

## “God’s Sovereign Choice”

### Romans 9

Dr. Jerry Nelson

Appendices:

“What is Election” by Sam Storms p16

“Misunderstanding of the Doctrine of Election” by Wayne Grudem p21

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See also the following books:

*Willing to Believe* by R. C. Sproul:

Description: What is the role of the will in believing the good news of the gospel? Why is there so much controversy over free will throughout church history? R. C. Sproul finds that Christians have often been influenced by pagan views of the human will that deny the effects of Adam's fall.

In *Willing to Believe*, Sproul traces the free-will controversy from its formal beginning in the fifth century, with the writings of Augustine and Pelagius, to the present. Readers will gain understanding into the nuances separating the views of Protestants and Catholics, Calvinists and Arminians, and Reformed and Dispensationalists. This book, like Sproul's *Faith Alone*, is a major work on an essential evangelical tenet.

*The Justification of God* by John Piper.

Description: “Written in an irenic spirit with a keen awareness and interaction with all significant scholarly – it is the best on Romans 9.” G.K. Beale of Gordon-Conwell Seminary

Read Romans 9:1-24

God promises in Romans 8 that those who are in Christ Jesus can never be separated from the love of God.

In fact, in Romans 8 the Apostle Paul articulates some of the grandest truths of the Scriptures:

8:28 “And we know that in **all things** God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

8:29-30 “For those God foreknew he also predestined... And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” What God starts he finishes.

And then in 8:38-39, the Apostle Paul writes, “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything

else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. “

In many ways, Paul has declared - those whom God chooses he keeps - he will never fail them.

Now in chapters 9-11 Paul is going to raise an apparent problem with that confidence in God's keeping power – “The problem is the Jews?”

Isn't the O.T. filled with promises to the Jews?

Look around, how many Jews do you see in the church?

In Romans 9:2-5 Paul acknowledges his own distress over the condition of his fellow-Jews.

He feels this so deeply that he says he wishes he could be cursed and cut off **rather than** his brothers, the Jews.

Most Jews weren't responding to the gospel.

The question this raises is, “If God's word, God's promises, to the Jews weren't kept, if most of the Jews aren't part of God's family, how much confidence can I place in God's choice and keeping of me.

Didn't God start something with the Jews that he didn't finish?

Didn't the Jews expect unending love?

If it didn't work out for them - how can I know it will work out for me?

Someone might quickly point out that the reason it didn't work out for the Jews is that they didn't believe and follow Jesus.

Is that it?

Is that what it all boils down to?

It all depends on the individual?

If final salvation depended on the Jews and likewise it depends on us, then why all that talk in chapter 8 about God's unending love.

If in fact **we** determine the outcome, then the last part of Romans 8 makes little sense -

But Paul's whole point was not our ability to remain faithful to God but God's ability to keep us faithful.

So **that** raises the question - if it all depends on God, didn't God fail with the Jews? And if he did, how can I know he will not fail with me?

There are three questions in this text that Paul answers to ensure us that we are fully secure in God's love and keeping.

The three questions form the structure of this part of the letter.

- The first, which we have already seen, in verse 6 is, "Has God's word failed?"
- The second, which follows logically from the first, is in verse 14 "Is God unjust?"
- And the third, which follows logically from the second, is in verse 19 "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"

The answer to each question then forces the next question.

### **As I've already indicated, the first of those questions you will find implied in verse 6**

The statement of verse 6 is, "It is not as though God's word had failed."

Again, what question is implied?

"Has God's word, God's promise, to the Jews, failed?"

Paul knew that few Jews were responding to the gospel.

And according to verses 4 and 5 that was in spite of the fact that they had so many advantages:

God adopted them, God was with them in the tabernacle and Temple, they had the covenants (the promises were given to them), they received God's word (the law), they had it all.

But many of them, maybe most of them, didn't end up trusting in God's Messiah - Jesus.

What happened, "Did God's promise, God's word, fail?"

Paul says, "No, God's promise didn't fail!"

Paul then goes on to prove that.

He begins by noting that most Jews, **and even we,** have a wrong understanding of **who** actually belongs to God.

Many people have the impression that if someone is a Jew by racial lineage, by biological fact, then they are automatically a Jew in the sense of being one of God's chosen, God's elect, God's promised people.

But what does Paul say?

Romans 9:6b-7 "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. (Israel, you will remember was the name of the father of the 12 tribes of Israel) Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children."

In other words, just because they are Abraham's descendants doesn't mean they are Abraham's spiritual children.

Paul had already declared this fact.

Look back to Romans 2:28 "A man is not a Jew if he is **only** one outwardly...No a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly...by the Spirit..."

Corrie Ten Boom's father said it this way, "Just because a mouse is in the cookie jar doesn't mean he's a cookie."

So who are the true children of Israel?

Who are the true children of God?

Now as we answer that, keep in mind the fundamental question: Did God fail?

If God chose **all** Jews and few of them respond - then God failed.

But God **did not choose** all the descendants of Abraham or Isaac.

INSTEAD, as we will see, God chose specific people, one by one, to be his own - to be the recipients of his promises.

In Romans 9:7b-8 Paul quotes from the OT: It is not merely because you are a descendant of Abraham that you are one of his children - "On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

In other words, it is **not merely the natural children of Abraham** who are God's children, but God's children are chosen on a different basis.

The point is that God did not choose based on race; God chose based on something in God that we will see in a moment.

**Now in verses 7-9 Paul will illustrate that Abraham's spiritual children are chosen differently than by race.**

Abraham fathered two sons - Ishmael first and then Isaac.

They were both natural descendants of Abraham.

But who was chosen by God? Isaac, not the firstborn Ishmael.

Now this is important: **when** was Isaac chosen?

Before he was even born as indicated in verse 9:9 "For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

Before Sarah was even pregnant, God promised she would have a son who would be the chosen one.

We respond, "That may be true, but surely God's choice of Isaac was because of what God foresaw Isaac would do - He knew Isaac would trust God and be faithful to God so that is why God chose him.

Reasoning that way, we conclude that God keeps those who keep themselves in God's love.

**Anticipating that reasoning Paul writes in**

Romans 9:10-12 "Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born **or had done anything good or bad**—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger."

