

Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, Lesson # 36
Objections to the Doctrine of Predestination - It Contradicts the Universalistic Scripture Passages

I. The Terms "Wish", "Will", and "All"

It may be asked, Is not the doctrine of Predestination flatly contradicted by the Scriptures which declare that Christ died for "all men," or for "the whole world," and that God wills the salvation of all men?

1 Tim 2:3-4 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

These verses simply teach that God is benevolent, and that He does not delight in the sufferings of His creatures any more than a human father delights in the punishment which he must sometimes inflict upon his son. God does not decretively will the salvation of all men, no matter how much He may desire it; and if any verses taught that He decretively willed or intended the salvation of all men, they would contradict those other parts of the Scripture which teach that God sovereignly rules and that it is His purpose to leave some to be punished.

The word "will" is used in different senses in Scripture and in our everyday conversation. It is sometimes used in the sense of "decree," or "purpose," and sometimes in the sense of "desire," or "wish." A righteous judge does not will (desire) that anyone should be hanged or sentenced to prison, yet at the same time he wills (pronounced sentence, or decrees) that the guilty person shall be thus punished. In the same sense and for sufficient reasons a man may will or decide to have a limb removed, or an eye taken out, even though he certainly does not desire it.

Luke 20:46 "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes

1 Tim 2:4 [God] who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Mark 15:15 So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Ezekiel 18:30-32 "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord God. "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord God. "Therefore turn and live!"

Deut 28:63 And it shall be, that just as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess.

In like manner the word "all" is unmistakably used in different senses in Scripture. In some cases it certainly does not mean every individual; e.g., of John the Baptist it was said, "And there went out unto him all the country of Judea, and all they of Jerusalem; and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins," Mark 1:5. After Peter and John had healed the lame man at the door of the temple, we read that "all men glorified God for that which was done," Acts 4:21. Jesus told his disciples that they would be "hated of all men" for His name's sake, Luke 21:17. Paul was accused of "teaching all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place" (the temple), Acts 21:28. When Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself," John 12:32, He plainly meant not every individual of mankind, for history shows that not every individual has been drawn to Him. He certainly does not draw the many millions of heathens who die in utter ignorance of the true God. What He meant was, that a large multitude from all nations and classes would be saved; and this is what we see coming to pass.

2 Cor 5:15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

The statement in II Cor. 5:15, that Christ "died for all," is perhaps to be explained by the fact that the epistle is written to "the Church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints that are in the whole of Achaia," and the "all" which Paul has in mind are those saved Christians.

It was not the whole of mankind which was equally loved of God and promiscuously redeemed by Christ...The declaration that Christ died for "all" is made clearer by the song which the redeemed now sing before the throne of the Lamb: "Thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation," Rev. 5:9; 1:5. The word all must be understood to mean all the elect, all His Church, all those whom the Father has given to the Son, etc., not all men universally and every man individually. The redeemed host will be made up of men from all classes and conditions of life, of princes and peasants, of rich and poor, of bond and free, of male and female, of young and old, of Jews and Gentiles, men of all nations, and races, from north to south, and from east to west.

II. The Gospel is for Jews and Gentiles Alike

In some instances the word "all" is used in order to teach that the gospel is for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews. Through the many centuries of their past history the Jews had, with few exceptions, been the exclusive recipients of God's saving grace. They had greatly abused their privileges as the chosen people. They supposed that this same distinction would be kept up in the Messianic era, and they were always inclined to appropriate the Messiah exclusively to themselves. So rigid was the Pharisaic exclusivism that the Gentiles were called strangers, dogs, common, unclean; and it was not lawful for a Jew to keep company with or have any dealings with a Gentile (John 4:9; Acts 10:28; 11:3).

The salvation of the Gentiles was a mystery which had not been made known in other ages (Eph. 3:4-6; Col. 1:27). It was for that reason that Peter was taken to task: by the Church at Jerusalem after he had preached the Gospel to Cornelius, and we can almost hear the gasp of wonder in the exclamation of the leaders when after Peter's defense they said, "Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life," (Acts 11:18). To understand what a revolutionary idea this was, read Acts 10:1-11:18. Consequently this was a truth which it was then peculiarly necessary to enforce, and it was brought out in the fullest and strongest terms. Paul was to be a witness "unto all men," that is, to Jews and Gentiles alike, of what he had seen and heard, (Acts 22:15). As used in this sense the word "all" has no reference to individuals, but means mankind in general.

