayer. Thus, the phrase “decreeing prayer” is, at best, an erroneous and inaccurate designation. Also, in none of these verses is “decree” used with the sense of having power inherent to it to cause what is decreed to come into existence or come about. It is fundamentally, a decision made about some matter, and that decision is made known as a command, edict or law.

THE NATURE AND POWER OF A DECREE

There is a subtle shift from the actual nature and power of a decree to what is conceived of as “decreeing prayer” and “decreeing.” The shift is based on the false assumption and belief that a law or decree has inherent power to cause it to be obeyed, that a “decree” has power in itself to cause it to be realized.¹⁵

Laws and decrees have no inherent power to cause them to be obeyed. This is abundantly clear in Scripture where the law of God commands people how to live yet, instead of it having the inherent power to cause obedience, the opposite actually happens. The laws, commands and decrees from God provoke sin and disobedience. Romans 5:20 states, “The Law came in so that the transgression would increase.” Romans 7:5 says, “For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.” This is the reality of the person described in Romans 7 who knows the law of God, agrees that it is good, has the desire to obey the law but cannot because another law or principle of power, the law or power of sin, is at work in him to cause him to disobey the law of God (Romans 7:7-24). Such people do not merely disobey the law, they cannot obey the law of God because they are in bondage to sin and have no power or ability (*dunamai*) to obey the law (Romans 7:2; 8:7). A decree has no inherent power to cause what it commands to become reality.

¹⁴ It is used 4 times in the KJV - Luke 2:1; Acts 16:4; 17:7; 1 Corinthians 7:37

¹⁵ Aristotle identified four different kinds of causes: (1) “the material cause,” meaning the material or stuff out of which the cause happens, such as the wood of a table, the marble of a statue, or the flesh and blood of a human being; (2) “the formal cause,” meaning the form or arrangement of the thing in relationship and distinction to other things, such as the ball bounces because it is round and not flat; (3) “the efficient or moving cause,” meaning the power that makes something happen or to become reality; and (4) “the final cause,” meaning the purpose or goal for which it happened. As it is used here, “cause” means (3), the “efficient or moving cause” or the power that makes it happen.

Obedience to a decree or law is secondary and completely outside of the law or decree itself. The power to obey the law of God is not the law itself but the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ And this is true of human decrees. Luke 2:1 says, “a decree (*dogma*) went out from Caesar Augustus that a census be taken of all the inhabited world” (Luke 2:1). What was it that caused this decree to be obeyed and realized? It was the choice of each individual to obey it. Thus, Luke goes on to state, “And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city” (Luke 2:3). The word translated “on his way” is in the Greek middle voice. The middle voice emphasizes that the subject him or her self causes the action - “the boy himself hit the ball.” It is not the passive voice meaning something outside of the subject was the moving cause for the action to happen to the subject - “the boy was hit by the ball.” The cause of action for the decree to be obeyed was not inherent in the power of the decree, but was secondary to the decree, being in power of the will and choice of “everyone who was on his way.” A decree has no more power to cause something to happen than a stop sign has to power to make a car stop.

Perhaps one reason people can assume a law has inherent power to cause it to be obeyed is the use of the phrase “force of law.” The word “force” infers that there is power in the law. However, the phrase “force of law” does not mean that a law itself has inherent power to cause it to be obeyed. Rather, it means that a law has a binding legal authority that people under its jurisdiction are required to obey. There is a fundamental difference between “authority,” which is the right to issue a law or give a command that is to be obeyed, and “power,” which is the actual force or ability to cause the law to be obeyed. A police officer has authority to give orders in the name of the law, and this is symbolized in his or her badge. But neither the badge nor the words, “in the name of the law,” have any power to cause anyone to obey the officer. The officer’s gun is the power of force, yet even then a person has the choice to obey or to be shot. The power to obey is actually in the one choosing to obey it and completely outside the law itself. The power to stop a car is not in the authority of a stop sign, nor in the authority of the governing body that issued the law and placed the stop sign at the particular location. The power to cause the law to be obeyed is the person driving the car who applies the brakes, and sometimes that doesn’t work! The phrase, “force of law” does not mean the a law, or a decree, has power to cause it to be obeyed or come about.

The belief that “decreeing prayer” causes something to happen is a confusion between the difference of authority to issue a decree and the power to cause it to happen. It is a misunderstanding of the inherent power of a decree to cause what is decreed to be obeyed and realized, which is that it has no inherent power to cause it to be obeyed. “Decreeing prayer,” being conceived of as a decree, has no power to cause what is “decreed” to come about.

“Decreeing prayer” is neither prayer nor should it be understood to be the cause to make anything happen. While the Scriptures teach and support the practice of prayer and declaration, they do not teach the practice of “decreeing prayer.”

SUPPOSED SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR “DECREEING PRAYER”

(1) JOB 22:28

The translation of Job 22:28 in the KJV is “Thou shalt also **decree** a thing, and it shall be established unto thee.” The NASB is similar being translated, “You will also **decree** a thing, and it will be established for you.” This verse, as it is translated in KJV and NASB, with the key word “decree,” is the foundational verse used to support the teaching of “decreeing prayer.”

From the outset, there are two things that should be observed about this verse:

(1) The verse itself says nothing about it being some kind of prayer.

(2) The context of the verse shows that what is spoken of is a completely different thing than prayer. The previous verse (22:27) speaks of prayer stating, “You will pray to Him, and He will hear you.” It then says,

¹⁶ Romans states, the only power that gives a person the ability to obey the law of God is the Holy Spirit (Romans 7:6; 8:1-2). The powerlessness of the law is expressed in the term “the letter,” in distinction to “the Spirit,” where “the letter” is the bare decree and command of God that has no power to cause obedience. It is the Spirit Who gives that power (Romans 7:6; 2 Corinthians 3:6).

“and you will pay your vows.” Following these two assertions, the NASB goes on to read in verse 28, “You will also decree a thing, and it will be established for you.” Three things are identified in these verses: prayer, paying vows, and that which is translated in the KJV and NASB as making a “decree.” To interpret verse 28 to be about prayer, and specifically “decreeing prayer,” is unwarranted.