Skipping to the next generation, Paul reminds his readers of Isaac's and Rebekah's children, Jacob and Esau.

They were conceived at the same time; twins.

God's choice of Jacob was not based parentage or birth order.

More importantly notice what he says in verse 11, God chose Jacob over Esau "Before they had done anything good or bad"

He intentionally points out that any choice of one over the other was not based on what they would ever do.

What does he say at the beginning of verse 12 "not by works but by him who calls..."

The choice is not based on works - not based on what God foresaw Jacob would do.

God's choice of someone is not based on God seeing into the future and choosing the one who would eventually respond correctly.

I can hear someone objecting at this point and saying, "You are right, we all agree that God's choice is not based on works, **but God foresaw who would have faith and he chose him.**"

In other words, God chooses those who eventually believe."

But if verse 11 doesn't sufficiently contradict that kind of thinking look at verse 16:

Romans 9:16 "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

That our effort, our works, are not the basis of God's choice of who to save has already been stated and granted.

But notice what else God's choice doesn't depend on: "It does not depend on man's desire."

"Desire" is a word that can be translated as a man's want, a man's wish, a man's decision.

Could it be said anymore strongly?

God's initial choice of us does not depend on God foreseeing our works or even God foreseeing our faith, our desire.

I think these verses make it Biblically untenable for us to still claim that God chooses based on who he foresees will believe.

The Bible says it does not depend on man's desire or his effort.

### Then what is the basis of God's choice according to v11?

How God chooses a person is very different from the way we would do it.

God chooses them strictly of his own free will, not caused by anything that he sees in the ones he chooses.

God's children are not determined by race, or works. Or even foreseen faith, but by the sovereign choice, the promise, of God. - the supernatural unmerited intervention of God.

On what basis does God choose?

9:11 "In order that God's purpose in election might stand."

The word "**purpose**" is largely equivalent to the words "**plan**" or "**design**".

Ephesians 1:11-12 says basically the same thing: "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory."

The bases of God's choices are not found in us but in him - his plan and his glory.

Again looking at 9:11 God's choices are made in accordance with "God's purpose in election..."

The word "**election**" is used much in the Bible in reference to God's choice and means God's choice that is uncaused by anything outside of himself.

But don't think God's choices are arbitrary; no, they are according to his purpose, his plan, for his glory.

So Paul concludes with God's statement to Rebekah"

Romans 9:12b-13 "The older will serve the younger."

God's decision, uninfluenced by anything in Jacob or Esau, was to choose Jacob and not Esau.

Paul supports this by quoting from the OT: "Just as it is written", God said, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

To understand those words we must understand that God is not describing here his emotions, he is describing his actions.

He loved, or to say it differently, he chose Jacob but he hated, or to say it differently, he did not choose, Esau.

Jesus used the word "hate" in somewhat the same way when he said "If you don't hate your mother and father, wife and children, and yes, even your own life you cannot be my disciple."

Jesus was not speaking of an emotion but of a decision about who you would unquestionably choose to put first.

So here, God chose Jacob and did not choose Esau.

Remember the main point Paul was making?

Did God's word fail in regard to the Jews?

**Absolutely not!** Those whom God chose he kept!

He did not promise to choose everyone and save everyone and then fail to do so.

**And it particularly important to note** that the promise was not based on anything **in** the people who were chosen for that would jeopardize the fulfillment -

If the choice were based on us then we would be in control of our destiny and any failure on our part would determine God's failure.

But God won't leave his promises to sinful fallible people.

Praise God that those whom he chooses are kept - God won't fail.

When we hear that God chose us, not for anything he foresaw in us but solely of his own sovereign free choice, then we can take great

encouragement that **God won't fail us** because his choice and his keeping are dependent only on him and not on us.

But instead of being encouraged by that truth, some take exception to it.

**Look at verse 14 and here is the second question:**

Romans 9:14 "What then shall we say? Is God unjust?"  
Is God unrighteous, evil?  
It is as if Paul reads our minds?

Some still ask that question when they are told that God chooses to give saving faith and grace to one person but not to another.

And how does Paul answer the question?

**"Not at all! No. God is NOT unjust!"**

Now here Paul has a chance to correct a misunderstanding if he wants to.

We **thought** we heard Paul saying that God chooses some and doesn't choose others not based on what God sees in them but solely based on something in God.

We **thought** we heard Paul come dangerously close to saying that God's choice of us was not even caused by his seeing into the future and foreknowing that we would have faith.

That's right, here is Paul's chance to clear up his message if we have misunderstood him.

Surely, we think, it must be something God foresees in those who will be saved or else, we think, God is being arbitrary and that would be unjust or unfair.

But what does Paul do?

Does he write, "No, no, you misunderstood me, God knew who would have faith, he knew who would respond, he knew who would be faithful and those are the ones he chose"?

Here's Paul's chance, so what does he do? Does he recant? No!

He states the truth of **God's sovereign, free, unfettered choice** of who would belong to him **even more strongly than before.**

Paul will defend God's justice, differently that we would have expected, with two O.T. references:

The first is in verses 15,16 "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

God will have mercy and compassion on whomever he chooses.

**The first answer** to our charge that God is unjust is that **our charge itself is faulty** - we aren't even focusing on the correct issue.

The issue is not justice, the issue is mercy.

Paul has already very powerfully made the case, earlier in this letter, that every person deserves eternal punishment and God is in no way obligated to intervene.

If everyone went to hell - justice would be served.

When Paul writes about God choosing some to have life - that is not an issue of justice, as if God were being unfair, it is a matter of mercy.

Two men deserve to spend the rest of their lives in prison because of their crimes but the governor commutes the sentence of one but not the other.

Is that unjust?

To be sure it is unequal, but it is not unjust.

We sometimes think unequal means unjust.

If you give one child a larger piece of candy than another be ready for the charge of unfairness.

It is not necessarily unfair, in fact it could be the fairest thing based on something the child doesn't even know about; but it is unequal.

But again, unequal doesn't necessarily mean unjust.

The governor was under no obligation to commute the sentence of either man, both deserved to spend the rest of their lives in prison.

The Governor's act wasn't unjust; it was merciful.

No one can claim they deserve God's mercy.

If he chooses to have mercy on some who deserve wrath - that is not about justice, it is about mercy.

