

Is 'Decree and Declare' Scriptural?

by Denver Cheddie

Our Father, I decree and declare that thou art in heaven;
for had we not done so, Thou mightest have fallen from heaven like lightning
We speak forth your kingdom on earth and decree that thy will be done
We confess that our daily bread is provided
We declare that we are forgiven and we release forgiveness to our debtors
We are loosed from temptations, we bind the evil one IN JESUS NAME
For we declare that thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever amen.

... The Lord's Prayer according to the "decree and declare" movement

I once prayed a public prayer, after which a fellow believer commended me for the spiritual growth they noticed in my life. I was bit flattered and I almost blushed, but how did they know I grew spiritually? It was because they heard me make "declarations" in my prayer. Now I actually did no such thing. My prayer might have sounded something like this, "Lord I pray for the pastors in our country, that they will be shepherds who feed the sheep, that they will not run greedily for material gain, but will be servants of the people." The person erroneously believed that I was making declarations because they misunderstood my sentence structure. I was actually petitioning God for all these things, not declaring any of them to be so.

Then I wondered, since when is making declarations in prayer a sign of spiritual maturity and growth? Most Pentecostals don't petition God for

anything anymore. They no longer make supplications. Instead they decree something to be so, and they declare it. A typical prayer might sound like this, “I decree and declare that pastors will shepherd the flock.” Actually this is just the latest variation of the positive confession movement – following closely on the heels of “name it and claim it”, “confess it and possess it”, and “blab it and grab it”. The only difference really is that “decree and declare” seems to thrive on alliteration rather than rhyme. Other than that, it’s the same thing. Ironically, proponents of “decree and declare” often declare, “this is not ‘name it and claim it’ I’m preaching”. Of course it is!

So everything that I wrote regarding Positive Confession also applies here. In that article, I actually go into details on all the scriptures that are twisted to teach positive confession. In this article, I address mainly the underlying issues behind decreeing and declaring – the extent of the believer’s authority and submission to God’s will.

Scriptural vs Unscriptural Declarations

Now let’s make some necessary distinctions. Everything you say is technically a declaration. Declare is an English word and there is nothing sinful or unscriptural about it. If I say “I’m going to work now”, that is a declaration. I declared my intent to go to work. There are many such declarations in the bible. The difference is that for most of us, declaring my intent to go to work does not actively cause me to get to work. My intent to go to work together with my effort to drive myself there is what gets me to work. Declaring that intent has absolutely nothing to do with it – it is not the active cause that results in the effect. “I am the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus” is a declaration, but saying so does not make me the righteousness of God. It is Christ’s atonement on

Calvary that makes it so. So there is nothing ever so special about a declaration. Every praise to God is a declaration – God is great. But saying that he is great does not make him great. He is great on his own, and in fact that is why I say it. It is not so because I say it. I say it because it is so.

This is an important point that illustrates the differences between people like myself and the “decree and declare” movement. I believe that declarations are not causative, but they believe that they are ... especially when coupled with decreeing. They decree something to be so, by saying it. Then by declaring it, they cause it to happen. Of course they understand that it’s not happening by their own power, but by God’s power and authority that resides in them. For example, “I decree and declare that the job interview will be successful and the job will be mine.” That’s a typical prayer. So why not just pray “Lord I petition you to give me favor in this job interview and that I will be hired for that job.”? There are some subtle differences. The first one appears to have more authority. And also the second one appears uncertain if it is God’s will for you to have that job.

On the less extreme end, most decree-and-declarists are just using vocabulary that they learned from others. That is, when they pray “I decree and declare that this job is mine”, they mean in their hearts exactly the same thing as “Lord I humbly recognize your sovereignty and petition you to give me this job in accordance with your will”. It is just their terminology that is conditioned to the only Christian environment they have ever known. In such cases, I don’t really have an issue. I do have an issue, however, with the more extreme variants, the ones who

actually believe they have more authority than what God gave them, and those who seem more interested in their own will than God's will.