The most important thing, however, to understand about this verse is that the KJV and NASB are inaccurate translations of the Hebrew. The English Standard Version more accurately translates the Hebrew, “You will **decide** on a matter, and it will be established for you.” The NIV translates it, “What you **decide** on will be done.” This is a completely different concept from making a “decree,” let alone speaking a “decree” that is a “tool” that causes something to happen. The fact that there are significant differences in the translations of the Hebrew¹⁷ should not only make people cautious about the meaning of the verse but, most of all, avoid making this the primary and foundational verse for a major doctrine and practice such as “decreeing prayer.”

The context of this verse is the accusation against Job by one of his friends, Eliphaz the Temanite. Eliphaz makes a conditional statement based on the assumption that Job has sinned and by repenting and returning to God, certain things will then come about (Job 22:21-30).¹⁸

The Hebrew word translated “decree” in the NASB and KJV is *gazar*. The NASB translates the Hebrew and Aramaic words into “decree” 50 times, and only two of these is it the Hebrew word *gazar*. Thus, *gazar* is not the primary word that might be translated “decree.”

gazar is used 21 times in 13 verses in the Old Testament, being translated “**divide**” 3 times, “**cut off**” 1 time, “**cut down**” 5 times, “**slice off**” 1 time, and “**decree**” 2 times. In 7 verses, the word is used double or two times, and translated as “**cut off**,” “**cut down**,” or “**slice off**.” The 13 verses are:

- 1 Kings 3:25 = “The king said, ‘**Divide** the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other.’”
- 1 Kings 3:26 = “Then the woman whose child *was* the living one spoke to the king, for she was deeply stirred over her son and said, ‘Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him.’ But the other said, ‘He shall be neither mine nor yours; **divide him!**’”
- 2 Kings 6:4 = “So he went with them; and when they came to the Jordan, they **cut down [2x]** trees.”
- Esther 2:1 = “After these things when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been **decreed** against her.”
- Psalm 88:5 = “Forsaken among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom You remember no more, and they are **cut off [2x]** from Your hand.”
- Psalm 136:13 = “To Him who **divided** the Red Sea asunder, for His lovingkindness is everlasting...”
- Isaiah 9:20 = “They **slice off [2x]** *what is* on the right hand but *still* are hungry, and they eat *what is* on the left hand but they are not satisfied; Each of them eats the flesh of his own arm.”
- Isaiah 53:8 = “By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered That He was **cut off [2x]** out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due?*”
- Lamentations 3:54 = “Waters flowed over my head; I said, ‘I am **cut off [2x]!**’”
- Ezekiel 37:11 = Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say,

¹⁷ A translation of the Hebrew into the Greek of LXX would be “but the righteousness of your way of life will be established.” There is no reference to a “decree.”

¹⁸ Job 22:21–30 (NASB) = “Yield now and be at peace with Him; thereby good will come to you. ²² Please receive instruction from His mouth and establish His words in your heart. ²³ If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored; if you remove unrighteousness far from your tent, ²⁴ and place *your* gold in the dust, and *the gold of Ophir* among the stones of the brooks, ²⁵ then the Almighty will be your gold and choice silver to you. ²⁶ For then you will delight in the Almighty and lift up your face to God. ²⁷ You will pray to Him, and He will hear you; and you will pay your vows. ²⁸ You will also decree a thing, and it will be established for you; and light will shine on your ways. ²⁹ When you are cast down, you will speak with confidence, and the humble person He will save. ³⁰ He will deliver one who is not innocent, and he will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands.”

“Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely **cut off [2x]**.””

- Habakkuk 3:17 = “Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines, *Though* the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be **cut off [2x]** from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls...”

These verse demonstrate that the essential meaning of *gazar* is to “**divide**” and not “decree.” While there are two places in the NASB and KJV *gazar* is translated “decree,” “decree” is not the basic connotation and meaning of the word.

Beside Job 22:28, the other place where *gazar* is translated “decree” in the NASB and KJV is Esther 2:1. It says, “After these things when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her.” In the NASB, there are seven other times the English word “decree” is used in Esther to translate Hebrew words (2:8; 3:9, 15; 4:3; 8:8, 14, 17). Five of these (2:8; 3:15; 4:3; 8:14, 17) are the translation of the Hebrew *dath*, which means “a law.” The two others, in 3:9 and 8:8, are the translation of *kathab*, meaning “writing or document.” Thus, besides *gazar*, two other Hebrew words are translated “decree,” and the Hebrew words *dath* and *kathab* have a more basic meaning of a law that has been issued by an authority.

The basic meaning of *gazar* is “**divide**.” To “divide” is to “distinguish, to separate in order to identify clearly, to discern, to decide.” It is the opposite of “confuse” which means, literally, “con” “with” and “fuse” “together” - two or more things fused together, thus the confusion. To “discern” is to “divide” or “unfuse.” In the context of Esther 2:1, the use of *gazar* has the basic meaning “to divide” as in “to determine or decide.” It does not have the primary meaning of a “decree that is a law that has been issued,” even though the KJV and NASB translate it “decree.”¹⁹ The context shows that “the decree” was subsequent to the prior determination and decision of what to do about her. Thus, it would better be translated, “what she had done and what had been decided against her.” The fact that different Hebrew words, *dath* and *kathab*, which have the more basic meaning of “a law” and more closely connote the idea of a “decree,” are used seven times in Esther demonstrates that *gazar* does not have the basic meaning of a “decree” but rather a “determination or decision.”

This is the meaning of *gazar* in Job 22:28. Eliphaz the Temanite is saying that once Job is right with God, these other things will be proven to be true. “You will pray to Him, and He will hear you; and you will pay your vows. You will also **decide, discern or determine** a thing, and it will be established, **proven to be true** for you” (Job 22:27-28). Eliphaz is not saying that what Job “decrees” will be a cause of that thing to become a reality, as if he is like God Who has the power to create with His word. He is saying that what Job has discerned, determined or decided to be true will prove to be true. Thus, Job 22:28 says nothing about prayer or decreeing, let alone “decreeing prayer.” There is no support in this verse for such a practice, let alone building a major doctrine on it.