We want to judge God by our standards.

We think everyone deserves to be treated exactly the same way.

But God operates by his standard, which is the only perfectly just standard.

Commentator Doug Moo correctly reminds us: "Determining right or wrong, what is just or unjust, demands a standard for measurement. That standard is ultimately nothing less than God's own character. God, therefore, acts justly when he acts in accordance with his own person and plan." (Moo, TNIVAC, 310)

As we have already seen, in 9:11, God's choices are made "In order that God's purpose in election might stand."

I confess I don't fully understand it but God's choices are in perfect accordance with his character which is righteous, not unrighteous.

**Now the second way** Paul responds to the charge that God is unjust, in choosing some and not others, is **not** very satisfying to me.

Romans 9:17 "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

When we come this illustration of Pharaoh, Israel's Egyptian nemesis, I wish Paul would say that Pharaoh got exactly what he deserved and therefore justice was carried out.

Paul could have so easily written that, and it would have been entirely accurate.

Pharaoh like every other human being deserves God's wrath and if God doesn't choose to intervene God can't be rightly charged with injustice.

But Paul doesn't take that easy way out - instead he keeps beating the drum of God's sovereign freedom to choose.

Look at verse 18: Romans 9:18 “Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.”

Even though Paul continues to run the risk of people charging God with unfairness - Paul wants to drive home his point:

God’s choice of you, out of all the people of the world, was a matter of awesome mercy - it was not based on your worthiness or your actions present or future - it was all of grace.

And because it doesn’t depend on you - you can have great confidence that his keeping you won’t depend on you either.

I think Paul knows that his answer to the charge of God being unjust isn’t as satisfactory as some would like because Paul, himself, raises yet another objection.

### **This is the third question: READ V19**

“One of you will say to me, “Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?”

This question only makes sense however if verses 15-18 not only taught that God shows mercy sovereignly but also that God hardens people sovereignly.

If God was only responsible for showing mercy and not responsible for hardening people I don’t think this question would be asked.

And so Paul responds first in verse 20, "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’”

We don’t like the response but Paul says:

Be careful that you don't ask questions of God that are improper.

The issue is not that we can't ask honest questions but that once we have the answer we don't blame God if we don't like the answer.

You see, the very question, “Then why does God still blame us?” is stated in such a way as to find fault with God.

Shall the person made say to his maker, "Why did you make me this way?"

**Paul's first response** to the question of, 'if God sovereignly does the choosing, how then can he find fault with anyone' is:  
**"Be careful, you have no right to be the judge of God".**

**Paul's second response** is given in Romans 9:21-24 "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory, even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?"

I confess again, these verses push me in a direction I don't like going.

The theological term for it is double predestination.

I can't get around the fact that here the Bible declares that God chose some to receive mercy and he chose others to pass over.

I cannot teach that God is the author of evil and it would seem evil to me to suggest that God actually created specific people to spend eternity in hell.

But neither can I deny this passage that leaves God sovereignly in control of all that happens.

The conclusion is that I simply remain ignorant on how God does this without being unjust.

How God does this, we are not told; by why he does it is stated clearly in verses 22-23:

God desires to "show his wrath and make his power known."  
 And to "make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy."

By showing his wrath it highlights ever more brightly his mercy.

It is when we know "I once was lost" that we sing "but now am found" and when I know the "wretch" I am that it becomes "Amazing Grace".

The splendor of his undeserved mercy shines brightest against the backdrop of his deserved wrath.

Please hear me - these answers by Paul don't answer every possible question about how and why God does what he does.

There is a mystery to it still.

But we can know that what God does he does justly and we can find no fault with God for the destruction of those who resist him – and resist him they do.

At verse 24b Paul comes back to the issue of the Jews.

Remember how he started the chapter?

The Jews didn't respond to the Gospel of Jesus.

In spite of all their advantages they largely rejected the Messiah.

Why? Remember the first Question? Did God's word fail?

Paul's readers would have known the O.T. and all the promises to Israel about being God's children forever -

promises that sounded familiar from chapter 8 regarding the Romans and us.

Could God be believed or had God failed in the past, leaving the door open for his failure in the future?

“No” Paul writes, “God won’t fail” and he concludes his discussion by citing four O.T. passages, two from Hosea and two from Isaiah.

Through Hosea, God says, Because of mercy, “I will call them my people who are not my people.”

And through Isaiah, God says, Because of mercy, God will not destroy all the Jews but will sovereignly save some.

And all four quotations reiterate the dominant theme of the argument:

God has acted in mercy.

God acted in pure mercy when he chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God acted in pure mercy when he chose people down through

the ages.

And God acted in pure mercy when he chose you and me.

And if God chose us, based not one whit on what he saw in us or foresaw in us, then his choice was free and is not controlled by my actions or even reactions.

Just as every Jew he chose and promised to keep SO  
He has chosen me and he has promised to keep me.

Just as he never failed one Jew he chose so he will never fail me.

**In the sermon notes on-line you will find several excellent articles explaining more fully these concepts I have taught here today:**

**“Election,” “Double Predestination,” and “Free Will.”**

## **What is Election?**

By Sam Storms

<http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/what-is-election>

Divine election is certainly one of the more profound and controversial doctrines in Holy Scripture. To some it is an idea conceived in hell, a tool of Satan wielded by him to thwart the evangelistic zeal of the church and thus responsible for populating hell with men and women who otherwise would have been reached with the gospel message. To others divine election is the heart and soul of Scripture, the most comforting and reassuring of biblical truths apart from which grace loses its power and God his glory. To the former, then, election is a primary reason why people are in hell. To the latter, it is the only reason why people are in heaven!

This radical difference of opinion concerning the doctrine of election and predestination is illustrated beautifully (and humorously) in a poem which appeared in *The Continental Journal*, March 11, 1779. It was entitled "On Predestination."

"If all things succeed as already agreed,

And immutable impulses rule us;

To preach and to pray, is but time thrown away,

And our teachers do nothing but fool us.

If we're driven by fate, either this way or that,

As the carman whips up his horses,

Then no man can stray --- all go the right way,

As the stars that are fix'd in their courses.

But if by free will, we can go or stand still,

As best suits the present occasion;

Then fill up the glass, and confirm him an ass

That depends upon Predestination.”