A favorite scripture of the “decree and declare” movement is Romans 4:17, which says “...calling those things which are not, as though they were”. Their interpretation of this is that we can call (decree and declare) things which presently do not exist or realities not yet realized as though they did. We do not as yet have the job, but I decree and declare that I do. Then according to Romans 4:17, it will happen. This is THEIR interpretation of that scripture.

To get the correct interpretation, I don't even have to read the entire chapter. All I need is the entire verse. “Abraham believed God, who calls those things which are not as though they were”. What else do I need to say? This is an attribute of God not man. Abraham did not have this ability – that's why he trusted God. God had promised him that his old wrinkled body would have a son through Sarah's dead womb. Abraham had no ability to make this happen. Instead he trusted God or believed God who had this ability. Very important: the ability or power resided with God not us. Abraham never confessed or declared anything. God declared it and made it happen.

Well shouldn't we strive to be like God? In some ways yes, but in some ways we can't. The attributes of God can be categorized as incommunicable attributes and communicable attributes. The incommunicable attributes are what makes God distinct from man. He is omnipotent, omnipresent, etc. We can never be omnipresent. Even the devil is not omnipresent. These are incommunicable attributes. But God is also holy, righteous, loving. These we are called to emulate. These are the communicable attributes. Romans 4:17 describes one of God's

incommunicable attributes – one of those that clearly distinguishes him from man. We simply do not have this power. The decree and declare movement however, insists that we have creative authority in our words.

How Much Authority Do We Really Have?

In Matthew 28:18 Jesus declares, “Behold all authority in heaven and earth is given to ME (Jesus). Go and make disciples”. Somehow we read these scriptures and we mentally insert the line “and I give this authority to you”. But read it again, it does not say that. He did not say that he was giving this authority to us. There were occasions when he sent out his disciples (prior to his ascension) and he gave them authority to cast out demons and heal the sick (Luke 10). When he ascended into heaven, he also seemed to give us authority to heal the sick and cast out demons (Mark 16). Jesus only gives us authority to do what he commissioned us to do – preach the gospel, disciple the nations, heal the sick, cast out demons, etc. He does not give us ALL authority.

When the disciples cast out demons, they used language such as “come out of her in Jesus name”. When they healed the sick, “Be healed in Jesus name”, “Rise up and walk”. They did not pray “Lord please cast out this devil”. Because God gave them the authority to cast out devils, they just had to use that authority. They did not have to pray for God to do it. Similarly when Moses cried out to God at the Red Sea, God chided him “Why are you crying to me? Use the rod that I gave you.” (Exodus 14:15) So Moses stretched forth the rod and parted the sea. This only happens when God actually gives authority to do something.

Did the disciples always pray this way? The answer is NO. They only commanded the sick to “be healed” and demons to “come out” when they

were healing the sick, casting out demons, or on the rare occasion when they raised the dead. When Paul was bitten by the viper (Acts 28:3), he did not rebuke the devil or exclaim “the devil is a liar!” He just ignored it and carried on with his business. When Peter was in jail, the people prayed (Acts 12:5). When Paul and Silas were in jail, they sang praises (Acts 16). No decreeing or declaring.

When Paul was given a thorn – a messenger of Satan to buffet him, did he speak to that thorn to go away or rebuke the demon of thorns? No, he pleaded with God (2 Corinthians 12:7). He simply made petitions. In the Lord’s prayer, we are taught to pray “deliver us from the evil one”. This prayer demonstrates an understanding of the fact that God is in control even over the devil, and it humbly petitions him to not let the devil have his way with us. Most of the times when the disciples prayed, they prayed like regular people – they made petitions and supplications. Paul taught us to not fret and worry but to make our supplications known to God and let his peace reign in us (Philippians 4:7). He did not teach us to make declarations.