(2) THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF *EKKLESIA*²⁰

Another support for the concept of “decreeing prayer” is an appeal to the original meaning and inferred connotation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which is translated “church”²¹ in the New Testament. The *Ekklesia*²² was an assembly in the city-state of Athens during the fifth century before Christ.²³ It was open to all male citizens over the age of 18 with 2 years of military service. It was designated “*Ekklesia*,” which means “called from or out of” - *ek*, meaning “from or out of” and *klesia*, meaning “call” - because the members were called forth by the trumpet of the herald summoning them to the public assembly at a particular location. It was responsible for declaring war, military strategy, electing the military leaders (*strategoi*) and other officials. It

19 The ESV does translate this “what had been decreed against her.”

20 This Greek word is also transliterated as *ecclesia*.

21 The word “church” comes from the Greek word *kupiakos*, which literally means “pertaining to the Lord” or “that which belongs to the Lord.” It is only used two times in the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 11:22 of “the Lord’s Supper,” and Revelation 1:10 of “the Lord’s day.” *kupiakos* transitioned into English word “kirk” and then “church.”

22 In its original use, *Ekklesia* was the proper name for the assembly, thus the word is capitalized.

23 There are differences in scholarly material as to the exact dates.

nominated and elected magistrates, thereby indirectly electing the members of the Aroepagus, which functioned as the high court of appeal for criminal and civil cases. It had the final say on legislation and the right to call magistrates to account after their year of office. It originally met once every month, but later it met three or four times per month. Votes were taken by a show of hands. A quorum of 6,000 was required. On the basis of this historical and original use of *Ekklesia* it is inferred and taught that the *Ekklesia* was the primary governmental body that issued laws for the whole of the Greek nation.

Support in the New Testament for *ekklesia* meaning a governmental assembly that issues laws and decrees is that it is used three times, in Acts 19:32, 39 and 41, where it is translated “assembly.”²⁴ It is then asserted on the basis of the original meaning of the word and its use three times in Acts 19 that the actual meaning and connotation of the word *ekklesia* in the New Testament is that it is an assembly that has governmental authority from the Lord Jesus Christ to make laws and issue decrees. From this, it is taught that individual Christians are given authority to issue and speak decrees, specifically decrees in the form of “decreeing prayer.” These “decrees” then become the cause by which what is decreed comes to pass and becomes reality.

This inference, assertion and practice of “decreeing prayer” is not supported by (a) a more precise understanding of *Ekklesia* in its original use in the city-state of Athens, (b) the actual background for the use of the Greek word *ekklesia* in Scripture, specifically in the Greek translation of the Old Testament called *The Septuagint* (LXX), and (c) the use of *ekklesia* in the New Testament.

(a) The Original Use of *Ekklesia*

When one analyzes the original context, meaning and use of *Ekklesia* in its original context, these things are evident:

(1) The word *Ekklesia* originated and was used in the city-state of Athens, not in the Greek “nation” as a whole. While this does not have implications for the original meaning of the word, it does have implications for the assertion that the *Ekklesia* was the governmental body for “the nation as a whole,” and that this idea can be applied to the Church as a whole. They are not an exact equivalent as is assumed and asserted.

(2) The *Ekklesia* was a public assembly that convened in a particular location composed of a specific, limited group of people - males, 18 years of age, who had two years of military service, who attended the assembly. This is similar to “congress” in distinction to the body of citizens of the nation as a whole. A convened assembly limited to certain individuals is not the nature of the Church, which is the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ composed of every member who is a true believer in Christ.

(3) The *Ekklesia* had limited authority to act. There had to be a quorum that exercised its authority by way of a majority vote and only met at certain times. Individuals did not have the authority to make laws or “decree,” but only the assembled body of the *Ekklesia*. It was not the highest court of appeal, for the Areopagus was. If one were to apply this in a strict way to the New Testament church, or more precisely to a particular or local church however it is constituted, so that a church is understood to be a governmental legislative body, the church would have to assemble at a specific time, have a quorum and then take a vote in order make laws and “decree.” Also, an individual would have no authority to issue an authoritative decree.

(4) While the *Ekklesia* had authority to declare war and to, in effect, veto laws, a primary responsibility was to elect officials who would be the principal agents of the government as well as military. Thus, it was not a pure democracy in which the people in the assembly had all the authority and power to act and govern, but a form of republican or representative government.²⁵ Also, it is not usually known that beside the *Ekklesia*, Ath-

²⁴ *ekklesia* is used 115 times in the New Testament. In the NASB, it is translated “church” 112 times, and “assembly” 3 times, only in this context in Acts 19.

²⁵ There are three basic forms of church government: (1) Congregational, which is pure democracy with everyone having authority to vote and participate in the rule of the church, (2) Episcopal, which is rule by one over the others, and (3) Presbyterian, which is representative whereby “elders” are elected who have authority to rule. The *Ekklesia* was, therefore, more of a Presbyterian government not Congregational, in which every member has the authority to participate in the decisions of the government.

ens had another assembly that solely dealt with lawmaking. This assembly was composed of representatives of different geographical areas.²⁶

These facts demonstrate that while the *Ekklesia* could be construed as the *primary* governmental body in Athens, it was not the *principal* law making and governmental body of the city-state, let alone “the nation as a whole.” Nor did an individual have any authority to make a law or issue a decree, let alone the power to cause it to be realized.

It is also important to observe that by the time of the first century in the Roman culture, the designation of an *ekklesia* was simply “an assembly” and not the primary governmental, lawmaking body of a city, let alone of the empire. This is the way it is used in Acts 19:32, 39 and 41 where it is translated “assembly.”

The context of Acts 19 shows that, while this “assembly” is called an *ekklesia*, because it gathered as a result of the dispute over the idol worship that was threatened by the ministry of the Apostle Paul of the city of Ephesus,

(a) The authority to resolve the dispute was not the “assembly” but the “courts and proconsuls” who were the principal governing authorities in the city (Acts 19:38). This shows that by this time in the first century in Roman culture an *ekklesia* was not the principal or even primary governmental body, let alone the body that made laws and decrees.

(b) The *ekklesia* in Acts 19 was not deemed to be “lawful” (*ennomos* - root word “*nom*” meaning “law”). This shows that the *ekklesia* in Acts 19 did not have any authority to act in any way, this it was not inherently a governing body.

These things demonstrate that at this time in the Roman culture the meaning of *ekklesia* had transitioned to no longer have the connotation of “governmental body” to simply that of “an assembly” in the general sense.

It should also be observed that caution must always be used when appeal is made to the original meaning of a word because the meaning of words change, transition and evolve over time. The meaning and cultural connotation of a word can become different or even opposite of the original meaning. The farther away a word is from its original context, the greater the potential for the change of meaning and connotation. This is especially true when a word is borrowed from one culture and used in another culture as was *ekklesia*, which was taken from the Greek culture of Athens to be used in the Roman culture. There are many examples of this in the English language. One is the word “doom.” In the Old English, it originally meant “a law, judgment or decree” but came to exclusively mean “fated or condemned to death or destruction.” Another example is the word “protest” which originally meant “to make a solemn declaration or testify” and transitioned to “a statement or action of disapproval.” While a word may continue have its original meaning, the determining factor for its meaning is how it is used in the context of the historic time period and culture.