Two weeks later an answer appeared in the same newspaper.

“If an all perfect mind rules over mankind,  
With infinite wisdom and power;  
Sure he may decree, and yet the will be free,  
The deeds and events of each hour.

If scripture affirms in the plainest of terms,  
The doctrine of Predestination;  
We ought to believe it, and humbly receive it,  
As a truth of divine revelation.

If all things advance with the force of mere chance,  
Or by human free will are directed;  
To preach and to pray, will be time thrown away,  
Our teachers may be well rejected.

If men are deprav'd, and to vice so enslav'd,  
That the heart chuses nothing but evil;  
Then who goes on still by his own corrupt will,  
Is driving post haste to the devil.

Then let human pride and vain cavil subside,  
                   It is plain to a full demonstration,  
 That he's a wild ass, who over his glass,  
                   Dares ridicule Predestination."

[Both of these poems are quoted by Charles W. Akers, "Calvinism and the American Revolution," in *The Heritage of John Calvin: Lectures*, ed. John H. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), pp. 170-171.]

Much of the disagreement and most of the animosity concerning this doctrine proceeds from a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means. Our analysis of divine election must, therefore, begin with an attempt to clarify precisely what is at stake and, at the same time, correct misrepresentations of it.

When I am asked, and I am asked often, "Sam, are you a Calvinist?", I immediately respond with a request of my own, "Tell me what you mean by 'Calvinist'. Then I'll tell you if I'm one!" Often the person then defines "Calvinism" as a rigid, fatalistic system of theology, devoid of life and joy, in which God is portrayed as a celestial bully who takes sadistic glee in sending people to hell whether they deserve it or not. "If *that* is what you mean by 'Calvinist', then I most assuredly am *not* one!"

The problem is that Arminians often run into an equally distressing caricature of their own position. Sadly, many Calvinists think of Arminianism as an intellectually flabby, overly sentimental view of the Christian faith that borders on liberalism, if not universalism. The "God" of Arminianism, I once heard someone sarcastically say, is actually "man" spoke of in a very loud voice. I hope these studies will go a long way in dispelling such unkind and terribly misleading caricatures of what people really believe.

Whereas much may and will be said of election in these studies, the point of dispute is surprisingly simple. No one who believes in the Bible disputes the fact that election is taught there. It isn't the reality of election, or even its source, author, time, or goal that has elicited

so much venom among professing Christians. It is rather the basis of divine election, that is to say, *why and on what grounds some are elected to salvation and life and others are not*. There are essentially only three options, the first of which is more pagan than Christian.

First, it has been argued that God elects those who are good. In this view, election is a debt God is obliged to pay, not a gift he graciously bestows. It is on the basis of inherent or self-generated righteousness that God elects men and women. This is the doctrine of Pelagianism, named after the British monk Pelagius who popularized the view in the fifth century. One would be hard-pressed to find an advocate of this perspective within the professing Christian church.

Second, others contend that God elects some who are bad who, notwithstanding their being bad, choose to exercise faith in Jesus Christ. It is on the basis of this *foreseen faith* that God elects them. This is the doctrine of Arminianism, named after the Dutch theologian James Arminius (1560-1609). It has also been called Wesleyanism because of the influence of John Wesley.

Third, there is the view that God elects some who are bad who, because of their being bad, are not of themselves able to exercise faith in Christ. It is on the basis of his own sovereign good pleasure that God elects them. This is the doctrine of Calvinism, named after the French theologian John Calvin (1509-1564).

We are concerned with the latter two options. The question reduces to this: Does God elect people because they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, or does God elect people in order that they shall believe in Christ? Jack W. Cottrell, an Arminian, is to be complimented for acknowledging that this is in fact the issue separating Calvinists and Arminians. "The Calvinistic mind," says Cottrell, "sees election as bringing about the transition from unbelief to belief, hence making unbelievers the object of election. The Arminian says that this transition is made by a free act of will; election then is an act of God directed toward the believer after the transition has been made" (Jack W. Cottrell, "Conditional Election," in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975], p. 72). Perhaps the most cogent recent exposition of Arminianism, particularly in its view of God, providence, and predestination, is Cottrell's work, *What the*

Bible Says About God the Ruler (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1984). The article cited, "Conditional Election," has been revised and included in this more recent work in the chapter "Predestination," pp. 331-52.

Thus the Calvinist says that God elects unbelievers and predestines them to become believers. The Arminian, on the other hand, says that God elects believers and predestines them to become his children.

The issue is not whether there is a cause or basis of God's choice of people, but whether that cause is some condition (faith) fulfilled by an individual acting from free will or the sovereign good pleasure of God. Does God elect a person because that person wants God, or does God elect a person because God wants that person in spite of the fact that the person does not want God? We are not disputing whether faith and repentance are necessary for salvation. Indeed, one may even speak of faith and repentance as the *condition* for salvation, in the sense that one must believe and repent in order to be saved. The question, rather, is this: *Are faith and repentance produced by free will and thus the cause of election, or are they produced by the Holy Spirit and thus the effect of election?*

According to Arminianism, election is that act of God whereby he foreordains to eternal life those whom he foresees will respond in faith to the gospel. According to Calvinism, election is that act of God whereby he foreordains to eternal life those who, because of sin, cannot respond in faith to the gospel. Which of these two views is the one the Bible teaches? Or is there a third, mediating option? That is the question which I have set myself to answer in these studies.

## **Misunderstandings of the Doctrine of Election**

(excerpt from *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem, pp. 674-79, Inter-Varsity Press, Zondervan Publishing House)

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## 1. Election Is Not Fatalistic or Mechanistic.

Sometimes those who object to the doctrine of election say that it is "fatalism" or that it presents a "mechanistic system" for the universe. Two somewhat different objections are involved here. By "fatalism" is meant a system in which human choices and human decisions really do not make any difference. In fatalism, no matter what we do, things are going to turn out as they have been previously ordained. Therefore, it is futile to attempt to influence the outcome of events or the outcome of our lives by putting forth any effort or making any significant choices, because these will not make any difference any way. In a true fatalistic system, of course, our humanity is destroyed for our choices really mean nothing, and the motivation for moral accountability is removed.