The decree and declare movement overestimates our authority. They believe that Jesus has given us all authority and that we can speak (decree and declare) anything especially financial blessings. They bind and rebuke devils that do not even exist. It is not uncommon to hear them bind and rebuke the demon of back pain and the spirit of poverty. The only times the disciples ever rebuked a demon was when they were casting it out of someone else or healing the sick. They never rebuked financial spirits, because they understood clearly what the bible taught regarding finances – give to God and HE will rebuke the devourer. The

entire counsel of scripture teaches that if we work hard, invest wisely and give to God, He will cause our work to prosper.

They also understood when sickness was the result of demonic activity and when it was the result of fatigue or some other natural cause (2 Timothy 4:20; Philippians 2:25-30). You can't bind or take authority over fatigue. You just need to rest. Not every attack of the enemy requires us to cast out a demon. Sometimes we just have to wrestle and resist (Ephesians 6). Jesus gives us only as much authority as we need to do the work he called us to do. We DO NOT have ALL authority, especially to do things outside of God's will and to build up our own kingdoms. Only Christ has ALL authority.

Binding and Loosing

The topic of "binding" warrants some extra attention as it is often a vehicle through which the decree and declare movement takes authority over the devil. The phrase "bind and loose" appears in Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18. "Whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is loosed in heaven." In the Matthew 16 scripture, there is no clear context so it is subject to misunderstanding.

The typical Charismatic interpretation is "bind the devil and loose the blessings of God". They live in a world where God is handcuffed, blindfolded and gagged; and he is begging us to "please do something about the devil", who is guarding all the blessings that were meant for God's people. So they need to bind the devil and loose those blessings. Thank God I live in a world where God is big and the devil is small, where God is in control. Believe me he is not handcuffed, neither is his arm shortened. If you feel God is not hearing you or answering you, you

don't need to change the way you pray, you just need to pray more. You might also have to either examine your life or try to understand what God is trying to accomplish. If you, as a believer, feel that Satan is buffeting you, then pray like Paul prayed. Plead with God for deliverance or for understanding (2 Corinthians 12).

The Matthew 18 scripture has a clearer context – read the whole chapter. Binding and loosing refer to exercising discipline to a member who refuses to repent of their sin. God gives the church leaders the discretion and ecclesiastical authority to exercise the necessary judgment against that person – keep him in the church (forgive him) or excommunicate him.

Why did Jesus use the words “bind and loose”? Scholars believe that Jesus was using the same language as the Jewish Rabbis, where they understood the terms “bind and loose” in a very specific manner, and differently from modern day Charismatics. The Jewish Rabbis used the term “bind” to mean forbid or to impose an obligation. “Loose” meant to permit or to remove an obligation. Some schools of Rabbis were more liberal than others, so they “loosed” the people from the obligations to which the other schools had “bound” them. How did the apostles understand Jesus’ teaching? In Acts 15:20, they forbade the gentiles from eating foods offered to idols and from fornication, but they removed the obligation for them to follow the law of Moses. This is what binding and loosing refer to, and it often pertained to matters of church doctrine and practice. This is very different from the modern Charismatic interpretation.

Charismatics also appeal to Matthew 12, where Jesus speaks of binding the strongman. In every situation, they believe, you must identify the strong man (the demon in charge), bind him, then plunder his spoils. But in this scripture, Jesus is the one who bound Satan (THE strong man), which is why we are able to cast out demons (divide the devil's spoils). Jesus was being accused of casting out devils with the help of Beelzebub. In response, He made the point that Satan's kingdom was not divided therefore he (Jesus) could not have been casting out Satan with Satan, as the scribes had intimated. His parable of the strongman clearly meant that He was the greater one who bound Satan and that was the reason he was able to cast out demons. He bound the devil, therefore we don't have to keep binding the devil. That was already done. There appears to be phases in which Satan was/will be bound. He was bound in a sense when the Kingdom of God came (Jesus' first coming). Then he will be finally bound literally at the second coming. Each time, it is God who does this binding. Binding the devil is not something we were called to do.