(b) The Use of *ekklesia* in the Greek Old Testament

The most significant factor for the meaning and connotation of *ekklesia* in the New Testament is not its original use in Athens, Greece, but its use in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, *The Septuagint* (LXX). It should be obvious that the Jewish writers of the New Testament living in the first century would use the Old Testament, and specifically the Greek of the LXX, for the controlling meaning and primary connotation of *ekklesia* and not its use in the Greek culture in the city-state of Athens 500 years earlier.²⁷

The most basic meaning of *ekklesia* in the Old Testament is that it is simply “an assembly” or “congregation.”²⁸ When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into the Greek language of the LXX about 300 years before Christ, the translators chose the Greek word *ekklesia* to translate the Hebrew word *qahal*, which means “an

²⁶ *Popular Controversies in World History*, Steven L. Danver, editor, Volume 2, Chapter 2, The Greek city-states were democratic”

²⁷ One can think of the famous statement by Tertullian (150-240 A.D.), “What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?”

²⁸ The English word “congregation” comes from the word “congregate” meaning “to assemble.” In the NASB the Hebrew word *edah* is most often translated “congregation” while *ekklesia* is most often translated “assembly.”

assembly.” *Ekklesia* occurs 80 times in the LXX and it always translates *qahal*, or words from the same root, except three times where there is no actual Hebrew word.²⁹ A *qahal* could be an assembly for religious purposes or for other purposes because the word itself did not have any distinct religious connotations. It is for this reason that in certain places the Old Testament would speak of “qahal of Yahweh,” the assembly of the LORD,” meaning “the assembly of people that belonged to the LORD.”

This distinction is seen in Numbers 16:3. The greater context is that after God had saved His people from slavery in Egypt, He made covenant with them and revealed the plans for the making of the Tabernacle, which would be the place where His holy, manifest presence would dwell in the Holy of Holies above the Ark of the Covenant. God then revealed and commanded that the only ones who could draw near and approach His holy, manifest presence in the Tabernacle were the priests who were of the line of Aaron. But a number of people objected to this and rebelled against the revealed will and word of God saying that every one of the people of Israel is “holy” and, therefore, should be able to be a priest to draw near to God’s holy, manifest presence in the tabernacle. So Numbers 16:3 states, “They assembled (*qahal*) together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘You have gone far enough, for all the congregation (*edah*) are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly (*qahal*) of the Lord?’”

The Hebrew word *qahal* is used two times in two different ways. The first time it is used simply to designate as the group of people who “assembled together.” This group assembled as a faction that was in rebellion against God that came together with the common complaint and grievance against the leadership of Moses, Aaron and, most of all, God.

The other place *qahal* is used is in the phrase “the assembly of the LORD.” The words “of the LORD” define and give the distinct meaning to the kind of the assembly this is. It is the assembly that belongs to the LORD and is gathered for the purpose of God. In designating this *qahal* as the “assembly of the LORD,” it identifies it as the people of God as a whole - not just a group of people, but all the people of God. It is “the assembly” of people who belong to the LORD and have been gathered for the purpose of the LORD.

Perhaps the most significant thing to observe about the use and meaning of *ekklesia* in the Old Testament, especially in the foundational books of the Pentateuch written by Moses, is the historic, cultural context. The “*ekklesia* of the LORD” is the identification of the people of God as a whole and their relationship to God. The LORD was the lawgiver and “the *ekklesia* of the LORD” was the covenant people of God who received His laws and decrees in order to obey them.³⁰ *ekklesia* did not and could not have the meaning, or even slightest connotation, of it being a governmental body that issued laws and decrees. Such a connotation would have been utterly contrary to the fact that it was God alone Who was the lawmaker, King and sovereign governing authority over His *ekklesia*. This demonstrates that in the minds of the translators of the LXX 300 years before Christ the word *ekklesia* had completely transitioned from its original meaning and connotation of being a “governmental body” to merely and only meaning “an assembly.”

This meaning and connotation of *ekklesia* is seen in the words of Stephen in Acts 7:38. It should be observed that Stephen was a Hellenistic Jew, meaning his primary language was Greek and not Hebrew, so his primary Bible would have been the LXX. It was also the Hellenistic Greek speaking Jews who were his primary persecutors.³¹ In his speech he states concerning Moses and the people of God in the wilderness, “This is the one who was in the congregation (*ekklesia*) in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and *who was* with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you.” The “congregation” or *ekklesia* was not “a governmental body” that issued decrees to bring God’s kingdom to the earth but the people of God who, along with Moses, received God’s laws and decrees to obey them. It was in this way that God’s kingdom came to the earth as His people received and obeyed His laws and decrees and then obeyed them.

The fact that Stephen uses *ekklesia* in regard to the people of God in the wilderness shows (a) the LXX
29 Deuteronomy 4:10; 1 Chronicles 28:2; 2 Chronicles 10:3.

30 Exodus 24:3, “Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!”

31 Acts 6:1, 9

was the controlling factor for its meaning and connotation from the earliest time of church history, and (b) the early church did not understand the word *ekklesia* to mean or have the connotation of “a governmental body that made laws and decrees.”

It can also be observed that while *ekklesia* means “called out” - from its original use in Athens of the assembly being “called out” - the Hebrew word *qahal* does not have this sense. It simply means “assembly.” While “the *qahal* of the LORD” could be called to assemble by the sound of a trumpet (Numbers 10:7), the basic meaning of the word *qahal* was not “called out.” A *qahal* was a group of people that assembled together, whether for religious purposes or not, whether as the congregation of God’s people as a whole or as other groups. For these reasons, the controlling meaning of *ekklesia* in its use in the LXX is that it is “an assembly.”

(c) The Use of *ekklesia* in the New Testament

The authorizing use of the word *ekklesia* in the New Testament is the Lord Jesus Christ who said, “I will build My *ekklesia*, My church” (Matthew 16:18).³² He uses it again in regard to the final sanction of the church discipline of one who has sinned, saying, “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church (*ekklesia*); and if he refuses to listen even to the church (*ekklesia*), let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:17). There is no explanation or definition of the word, for it is understood that the disciples knew what Jesus meant because of its use in the Old Testament.