In a mechanistic system the picture is one of an impersonal universe in which all things that happen have been inflexibly determined by an impersonal force long ago, and the universe functions in a mechanical way so that human beings are more like machines or robots than genuine persons. Here also genuine human personality would be reduced to the level of a machine that simply functions in accordance with predetermined plans and in response to predetermined causes and influences.

By contrast to the mechanistic picture, the New Testament presents the entire outworking of our salvation as something brought about by a *personal* God in relationship with *personal* creatures. God "destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:5). God's act of election was neither impersonal nor mechanistic, but was permeated with personal love for those whom he chose. Moreover, the personal care of God for his creatures, even those who rebel against him, is seen clearly in God's plea through Ezekiel, "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his evil way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11).

When talking about our response to the gospel offer, Scripture continually views us not as mechanistic creatures or robots, but as genuine persons, personal creatures who make willing choices to accept or reject the gospel. Jesus invites everyone, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). And we read the invitation at the end of Revelation: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let him who hears say, 'Come.' And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price" (Rev. 22:17). This invitation and many others like it are addressed to genuine persons who are capable of hearing the invitation and responding to it by a decision of their wills. Regarding those who will not accept him, Jesus clearly emphasizes their hardness of heart and their stubborn refusal to come to him: "Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:40). And Jesus cries out in sorrow to the city that had rejected him, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Matt. 23:37).

In contrast to the charge of fatalism, we also see a much different picture in the New Testament. Not only do we make willing choices as real persons, but these choices are also real choices because they do affect the course of events in the world. They affect our own lives and they affect the lives and destinies of others. So, "He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:18). Our personal decisions to believe or not believe in Christ have eternal consequences in our lives, and Scripture is quite willing to talk about our decision to believe or not believe as the factor that decides our eternal destiny.

The implication of this is that we certainly must preach the gospel, and people's eternal destiny hinges on whether we proclaim the gospel or not. Therefore when the Lord one night told Paul, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for

I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10), Paul did not simply conclude that the "many people" who belong to God would be saved whether he stayed there preaching the gospel or not. Rather, "he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11) - this was longer than Paul stayed in any other city except Ephesus during his three missionary journeys. When Paul was told that God had many elect people in Corinth, he stayed a long time and preached, in order that those elect people might be saved! Paul is quite clear about the fact that unless people preach the gospel others will not be saved:

"But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" ... "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ." (Rom. 10:14, 17)

Did Paul know before he went to a city who was elected by God for salvation and who was not? No, he did not. That is something that God does not show to us ahead of time. But once people comes to faith in Christ then we can be confident that God had earlier chosen them for salvation. This is exactly Paul's conclusion regarding the Thessalonians; he says that he knows that God chose them because when he preached to them, the gospel came in power and with full conviction: "For we know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you; for our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1 Thess. 1:4-5). Far from saying that whatever he did made no difference, and that God's elect would be saved whether he preached or not, Paul endured a life of incredible hardship in order to bring the gospel to those whom God had chosen. At the end of a life filled with suffering he said, "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory" (1 Tim. 2:10).

## **2. Election Is Not Based on God's Foreknowledge of Our Faith.**

Quite commonly people will agree that God predestines some to be saved, but they will say that he does this by looking into the future and seeing who will believe in Christ and who will not. If he sees that a person is going to come to saving faith, then he will predestine that person to be saved. In this way, it is thought, the ultimate reason why some are saved and some are not lies within the people themselves, not within God. All that God does in his predestining work is to give confirmation to the decision he knows people will make on their own. The verse commonly used to support this view is Romans 8:29: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."

### **a. Foreknowledge of Persons, Not Facts:**

But this verse can hardly be used to demonstrate that God based his predestination on foreknowledge of the fact that a person would believe. The passage speaks rather of the fact that God knew persons ("those whom he foreknew"), not that he knew some fact about them, such as the fact that they would believe. It is a personal, relational knowledge that is spoken of here: God, looking into the future, thought of certain people in saving relationship to him, and in that sense he "knew them" long ago. This is the sense in which Paul can talk about God's "knowing" someone, for example, in 1 Corinthians 8:3: "But if one loves God, one is known by him." Similarly, he says, "but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God ..." (Gal. 4:9). When people know God in Scripture, or when God knows them, it is personal knowledge that involves a saving relationship. therefore in Romans 8:29, "those whom he foreknew" is best understood to mean, "those whom he long ago thought of in a saving relationship to himself." The text actually says nothing about God foreknowing or foreseeing that certain people would believe, nor is that idea mentioned in any other text of Scripture.

Sometimes people say that God elected groups of people, but not individuals to salvation. In some Arminian views, God just elected the church as a group, while the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) said that God elected Christ, and all people in Christ. But Romans 8:29 talks about certain people whom God foreknew ("those whom he foreknew"), not just undefined or unfilled groups. And in Ephesians Paul talks about certain people whom God chose, including himself: "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). To talk about God choosing a group with no people in it is not biblical election at all. But to talk about God choosing a group of people means that he chose specific individuals who constituted that group.

### **b. Scripture Never Speaks of Our Faith As the Reason God Chose Us:**

In addition, when we look beyond these specific passages that speak of foreknowledge and look at verses that talk about the reason God chose us, we find that Scripture never speaks of our faith or the fact that we would come to believe in Christ as the reason God chose us. In fact, Paul seems explicitly to exclude the consideration of what people would do in life from his understanding of God's choice of Jacob rather than Esau: he says, "Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, she was told, 'The elder will serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated'" (Rom. 9:11-13). Nothing that Jacob or Esau would do in life influenced God's decision; it was simply in order that his purpose of election might continue.

When discussing the Jewish people who have come to faith in Christ, Paul says, "So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works" (Rom. 11:5-6). Here again Paul emphasizes God's grace and the complete absence of human merit in the process of election. Someone might object that faith is not viewed as a "work" in Scripture and therefore faith should be excluded from the quotation above ("It is no longer on the basis of works"). Based on this objection, Paul could actually mean, "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, but rather on the basis of whether someone will believe." However, this is unlikely in this context: Paul is not contrasting human faith and human works; he is contrasting God's sovereign choosing of people with any human activity, and he points to God's sovereign will as the ultimate basis for God's choice of the Jews who have come to Christ.