Thy Will Be Done

The Lord's prayer (how Jesus taught us to pray) contains a line that says "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven". An essential part of praying is submission to God's will. God values qualities such as humility and brokenness. God hates arrogance and presumption. I would much rather pray, "Lord if it is your will, please work things out in your sovereignty so that I can get this job. Show me what I need to do in order to put my faith into action." That's humility before God and utter dependence on him. It also displays an understanding of how God works. "I decree and declare that this job is mine" sounds a bit more arrogant because it presumes authority that we do not really have. It also does not seem

concerned whether this job is indeed God's will. I would much rather pray the way Jesus taught me to pray, even if certain cliques in the church think I am less spiritual than they are. That's OK, I would rather be scriptural. It is still possible to pray persistently and violently without resorting to decreeing and declaring.

Another reason I prefer to pray in the traditional way is because I don't see anyone in the bible praying "declarations". It's just not there. Many of Paul's prayers are recorded in his epistles. I cannot think of a single place where he decreed and declared anything. God gave him a thorn in his flesh – a messenger of Satan to buffet him. On three occasions he pleaded with God to remove it. But God refused and that was the end of it. Paul never decreed and declared that the thorn would be removed. He never spoke to it, he merely petitioned God. If this were someone other than Paul, they would have been castigated for their lack of spiritual maturity evident through their poor vocabulary. When he understood that it was not God's will for it to be removed, he left it at that. God did not deliver him, but gave him understanding of the situation – understanding which helped Paul deal with the trial.

The devil cannot possess Christians, but he can attack us in other ways. If the devil is "buffeting" you, first pray for God to lead us not into temptation, i.e. examine if there is any unconfessed sin in your life. Then pray to God to deliver you from the evil one. If God chooses not to, then ask for understanding of what he is trying to accomplish. This is how Jesus taught us to pray, and notice how far removed it is from decreeing and declaring. See my article on witchcraft for a more in-depth discussion on the workings of the devil.

Conclusion

What I find disturbing about contemporary trends in the Charismatic movement is the strong emphasis on saying more so than doing. How do Charismatics walk in the Spirit? By saying “I walk in the spirit”. How do they crucify the flesh? By saying “I crucify the flesh”. It’s amazing and funny how this has become culture. It is within this culture that unscriptural doctrines like decree and declare thrive. This doctrine overestimates the believer’s authority and seeks to establish our will rather than God’s will.

The bible simply does not teach that we have any authority or power to decree and declare things to happen. Only God has such power. Instead we ought to petition God for our daily bread to be supplied and our needs to be met. One is humble, the other is presumptuous. One is scriptural and timeless, the other is just the latest passing fad.

OLDER COMMENTS

Job 22:28 clearly teaches us that we can declare things and they will be established.

That is what Job 22:28 says – “You will also declare/decreed a thing and it will be established”. But WHO said this? Was it God? Was it Job speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? The answer to both these questions is no. It was one of Job’s friends, Eliphaz who made this statement. These men were called miserable comforters, having said some things that were right and some things that were wrong. The bible merely records what they said. It does not mean that what they said was necessarily right. The bible accurately records the fool’s thoughts “there is no God”. The fool of course is wrong. Later in Job 42:7, God actually chastised Eliphaz for not speaking that which was right. So this scripture cannot justify the practice of decreeing and declaring.

Psalm 2:7 teaches us to “declare a decree”.

Psalm 2:7 says “I will declare the decree: the Lord has said ...”. This scripture does teach us to declare a decree, but what does declare mean and what is a decree? The verse clearly shows that a decree is what the Lord has said, not what we say. In this case, the decree was “You are my son, this day I have begotten you.” This is what God said. Then the psalmist declared that decree. Declaring simply meant saying it, or boasting in it. It is a common word that is used in the Psalms e.g. “I will show forth all your marvelous works” (Ps 9:1). It’s the same Hebrew word. It is not a magic phrase, but simply an expression of praise to God. So what this scripture teaches is that GOD makes decrees (not us), and we can boast in them – declare them, tell others about them, etc. This is nowhere near what the decree and declare movement teaches.

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