

Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, Lesson #16 - Reprobation

I. Unconditional Election Review

As a result of the fall [all people] are guilty and corrupted; their motives are wrong and they cannot work out their own salvation. They have forfeited all claim upon God's mercy, and might justly have been left to suffer the penalty of their disobedience as all of the fallen angels were left. But instead the elect members of this race are rescued from this state of guilt and sin and are brought into a state of blessedness and holiness. The non-elect are simply left in their previous state of ruin, and are condemned for their sins. They suffer no unmerited punishment, for God is dealing with them not merely as men but as sinners.

1) Doctrine of unconditional election naturally follows after a right understanding of the doctrine of total depravity. Why? If men are naturally dead in their sins and can never come to God in their own power, then some external power must act on their behalf.

2) God would have been completely just to leave all mankind to perish in their sins. Wicked man deserves the penalty of his sins, or deserves the wrath of God.

3) God graciously and lovingly chooses to rescue the elect members of the human race. Why? WCF 3.4 states "...out of his mere free grace and love"; not based on anything good in mankind. In other words, God's election is not based on any conditions. We might even say God's election is UN-CONDITIONAL.

4) When does God choose who will be His elect? Before the foundation of the world or in eternity. This means God predestines who will be his elect. Again, predestination or election is NOT based on anything God saw or foresaw in the elect. Again, God's election of who would become His covenant people is not based on any conditions, and is therefore an unconditional election.

5) A right understanding of election will do several things to us: convince us of God's mercy, illustrate the grace of God, humble us, and glorify God.

II. Doctrine of Reprobation

Reprobation - doctrine that states just as there are an elect people of God who have been predestined by God for election, there is logically also a group of reprobate people who have been elected by God for damnation.

The doctrine of absolute Predestination of course logically holds that some are foreordained to death as truly as others are foreordained to life. The very terms "elect" and "election" imply the terms "non-elect" and "reprobation." When some are chosen others are left not chosen. The high privileges and glorious destiny of the former are not shared with the latter. This, too, is of God. We believe that from all eternity God has intended to leave some of Adam's posterity in their sins, and that the decisive factor in the life of each is to be found only in God's will.

In all of the Reformed creeds in which the doctrine of Reprobation is dealt with at all it is treated as an essential part of the doctrine of Predestination.

WCF 3.3. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.

WCF 3.7. The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.

RP Testimony 3.3 We reject the teaching that God is unjust in choosing some sinners to salvation and leaving others to suffer merited condemnation.

Those who hold the doctrine of Election but deny that of Reprobation can lay but little claim to consistency.

Calvin:

"...not all men are created with a similar destiny but eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say, he is predestinated either to life or to death."

"There can be no election without its opposite, reprobation."

Luther:

"This mightily offends our rational nature that God should, of His own mere unbiased will, leave some men to themselves, harden them and condemn them; but He gives abundant demonstration, and does continually, that this is really the case; namely, that the sole cause why some are saved, and others perish, proceeds from His willing the salvation of the former, and the perdition of the latter, according to that of St. Paul, 'He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth.'"

"It may seem absurd to human wisdom that God should harden, blind, and deliver up some men to a reprobate sense; that He should first deliver them over to evil, and condemn them for that evil; but the believing, spiritual man sees no absurdity at all in this; knowing that God would be never any less good, even though He should destroy all men."

"all things whatever arise from and depend upon the Divine appointment, whereby it was preordained who should receive the word of life and who should disbelieve it, who should be delivered from their sins and who should be hardened in them, who should be justified and who condemned."

III. Scripture Proofs

Prov 16:4 The Lord has made all for Himself, Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.

1 Peter 2:8 A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense. They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

Rom 9:22-23 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory

John 12:39-40

Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: 40 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."

It is hard for us to realize that the adorable Redeemer and only Savior of men is, to some, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence; yet that is what the Scriptures declare Him to be. Even before His birth it was said that He was set (that is, appointed) for the falling, as well as for the rising, of many in Israel (Luke 2:34). And when, in His intercessory prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, He said, "I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me," the non-elect were repudiated in so many words.

IV. Reprobation flows from Total Depravity

It is obvious that this part of the doctrine of Predestination which affirms that God has, by a sovereign and eternal decree, chosen one portion of mankind to salvation while leaving the other portion to destruction, strikes us at first as being opposed to our common ideas of justice and hence needs a defence.

The defence of the doctrine of Reprobation rests upon the preceding doctrine of Original Sin or Total Inability. This decree finds the whole race fallen. None have any claim on God's grace. But instead of leaving all to their just punishment, God gratuitously confers undeserved happiness upon one portion of mankind,—an act of pure mercy and grace to which no one can object,—while the other portion is simply passed by. No undeserved misery is inflicted upon this latter group. Hence no one has any right to object to this part of the decree. If the decree dealt simply with innocent men, it would be unjust to assign one portion to condemnation; but since it deals with men in a particular state, which is a state of guilt and sin, it is not unjust.

He has taken it altogether upon Himself to provide the redemption through which His people are saved. The atonement, therefore, is His own property; and He certainly may, as He most assuredly will, do what He pleases with His own. Grace is given to one and withheld from another as He sees best. It is to be noticed also that the withholding of His grace from the non-elect is but the negative cause of their perishing, just as the absence of a physician from the sick man is the occasion, not the efficient cause, of his death.

No one with proper ideas of God supposes that He suddenly does something which He had not thought of before. Since His is an eternal purpose, what He does in time is what He purposed from eternity to do. Those whom He saves are those whom He purposed from eternity to save, and those whom He leaves to perish are those whom He purposed from eternity to leave. If it is just for God to do a certain thing in time, it is, by parity of argument, just for Him to resolve upon and decree it from eternity, for the principle of the action is the same in either case. And if we are justified in saying that from all eternity God has intended to display His mercy in pardoning a vast multitude of sinners why do some people object so strenuously when we say that from all eternity God has intended to display His justice in punishing other sinners?

There should be no objection to the doctrine of reprobation because it is something God has decreed from all eternity, just as He has decreed the election of a certain people, for the purposes of glorifying Himself.

V. Purposes of the Decree of Reprobation

The condemnation of the non-elect is designed primarily to furnish an eternal exhibition, before men and angels, of God's hatred for sin, or, in other words, it is to be an eternal manifestation of the justice of God. (Let it be remembered that God's justice as certainly demands the punishment of sin as it demands the rewarding of righteousness.) This decree displays one of the divine attributes which apart from it could never have been adequately appreciated. The salvation of some through a redeemer is designed to display the attributes of love, mercy, and holiness. The attributes of wisdom, power and sovereignty are displayed in the treatment accorded both groups. Hence the truth of the Scripture statement that, "Jehovah hath made everything for its own end; Yea, even the wicked for the day of evil," Proverbs 16:4; and also the statement of Paul that this arrangement was intended on the one hand, to "make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He afore prepared unto glory," and on the other, "to show His wrath, and to make His power known" upon "vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction," Romans 9:22, 23.