Similarly, when Paul talks about election in Ephesians, there is no mention of any foreknowledge of the fact that we would believe, or any idea that there was anything worthy of meritorious in us (such as a tendency to believe) that was the basis for God's choosing us. Rather, Paul says, "He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:5-6). Now if God's grace is to be praised for election, and not human ability to believe or decision to believe, then once again it is consistent for Paul to mention nothing of human faith but only to mention God's predestining activity, his purpose and will, and his freely given grace.

Again in 2 Timothy, Paul says that God "saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago" (2 Tim. 1:9). Once again God's sovereign purpose is seen as the ultimate reason for our salvation, and Paul connects this with the fact that God gave us grace in Christ Jesus ages ago - another way of speaking of the truth that God freely gave favor to us when he chose us without reference to any foreseen merit or worthiness on our part.

### **c. Election Based on Something Good in Us (Our Faith) Would Be the Beginning of Salvation by Merit:**

Yet another kind of objection can be brought against the idea that God chose us because he foreknew

that we would come to faith. If the ultimate determining factor in whether we will be saved or not is our own decision to accept Christ, then we shall be more inclined to think that we deserve some credit for the fact that we were saved: in distinction from other people who continue to reject Christ, we were wise enough in our judgment or capacities to decide to believe in Christ. But once we begin to think this way then we seriously diminish the glory that is to be given to God for our salvation. We become uncomfortable speaking like Paul who says that God "destined us ... according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph. 1:5-6), and we begin to think that God "destined us ... according to the fact that he knew that we would have enough tendencies toward goodness and faith within us that we would believe." When we think like this we begin to sound very much unlike the New Testament when it talks about election or predestination. By contrast, if election is solely based on God's own good pleasure and his sovereign decision to love us in spite of our lack of goodness or merit, then certainly we have a profound sense of appreciation to him for a salvation that is totally undeserved, and we will forever be willing to praise his "glorious grace" (Eph. 1:6).

In the final analysis, the difference between two views of election can be seen in the way they answer a very simple question. Given the fact that in the final analysis some people will choose to accept Christ and some people will not, the question is, "What makes people differ?" That is, what ultimately makes the difference between those who believe and those who do not? If our answer is that it is ultimately based on something God does (namely, his sovereign election of those who would be saved), then we see that salvation at its most foundational level is based on grace alone. On the other hand, if we answer that the ultimate difference between those who are saved and those who are not is because of something in man (that is, a tendency or disposition to believe or not believe), then salvation ultimately depends on a combination of grace plus human ability.

#### **d. Predestination Based on Foreknowledge Still Does Not Give People Free Choice:**

The idea that God's predestination of some to believe is based on foreknowledge of their faith encounters still another problems: upon reflection, this system turns out to give no real freedom to man either. For if God can look into the future and see that person A will come to faith in Christ, and that person B will not come to faith in Christ, then those facts are already fixed, they are already determined. If we assume that God's knowledge of the future is true (which it must be), then it is absolutely certain that person A will believe and person B will not. There is no way that their lives could turn out any differently than this. Therefore it is fair to say that their destinies are still determined, for they could not be otherwise. But by what are these destinies determined? If they are determined by God himself, then we no longer have election based ultimately on foreknowledge of faith, but rather on God's sovereign will. But if these destinies are not determined by God, then who or what determines them? Certainly no Christian would say that there is some powerful being other than God controlling people's destinies. Therefore it seems that the only other possible solution is to say they are determined by some impersonal force, some kind of fate, operative in the universe, making things turn out as they do. But what kind of benefit is this? We have then sacrificed election in love by a personal God for a kind of determinism by an impersonal force and God is no longer to be given the ultimate credit for our salvation.

#### **e. Conclusion: Election is Unconditional:**

It seems best, for the previous four reasons, to reject the idea that election is based on God's foreknowledge of our faith. We conclude instead that the reason for election is simple God's sovereign choice - he "destined us in love to be his sons" (Eph. 1:5). God chose us simply because he decided to bestow his love upon us. It was not because of any foreseen faith or foreseen merit in us.

This understanding of election has traditionally been called "unconditional election." It is

"unconditional" because it is not conditioned upon anything that God sees in us that makes us worthy of his choosing us.

“How Can God Be Just?”  
Sam Storms November 6, 2006

<http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/how-can-god-be-just>

One of the more frequently heard objections to unconditional election is that it impugns God’s justice. God is unfair and unjust, says the Arminian, if he treats people differently or bestows on some a favor that he withholds from others.

But this is surely a strange way of defining justice. Justice is that principle in virtue of which a person is given his due. To withhold from a person what he deserves or what the law demands that he receive is to act unjustly. How, then, can it be unjust to withhold from a person what he does *not* deserve? If you are in my debt and I demand payment, I can hardly be said to have acted unjustly. Similarly, should you not pay me, as you are obligated by law, it is justice that demands that you suffer the consequences.

All humanity stands infinitely indebted to God, rightly condemned to suffer the penal consequences that our sin deserves. No man can rightfully claim to deserve mercy or divine clemency, for “there is none who does good, there is not even one” (Rom. 3:12b). The verdict of Holy Scripture is “guilty as charged,” with no grounds for a new trial or for appeal.

No legitimate indictment may be brought against the bench should “His Honor” immediately consign the whole of Adam’s race to eternal death. There is justifiable recourse for the defendants neither in the law nor in themselves. No technicality in the procedural development of the trial nor character witness on behalf of the accused can be claimed. Unlike earthly judges who may be baffled by quick-witted lawyers or bribed by unscrupulous partisans, God weighs all the evidence and judges with absolute impartiality. The verdict is the

same for all: *Guilty!* The punishment is the same for all: *Eternal Death!*

God is under no obligation to save any, and is entirely just in condemning all. That he should pardon some is owing entirely to free and sovereign grace. Thus, “the marvel of marvels,” says Benjamin Warfield, “is not that God, in his infinite love, has not elected all of this guilty race to be saved, but that he has elected any. What really needs accounting for – though to account for it passes the powers of our extremest flights of imagination – is how the holy God could get the consent of his nature to save a single sinner. If we know what sin is, and what holiness is, and what salvation from sin to holiness is, **this is what we shall face**” (Benjamin B. Warfield, “Election,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. John E. Meeter, 2 vols. [Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970], I:297-98).