It is the Hebrew word *qahal*, which was translated into the Greek LXX as “the *ekklesia* of the LORD,” that was the background for how Jesus used the word. It is because the word “*ekklesia*” merely meant “an assembly” that Jesus did not say, “I will build a church,” or “assembly,” but emphatically said, “I will build My church - My *ekklesia*.” Just as in the Old Testament the “assembly of the LORD” meant that it “belongs to the LORD” and was gathered for His purposes, so Jesus speaks of the assembly that is His - His people, His Church - which He will gather for His purposes.

It is because this is the historic background of *ekklesia* that the Church throughout her history has defined “the *ekklesia* of the Lord Jesus Christ,” not as a governmental law making body, but as “all the people throughout all of history who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is His Church because He purchased every member of His Church with His blood.

While *ekklesia* primarily means “an assembly,” an implied meaning as it is

it is used in the New Testament is that the Church is “the assembly of those who are called.” The root of *ekklesia* is the Greek word “*kaleo*” which means “to call.” While the exact meaning of *ekklesia* is “called out from,” the overwhelming use of the word “call” in the New Testament is not “called out from,” that is the world and sin, but “called to.” Believers are called by God “into fellowship with His Son” (1 Corinthians 1:9); to be “saints,” “holy ones set apart to God” (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2); to know “the hope of His calling” - hope meaning “confident future expectation” (Ephesians 1:18; 4:4); “toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14); “into His glory and kingdom” (1 Thessalonians 2:12, 14).

The Church is composed of all those who have been called and summoned by God to the Lord Jesus Christ.³³ This is the original context of Christ’s use of *ekklesia* in Matthew 16:18. He first asks His disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13), and then, “But who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15). Peter confesses, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16:16). Jesus first makes known that his confession of Who He is came by way of revelation of God the Father in heaven, which would have been by the work of the Holy Spirit in Peter’s heart and mind. Jesus then says to him, “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18). What is the rock Jesus is speaking about that will be the foundation stone on which He will build His *ekklesia*? It is the confession that Peter

³² Jesus’ actual words would have been in Aramaic (see Mark 5:41; 7:34). However, that is irrelevant for two reasons: (1) we do not know what Aramaic word He used, and scholars continue to debate what it was; and (2) the authoritative words of Scripture of the New Testament and of the Lord Jesus Christ that were inspired by the Holy Spirit are in Greek.

³³ Hebrew 12:23 makes known, it is the assembly of God’s people not only on earth but also in heaven stating, it is the “church (*ekklesia*) of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.”

made about Who Jesus is, that He is “the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Believers are not called to an institution, organization or governmental body. They are called to a Person - the Lord Jesus Christ - to living, vital, personal relationship with the Son of God. As such, the fundamental nature of the *ekklesia* is not that it is a governmental body that makes decrees which cause God’s kingdom to come to earth. The *ekklesia* is first and foremost a confessional body, an assembly of those who confess the truth of Who the Lord Jesus Christ is and thereby enter God’s kingdom by declaring their faith, allegiance and covenant loyalty to Him as King and Lord of their lives.

The designation by the Lord Jesus of “My *ekklesia*” also shows that the fundamental meaning of *ekklesia* is not that it is a “governmental body issuing laws and decrees” but rather the people who are to receive and live according to the laws and commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church is His kingdom, and His kingdom comes to earth as His people do His will and keep His commandments by the power of the Holy Spirit. His law is written on their hearts by the Holy Spirit, which is the nature of the New Covenant.³⁴ His will is done on earth, not by His people speaking a “decree” but by living in the Spirit and walking and working according to the Spirit according to the decrees given them.

A brief overview of *ekklesia* in the New Testament shows that it is generally used in the following ways to designate:

- (1) The entire body of Christ through all generations composed of Jews and Gentiles from every nation who are not only on earth but in heaven (Ephesians 3:6, 10, 21; 5:23, 25, 27, 29; Hebrews 12:23).
- (2) All the Christians professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in a particular city or geographical area (Acts 8:1; 9:31; 11:22; 13:1; 15:41; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:2; 2:22; Revelation 2:1, 7, 8, 11, 12, 17, 18, 23, 29; 3:1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 22; 22:16).
- (3) A particular church or churches composed of Christians gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 16:4, 5, 16; 23; 1 Corinthians 11:18; 14:23).
- (4) A particular group of believers who, being members of the Church, are spoken of as representative of the Church as a whole (Acts 8:1, 3; Philippians 3:6).
- (5) An “assembly” (Acts 19:32, 39, 41).

Ekklesia is used 115 times in the New Testament, and in the NASB it is translated “church” 112 times and “assembly” 3 times. In its meaning and controlling connotation in the New Testament when used of “the church,” which is the Body of Christ, *ekklesia* never means “a governmental body that issues decrees that are tools that cause the kingdom of God to come to earth.” Nor is this its meaning in the three times it is used in Acts 19. As seen above, the word “decree” was never used of the church as a whole or of the activity of individual Christians. There is no support for this interpretation or for the practice of “decreeing prayer” or “decreeing” based on the use of *ekklesia* in the New Testament.

(3) “YOUR KINGDOM COME, YOUR WILL BE DONE”

Another support for the practice of “decreeing” and “decreeing prayer” is the interpretation of the words of the Lord Jesus in the Lord’s Prayer, and especially the second petition, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10; also Luke 11:2). It is said that the petitions are not requests but actually decrees, and we are to use these decrees to cause what is in heaven to come into the earth realm. The basis for this teaching is a misinterpretation of the English translation of these petitions because of a misunderstanding of the actual meaning of the Greek words.

The critical and determining factor for the interpretation of these words is the mood of the verbs which shows these are petitions and not “decrees.” The mood of five of the six petitions is imperative. In the Greek language, the mood of the verb defines and represents the way the word is to be understood and conceived of in relation to reality.³⁵ It is vital to understand that the imperative mood is not conceived of as bringing something

³⁴ Hebrews 8:10

³⁵ Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. MacMillian, Toronto, 1927, p. 165

into reality. Rather it expresses “the appeal of will to will. It expresses neither probability nor possibility, but only intention, and is, therefore, the furthest removed from reality.”³⁶ It is a misunderstanding of the imperative mood to conceive of it as being a statement that causes something to happen or to bring something into reality.