III. The Term "World" is Used in Various Senses

1 John 2:2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

John 12:47 And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.

When it is said that Christ died "not for our sins only but for the sins of the whole world," 1 John 2:2, or that He came to "save the world," John 12:47, the meaning is that not merely Jews but Gentiles also are included in His saving work; the world as a world or the race as a race is to be redeemed.

Sometimes the term "world" is used when only a large part of the world is meant, as when it is said that the Devil is "the deceiver of the whole world," or that "the whole earth" wonders after the beast, Revelation 13:3. Sometimes this term means only a relatively small part of the world, as when Paul wrote to the new Christian Church at Rome that their faith was "proclaimed throughout the whole world," Rom. 1:8. None but believers would praise those Romans for their faith in Christ, and in fact the world at large did not even know that such a Church existed at Rome. Hence Paul meant only the believing world or the Christian Church, which was a comparatively insignificant part of the real world.

In ordinary conversation we often speak of the business world, the educational world, the political world, etc., but we do not mean that every person in the world is a business man, or educated, or a politician. When we say that a certain automobile manufacturer sells automobiles to everybody, we do not mean that he actually sells to every individual, but that he sells to everyone who is willing to pay his price...The Bible is written in the plain language of the people and must be understood in that way.

Verses like John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life," give abundant proof that the redemption which the Jews thought to monopolize is universal as to space. God so loved the world, not a little portion of it, but the world as a whole, that He gave His only begotten Son for its redemption...But where is the oft-boasted proof of its universality as to individuals? This verse is sometimes pressed to such an extreme that God is represented as too loving to punish anybody, and so full of mercy that He will not deal with men according to any rigid standard of justice regardless of their deserts. The attentive reader, by comparing this verse with other Scripture, will see that some restriction is to be placed on the word "world." One writer has asked, "Did God love Pharaoh? (Rom. 9:17). Did He love the Amalekites? (Ex. 17:14). Did He love the Canaanites, whom He commanded to be exterminated without mercy? (Deut. 20:16). Did He love the Ammonites and Moabites whom He commanded not to be received into the congregation forever? (Deut. 23:3). Does He love the workers of iniquity? (Ps. 5:5). Does He love the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, which He endures with much long-suffering? (Rom. 9:22). Did He love Esau? (Rom. 9:13)."

IV. General Considerations

If the words of 1 Tim. 2:4, that God "would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth," be taken in the Arminian sense it follows either that God is disappointed in His wishes, or that all men without exception are saved. Furthermore, the doctrine which imputes disappointment to Deity contradicts that class of Scripture passages which teach the sovereignty of God. His will in this respect has been the same through the centuries. And if He had willed that the Gentiles should be saved, why was it that He confined the knowledge of the way of salvation to the narrow limits of Judea? Surely no one will deny that He might as easily have made known His Gospel to the Gentiles as to the Jews. Where He has not provided the means we may be sure that He has not designed the ends. The reply of Augustine to those who advanced this objection in his day is worth quoting: "when our Lord complains that though he wished to gather the children of Jerusalem as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but she would not, are we to consider that the will of God was overpowered by a number of weak men, so that He who was Almighty God could not do what He wished or willed to do? If so, what is to become of that omnipotence by which He did whatsoever pleased Him in Heaven and in? Moreover, who will be found so unreasonable as to say that God cannot convert the evil wills of men, which He pleases, when He pleases, and as He pleases, to good? Now, when He does this, He does it in mercy; and when He doeth it not, in judgment He doeth it not." Verses such as 1 Tim. 2:4 it seems are best understood not to refer to men individually but as teaching the general truth that God is benevolent and that He does not delight in the sufferings and death of His creatures. It may be further remarked that if the universalistic passages are taken in an evangelical sense and applied as widely as the Arminians wish to apply them, they will prove universal salvation,—a result which is contradicted by Scripture, and which in fact is not held by Arminians themselves.