I must confess that the question that haunts my heart is not “How can God be just?”, but “How can God be merciful?” It isn’t “Esau I hated” that disturbs me, but “Jacob I loved” that absolutely astounds me.

### **How Can God Be Impartial?**

Somewhat related to the foregoing objection concerning God’s justice is the one which accuses him of partiality. God is not impartial, say many Arminians, if he favors some with life but not all. He is guilty of showing partiality toward the elect.

*Of course he is!* That is what unconditional election is all about. But we should refrain from saying that God is “guilty” of being partial toward the elect because this kind of partiality is a virtue, not a vice. It is a divine prerogative for which God should be praised, not vilified. Let me explain what I mean.

To say that God is impartial means that he is not moved or motivated by human characteristics such as race or gender or color of hair or socio-economic achievements. When God set his electing love on some but not all, he was not influenced by wealth or power or beauty or education or skill or potential or any other human consideration. God favored the elect, God was *partial* toward them, because that is what he wanted to do. He was not obligated by anything in any person to show favor to anyone. If God grants preferential treatment to his elect it is solely because it pleases him to do so, and not

because the elect distinguished themselves from the non-elect by fulfilling some condition, either spiritual or physical.

Scripture makes it ever so clear that there is nothing that makes one person to differ from another in the eyes of God. In every morally and spiritually relevant concern, all people are equal. No person in any morally or spiritually relevant way stands out as different from any other person, or manifests any feature or performs any deed or fulfills any condition that God is obligated to acknowledge or to which he must respond. In that sense, therefore, he is utterly *impartial* when he chooses one but not another. The basis for this choice is not because of some distinctive element in the former that the latter lacks. No physical trait or spiritual virtue (or vice, for that matter), no financial or political achievement, nothing, dictates or determines God's election of men and women to eternal life. This is just another way of saying that election is utterly of *grace*.

What is it, then, that dictates and determines God's choice? *God*. He chooses one, but not another, because it pleases him to do so. **Why that particular choice is more pleasing to God than another, or neither, is not revealed in Holy Scripture.** That is simply the way God wants it, and so it shall be.

I've heard people say: "But I don't agree with or care for God's reason in choosing Jerry instead of Ed." But what, may I ask, is that reason, the one of which you disapprove? I am not aware that Scripture provides such information. How can anyone object to the reason God elected Jerry instead of Ed when no one knows what it is?

I can tell you what that reason *is not*. It is not anything having to do with Jerry or Ed, either foreseen or actual. God chose Jerry instead of Ed because it was pleasing to God, and that is all the reason he needs. This is the heart and soul of the doctrine of unconditional election, that God sovereignly decided to show love and favor toward some who did not deserve it, but not all, without regard to anything in either.

To sum up, God is *partial toward the elect*, but not because of the elect. He favors them with love and life, without regard for their life or love. He is, therefore, *utterly impartial in the partiality he has for his*

*own*. This is just another way of saying that God unconditionally (impartially) loves (is partial toward) the elect.

## **Double Predestination**

R.C. Sproul

[http://www.the-highway.com/DoublePredestination\\_Sproul.html](http://www.the-highway.com/DoublePredestination_Sproul.html)

"A horrible decree ...." "Most ruthless statement. . . ." "A terrible theological theory. . . ." "An illegitimate inference of logic. . ." These and other similar epithets have been used frequently to articulate displeasure and revulsion at the Reformed doctrine of double predestination. Particularly abhorrent to many is the notion that God would predestinate (in any sense) the doom of the reprobate.

### ***The "Double" of Predestination***

The goal of this essay is not to provide a comprehensive analysis, exposition, or defense of the doctrine of election or predestination. Rather, the essay is limited to a concern for the "double" aspect of predestination with particular reference to the question of the relationship of God's sovereignty to reprobation or preterition.

The use of the qualifying term "double" has been somewhat confusing in discussions concerning predestination. The term apparently means one thing within the circle of Reformed theology and quite another outside that circle and at a popular level of theological discourse. The term "double" has been set in contrast with a notion of "single" predestination. It has also been used as a synonym for a symmetrical view of predestination which sees election and reprobation being worked out in a parallel mode of divine operation. Both usages involve a serious distortion of the Reformed view of double predestination.

Viewing double predestination as a distinction from single predestination may be seen in the work of Emil Brunner. Brunner argues that it is impossible to deduce the doctrine of double predestination from the Bible. He says:

The Bible does not contain the doctrine of double predestination, although in a few isolated passages it seems to come close to it. The Bible teaches that all salvation is based on the eternal Election of God in Jesus Christ, and that this eternal Election springs wholly and entirely from God's sovereign freedom. But wherever this happens, there is no mention of a

decree of rejection. The Bible teaches that alongside of the elect there are those who are not elect, who are "reprobate," and indeed that the former are the minority and the latter the majority; but in these passages the point at issue is not eternal election but "separation" or "selection" in judgment. Thus the Bible teaches that there will be a double outcome of world history, salvation and ruin, Heaven and hell. But while salvation is explicitly taught as derived from the eternal election, the further conclusion is not drawn that destruction is also based upon a corresponding decree of doom.<sup>1</sup>

Here Brunner argues passionately, though not coherently, for "single" predestination. There is a decree of election, but not of reprobation. Predestination has only one side — election. In this context, double predestination is "avoided" (or evaded) by the dialectical method. The dialectical method which sidesteps logical consistency has had a pervasive influence on contemporary discussions of double predestination. A growing antipathy to logic in theology is manifesting itself widely. Even G. C. Berkouwer seems allergic to the notion that logic should play a role in developing our understanding of election.

It is one thing to construct a theology of election (or any other kind of theology) purely on the basis of rational speculation. It is quite another to utilize logic in seeking a coherent understanding of biblical revelation. Brunner seems to abhor both.