In the Lord’s Prayer, there are (depending on how one enumerates them) six petitions. As traditionally translated into English they are:

- (1) Hallowed be Your Name
- (2) Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven
- (3) Give us this day our bread
- (4) Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors
- (5) Lead us not into temptation
- (6) Deliver us from evil

The mood of five (5) of the petitions is imperative.³⁷ Depending on the context, there are four nuances that the imperative mood can be interpreted as meaning.³⁸ They are:

- (1) The imperative of command
- (2) The imperative of prohibition
- (3) The imperative of entreaty
- (4) The imperative of permission

It is obvious that these are not imperatives of prohibition, as if we were prohibiting these things from happening. Nor are they imperatives of permission, as if we, in speaking these words, we are giving permission for these things to happen.

The only basis for these petitions to be conceived of as “decrees” is that they be interpreted as an imperative of command. However, a command does not have inherent power to cause what is commanded to happen or to be realized. It is an appeal or directive of one will to another will. The question can also be asked, if these are to be interpreted as imperatives of command, who or what is being commanded to act? Who or what is being commanded to cause God’s name to be made holy, to cause God’s will to be done, to give daily bread, to forgive sins, to cause deliverance from evil? These are all actions that God Himself causes to happen, and that is why we pray for Him to do these things. So it is completely erroneous to conceive of these statements as being directed to a situation or circumstances in the form of a decree, for they are directed to God as prayers.

These are imperatives of entreaty meaning “we urgently beseech and ask You to do these things.” This should be obvious from the very fact that the prayer is addressed to God the Father: “Our Father in heaven” and they are the requests to “cause Your name to be made holy, cause your kingdom to come and will to be done...” It is a complete disconnect to begin this as a prayer addressing the Father and then switch to these being “decrees” directed toward different situations as tools to make them happen. These are prayers. This is why throughout Church history these petitions have been called “the Lord’s Prayer” or “the Disciple’s Prayer,” not “the Disciple’s Decrees.”

(4) THE WORD OF GOD HAS INHERENT POWER

One other support for the teaching of “decreeing” and “decreeing prayer” is the notion that when Scripture is spoken or quoted in the form of a “decree” it will cause a circumstance or situation to change according to what is “decreed.” This is based on the belief that the written word of God has inherent power in and of itself and that, when quoted, will then cause the effect that is intended and desired by the one quoting or “decreeing” it.

36 Dana and Mantey, p. 174

37 “Lead us” is subjunctive, which the mood of contingency or probability. Dana and Mantey, p. 170

38 Dana and Mantey, p.174-176

While it is not infrequently assumed by Christians that Scripture has an inherent power based on a verse such as “the word of God is living and active” (Hebrews 4:12), this is not what the Scriptures actually teach or reveal about the written word of God. Of course, being spoken by God Himself, His word has power to accomplish what He intends. The classic declaration of this is Isaiah 55:11, “So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it.” Being God, He created the heavens and the earth by the power of His word (Genesis 1). And being from God, His word will accomplish what He intends, what He “desires” and “sent” it to accomplish. However, the actual creative and dynamic word spoken by God Himself is different than His word that is written or that is quoted or spoken by a person. The bare word of God, written or quoted by a person, does not have power in and of itself to cause anything to happen. Nor by merely quoting it, as conceived of as a “decree” will it accomplish what the person “decreeing” it intends.

Perhaps the most explicit statement in this regard is 2 Corinthians 3:6, “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” The “letter” is the written word of God - the very commandments and decrees of God in Scripture. In context, “the letter” is illustrated as God’s words written on the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments held in the hands of Moses. The stony, non-living tablets are analogous to a stony, spiritually dead human heart (2 Corinthians 3:3). Far from the commandments having inherent power to cause a person to obey what is decreed, it is the cause of death and condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:7, 9). They command a spiritually dead person to do what he or she does not have the power and ability to do (Romans 8:7) and because they cannot obey what God commands, they sin which results in condemnation and death. This is further illustrated in terms of a “veil” over a hard heart that prevents a person from hearing and seeing Christ in the Scriptures whenever they are read (2 Corinthians 3:12-16). The mere reading, quoting and speaking of the written word of God does not have power to cause a person to see and believe in Christ. Just as bare seed within the soil does not have power in itself to cause it to come alive in the soil until it is germinated by water, so too the bare word or letter of the word of God does not have power in the heart to reveal Christ until the Holy Spirit graciously reveals it and causes it to be made alive in the heart, as with Peter who confessed Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

As stated above, a stop sign has no power to cause anyone to stop. The commandments to “not sin” or “to love” do not empower anyone to keep them. The knowledge of as well as desire to obey Scripture, as Romans 7 shows, do not cause anyone to obey them. It is not the bare word or letter of God but the Spirit of God Himself Who is the power to cause the word of God to be powerful and effective. Only the power of the Spirit enables anyone to obey the word (Romans 8:2-4). As the Lord Jesus said, “It is the Spirit Who gives life” (John 6:63).

One of the foremost examples of this is the quotation of Paul in Romans 9:9 concerning the promise of God to Abraham concerning Sarah having a son: “For this is the word of promise: ‘At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.’” The promise was the very word of God, but the power to accomplish what was promised was God Himself Who said, “I will come.” The Greek word translated “time” is *kairos* which means “the time appointed by God.” Abraham could have “decreed” all he wanted by quoting the word of promise, but it would not effect anything because it was not until God Himself chose to come at His appointed time that His promise came to be accomplished. On the other hand, Abraham could “declare” that God’s promise is true and wait for God to fulfill it in His time. The power to cause God’s word to accomplish what He intends is God Himself and so all the glory goes to God, as the words of the Lord’s Prayer state, “Yours is the kingdom, and the power and the glory.”

The word of God is truth and in this regard we can make declarations concerning situations and circumstances that it applies to in our lives. However, this is completely different from conceiving that our quoting the word of God in the form of a “decree” will be the cause of the situation or circumstance to change so that someone is healed or set free from Satan. It is God Himself Who causes situations and circumstances to change according to His word by the power of the Holy Spirit as He intends in His time. This is why the Lord Jesus, the very Son of God incarnate Who spoke the very words of God, had to be anointed by the Holy Spirit to make what He said effective in the hearts of those who were given “ears to hear and eyes to see” (Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 16, 43).

THERE IS NO EXAMPLE OF “DECREEING PRAYER” IN SCRIPTURE

If “decreeing prayer” is to be the practice of believers because of their authority in Christ and the nature of the Church, one would assume that there would be some example of it in Scripture. However, there is no example of the practice of “decreeing prayer” or “decreeing” by Christians in the New Testament, or the Old Testament for that matter.³⁹ To the contrary, the New Testament has numerous examples of situations and circumstances in which those who teach “decreeing prayer” say could be the occasion to use it as a “tool,” but are not. Nor is there any indication that “decreeing prayer” was even conceived of in such situations.

For example:

(a) Where is any example of the Lord Jesus Christ using “decreeing prayer”? As the Lord’s Prayer shows, He prayed, He didn’t “decree.”

(b) The synoptic gospels reveal that the kingdom of God was the foremost focus and concern of Jesus’ life and ministry, and that it was the priority of His prayer life. If “decreeing prayer” and “decreeing” is such a significant “tool” to cause God’s kingdom rule in heaven to become a reality on earth, why didn’t Jesus teach about it?

(c) Why didn’t the Apostles “decree” the kingdom to come on earth for Israel (Acts 1:6-7)?

(d) When the believers in Acts suffered persecution for preaching the gospel, why didn’t they “decree” that Satan’s plans be destroyed but instead simply prayed (4:31)?

(e) Why didn’t the church in Jerusalem, which had become poor because of a famine, “decree” prosperity but instead was dependent upon God to provide through the gifts and collection of churches around the Roman empire? (Acts 11:29; Romans 15:26-27)?

(f) Why didn’t the Apostle Paul “decree” the salvation of Jews for whom he had “great sorrow and unceasing grief” in his heart, but instead prayed for their salvation and worked so that, if possible, they would be saved (Romans 9:1; 10:1; 11:14)? And, for that matter, if it is the will of God, why didn’t the church “decree” the salvation of every soul?

(g) Why didn’t Paul “decree” that his “thorn in the flesh,” which was a “messenger from Satan,” be removed and so destroy the work and plans of Satan, but instead prayed for the Lord to remove it, and He did not (2 Corinthians 12:7-8)?

(h) Why didn’t Paul “decree” that Satan’s activity that hindered his plans be “destroyed” (1 Thessalonians 2:18)?

(i) Why didn’t Paul “decree” and instruct other believers to “decree” that he would be rescued from those who he believed would persecute him in Judea but instead requested that they would strive with him in prayer (Romans 15:30-31).

(j) Why didn’t Paul “decree” the healing of Trophimus whom he left sick in Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20)?

(k) Why didn’t Peter instruct believers to “decree” that Satan would no longer prowl about as a roaring lion seeking to devour Christians (1 Peter 5:8)?

(l) Why didn’t Jesus tell the church in Smyrna, which experienced poverty and would soon experience persecution and death instigated by Satan, to decree wealth and destroy the work of Satan (Revelation 2:8-11)?

The reason “decreeing” and “decreeing prayer” was not used by Christians as a “tool” in any of these situations, along with others that could be mentioned, is because it is a practice that is not revealed or supported in the Scripture.

The closest to any support for “decreeing” in the New Testament would be the statement by the Lord Jesus concerning speaking to a mountain that it will move. This is a statement that Jesus used on two different occasions. The Lord’s Prayer is not a form of “decreeing prayer.” See above.

sions in two different contexts:

(1) The first was the inability of the disciples to drive a demon out of a boy and in response to their question, “Why could we not drive it out?” Jesus said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you” (Matthew 17:19-20).

(2) The second occasion is after Jesus cursed the fig tree and Peter, speaking on behalf of the disciples, said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look the fig tree which you cursed has withered.” “Jesus answered saying to them, ‘Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be *granted* him” (Mark 11:21-23).

There are three things to observe about the statement:

(1) Jesus uses it to illustrate His point in two different contexts, driving out a demon and cursing a fig tree. This demonstrates that this was a proverbial statement. Proverbs are general principles that can be applied to different circumstances, not absolute laws.

(2) This statement is hyperbole, which is an exaggerated statement that is not intended to be taken literally so as to mean that in any and every circumstance a person who believes could speak a word and it would be done. Jesus often used hyperbole, as in the Sermon on the Mount when He said if your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out, if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off (Matthew 5:29-30). These words should not be taken literally, but rather as they are intended to be understood. The fact that Jesus’ statement concerning speaking to the mountain is hyperbole is evident from his comment “nothing will be impossible to you.” “Nothing” and “impossible” are absolutes. However, it is not literally true that absolutely nothing is impossible for the one who speaks a word any more than it is literally true that absolutely nothing is impossible for God. God cannot lie because He cannot sin (2 Timothy 2:13; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). Nothing is impossible for God to do *that He intends to do*. Jesus’ statement is a proverbial statement of hyperbole used to illustrate a point and emphasize a principle, not to teach an absolute law or a doctrine of “decreeing.”

(3) What is evident in the context of this proverbial statement is that the power to cause what is spoken to be realized is God, not the words themselves. In the incident concerning driving out the demon, a number of disciples were involved in seeking to “cure” the boy. It can be assumed that they would have spoken to the demon in the authority given to them by Jesus but this failed. There is no thought of a decree being issued that has inherent power to cause God’s kingdom rule to come into the life of this demonized boy. This is a power encounter, and the disciples did not have the power of the kingdom of God manifest because they did not have faith. Significantly enough, Jesus does not speak about how large their faith must be but how small it can be - the size of a mustard seed, which He said was the smallest of seeds in the garden (Matthew 13:31-32). This is different from what is conceived of as the power of a “decree” or “decreeing prayer” which are believed to have power in them to make things happen.

SATAN’S TEMPTATION FOR JESUS TO “DECREE”

While there is no example or teaching in Scripture for the practice of Christians using “decreeing prayer” or “decreeing,” the theology or fundamental principles of “decreeing” are seen in Scripture in the first temptation of Jesus by Satan. The greater context of the temptation is the words of God the Father at Jesus’ baptism when Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and the Father spoke from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3: 17). Scripture tells us that, after this, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil and after fasting forty days and night Jesus became hungry. It was then that “the tempter came and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread’” (Matthew 4:3).

To understand the nature of this temptation, it must be observed that the only human being for whom this could be an actual temptation is the Lord Jesus Christ Who was God and man, having two natures in One Person. The nature of the temptation was based on the reality of Christ’s divine nature and that He use His divine

power to command and thereby creatively cause the physical DNA of a stone to become the DNA of bread. No human being has the power to do this. The “wise men, sorcerers and magicians” in Pharaoh’s court exercised power to transmute their staffs into snakes, as did Moses. But while Moses’ power was from God, their power was from “their secret arts,” which means “occult” power from the spirit realm and not human power (Exodus 7:11). The power to transmute physical things is not human but spiritual, either by God or from Satan. In His incarnation, the Lord Jesus freely chose to “empty” Himself of His equality with God, not meaning that He would no longer be God, which is not possible, but that He would not use His divine power so that He would live completely and totally as a human (Philippians 2:6ff.). The temptation of Satan was for Him to use His divine power, to command or decree it to happen. He was hungry, which would have been a significant inducement to use His divine power not only for His own desire but His actual need as a human being. Thus, the response of the Lord Jesus to the temptation was His commitment to live as a man doing God’s will with the words, “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4, from Deuteronomy 8:3). While there are related issues, such as using power for His own needs, or yielding to the desire of the flesh or material things, the key to the temptation was Christ using His divine power to “command” or “decree” the stones to become bread. In doing this, He would not live completely and totally as a man in utter dependence upon God and absolute commitment to only do His will.

While only the Lord Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, the basis of the temptation is the same as the basic of the theology of “decreeing” and “decreeing prayer”:

(a) “If you are the Son of God” - While the temptation is based on the inherent power of the divine nature of the Lord Jesus, it is believed that the church and individual Christians have been given authority and the power of God to cause things to happen. Not infrequently this is said to be the authority and power that Christians have from our status as “sons of God.” Christians are said to have authority and power from Christ that is, in effect, equal to God. Because of this, it is believed, Christians have authority and power to “decree” or make “prayers of decree.” This is, in principle, the same as the first part of the temptation, “If,” or as the Greek can properly be translated, “Since you are the Son of God...”

(b) “command these stones to become bread” - This power is exercised by a “command” which is, in principle, the same thing as the notion of a “decree.” The temptation of Jesus was to speak the word so that power would be released to cause the desired change and effect that he wanted. This is the basic concept of “decreeing” and “decreeing prayer.” Satan’s temptation of the Lord Jesus was for Him to make a “decree” which would have inherent power to cause the desired effect of making the stones to become bread.

This theology is similar in principle, if not the same, as those who believe the sacraments, or ordinances, have power in and of themselves to cause what is represented in the sacrament to be made a reality in the person who receives the sacrament. The only difference is while “decreeing” is the use of words, the sacraments are the use of physical objects and actions. The Latin for this is *ex opera operato*, “from the operation it operates,” or “from the working, it works.” For example, in this theology it is believed that when a person is baptized, the physical act is the means and cause of the person to be born of the Spirit and their sins forgiven. It is believed that God has given power to the sacrament itself to cause this to happen. In this theology, it could correctly be stated that the sacrament of baptism is a “tool” to cause the kingdom of God to come into the person’s life. Thus, the power of God is subjected to human action.

The most alarming thing about the theology of “decreeing prayer” and “decreeing is that it is, in principle, the same as witchcraft. The basic principle of witchcraft is control - a person influences their world in some way in order to achieve the desired outcome. Witchcraft is the use of knowledge - secret, occult knowledge or public knowledge - by which words and/or actions are used to be the cause by which a power is released and manifested, whether it is spiritual or “natural,” so as to bring about the desired and intended effect. It is called a “craft” because it is the controlled use of knowledge, action and manipulation that causes the desired and intended outcome in their sphere of influence in some way. Woodworking is a “craft” that, through knowledge and skill, uses tools to shape wood into the desired effect of the craftsman. The tools are under the control of the craftsman. The difference between witchcraft and “decreeing” and “decreeing prayer” is that whereas witchcraft

invokes and uses the power of evil spirits, “decreeing” and “decreeing prayer” are believed to be the power of God.⁴⁰ While two completely different spirits are believed to be operating, in principle, the theology is the same which is, in principle, witchcraft. It is for this reason that non-Christians teach the practice of decreeing.⁴¹

It may be that one of the attractions of the teaching of “decreeing” and “decreeing prayer” is control - the sense that a person has authority to control and release power that influences their world as they desire, or as they think God wills. Control is essentially the opposite of prayer, which is total dependence on God to freely grant the answer to the prayer.

The principle of witchcraft in “decreeing prayer” can be discerned when one asks these questions of the Lord Prayer: Who or what is the cause to make God’s name to be made holy, to cause God’s will to be done, to give daily bread, to cause sins to be forgiven, to deliver from evil? These are all actions that God Himself causes to happen. However, if it is agreed that God causes these things to happen and yet is also believed that the “decree” is the tool that makes these things happen, then the human “decree” causes God to work in power according to what the person has decreed. Thus, the power of God is subjected to human action and control. This is, in principle, that same as witchcraft.

CONCLUSION

The Apostle Paul spoke of his Jewish brothers as having a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge (Romans 10:2). It is a fact that those who teach and practice “decreeing prayer” and “decreeing” have a zeal for God and desire His kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. The way that this is to take place is the use of means that God has ordained. Prayer, in the restricted sense, declaration and decreeing are completely different things. While prayer and declaration are taught and supported in Scripture, there is no teaching or support in Scripture for the practice of “decreeing prayer” or “decreeing.” The Lord Jesus said, “My house will be a house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11:17). May all of God’s people be zealous to devote themselves to prayer and to declare the glory of God so that He will bring about His will on earth as it is in heaven.

40 This is not to infer, imply or say that those who practice “decreeing” or “decreeing prayer” are using the power of demons. However, this could open a person up to them.

41 See, for example, Elizabeth Clare Prophet, Spiritual Awareness Fellowship, *Learn How to Decree*. “A decree is defined in the dictionary as an official order given by a person with power and an order usually having the force of law. From a spiritual perspective, it is no different. The person with power is YOU--and that power is the I AM Presence within you and the living Christ, the Son of God, that dwells in your heart. You are calling upon God’s universal law and light to be enacted in a given situation. If you are new to the art and science of using the spoken word as a creative force, we recommend that you begin by listening to this dynamic presentation on how meditation, prayer, and the spoken word are the perfect alchemy for changing your life and the world around you.” <http://www.spiritual-awareness.org/decree.html>

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