Let us examine the "logic" of Brunner's position. He maintains that (1) there is a divine decree of election that is eternal; (2) that divine decree is particular in scope ("There are those who are not elect"); (3) yet there is no decree of reprobation. Consider the implications. If God has predestined some but not all to election, does it not follow by what Luther called a "resistless logic" that some are not predestined to election? If, as Brunner maintains, *all* salvation is based upon the eternal election of God and not all men are elect from eternity, does that not mean that from eternity there are non-elect who most certainly will not be saved? Has not God chosen from eternity not to elect some people? If so, then we have an eternal choice of non-election which we call reprobation. The inference is clear and necessary, yet some shrink from drawing it.

I once heard the case for "single" predestination articulated by a prominent Lutheran theologian in the above manner. He admitted to me that the conclusion of reprobation was logically inescapable, but he refused to draw the inference, holding steadfastly to "single" predestination. Such a notion of predestination is manifest nonsense.

Theoretically there are four possible kinds of consistent single predestination. (1) Universal predestination to election (which Brunner does not hold); (2) universal predestination to reprobation (which nobody holds); (3) particular predestination to election with the option of salvation by self-initiative to those not elect (a qualified Arminianism) which Brunner emphatically rejects; and (4) particular predestination to reprobation with the option of salvation by self-initiative to those not reprobate (which nobody holds). The only other kind of single predestination is the dialectical kind, which is absurd. (I once witnessed a closed discussion of theology between H. M. Kuitert of the Netherlands and Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Seminary. Kuitert went into a lengthy discourse on theology, utilizing the method of the dialectic as he went. When he was finished, Dr. Van Til calmly replied: "Now tell me your theology *without the dialectic*, so

I can understand it!" Kuitert was unable to do so. With Brunner's view of predestination the only way to avoid "double" predestination is with the use of "double-talk."

Thus, "single" predestination can be consistently maintained only within the framework of universalism or some sort of qualified Arminianism. If particular election is to be maintained and if the notion that all salvation is ultimately based upon that particular election is to be maintained, then we must speak of double predestination.

The much greater issue of "double" predestination is the issue over the relationship between election and reprobation with respect to the nature of the decrees and the nature of the divine outworking of the decrees. If "double" predestination means a symmetrical view of predestination, then we must reject the notion. But such a view of "double" predestination would be a caricature and a serious distortion of the Reformed doctrine of predestination.

### *The Double-Predestination Distortion*

The distortion of double predestination looks like this: There is a symmetry that exists between election and reprobation. God WORKS in the same way and same manner with respect to the elect and to the reprobate. That is to say, from all eternity God decreed some to election and by divine initiative works faith in their hearts and brings them actively to salvation. By the same token, from all eternity God decrees some to sin and damnation (*destinare ad peccatum*) and actively intervenes to work sin in their lives, bringing them to damnation by divine initiative. In the case of the elect, *regeneration* is the monergistic work of God. In the case of the reprobate, sin and *degeneration* are the monergistic work of God. Stated another way, we can establish a parallelism of foreordination and predestination by means of a *positive* symmetry. We can call this a *positive-positive* view of predestination. This is, God *positively* and *actively* intervenes in the lives of the elect to bring them to salvation. In the same way God *positively* and *actively* intervenes in the life of the reprobate to bring him to sin.

This distortion of positive-positive predestination clearly makes God the author of sin who punishes a person for doing what God monergistically and irresistibly coerces man to do. Such a view is indeed a monstrous assault on the integrity of God. This is not the Reformed view of predestination, but a gross and inexcusable caricature of the doctrine. Such a view may be identified with what is often loosely described as hyper-Calvinism and involves a radical form of supralapsarianism. Such a view of predestination has been virtually universally and monolithically rejected by Reformed thinkers.

### *The Reformed View of Predestination*

In sharp contrast to the caricature of double predestination seen in the positive-positive schema is the classic position of Reformed theology on predestination. In this view predestination is double in that it involves both election and reprobation but is not symmetrical with respect to the mode of divine activity. A strict parallelism of operation is denied. Rather we view predestination in terms of a positive-negative relationship.

In the Reformed view God from all eternity decrees some to election and positively intervenes in their lives to work regeneration and faith by a monergistic work of grace. To the non-elect God withholds this monergistic work of grace, passing them by and

leaving them to themselves. He does not monergistically work sin or unbelief in their lives. Even in the case of the "hardening" of the sinners' already recalcitrant hearts, God does not, as Luther stated, "work evil in us (for hardening is working evil) by creating fresh evil in us."<sup>2</sup> Luther continued:

When men hear us say that God works both good and evil in us, and that we are subject to God's working by mere passive necessity, they seem to imagine a man who is in himself good, and not evil, having an evil work wrought in him by God; for they do not sufficiently bear in mind how incessantly active God is in all His creatures, allowing none of them to keep holiday. He who would understand these matters, however, should think thus: God works evil in us (that is, by means of us) not through God's own fault, but by reason of our own defect. We being evil by nature, and God being good, when He impels us to act by His own acting upon us according to the nature of His omnipotence, good though He is in Himself, He cannot but do evil by our evil instrumentality; although, according to His wisdom, He makes good use of this evil for His own glory and for our salvation.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the mode of operation in the lives of the elect is not parallel with that operation in the lives of the reprobate. God works regeneration monergistically but never sin. Sin falls within the category of providential concurrence.

Another significant difference between the activity of God with respect to the elect and the reprobate concerns God's justice. The decree and fulfillment of election provide mercy for the elect while the efficacy of reprobation provides justice for the reprobate. God shows mercy sovereignly and unconditionally to some, and gives justice to those passed over in election. That is to say, God grants the mercy of election to some and justice to others. No one is the victim of injustice. To fail to receive mercy is not to be treated unjustly. God is under no obligation to grant mercy to all — in fact He is under no obligation to grant mercy to any. He says, "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy" (Rom. 9). The divine prerogative to grant mercy voluntarily cannot be faulted. If God is required by some cosmic law apart from Himself to be merciful to all men, then we would have to conclude that justice demands mercy. If that is so, then mercy is no longer voluntary, but required. If mercy is required, it is no longer mercy, but justice. What God does not do is sin by visiting injustice upon the reprobate. Only by considering election and reprobation as being asymmetrical in terms of a positive-negative schema can God be exonerated from injustice.

### *The Reformed Confessions*

By a brief reconnaissance of Reformed confessions and by a brief roll-call of the theologians of the Reformed faith, we can readily see that double predestination has been consistently maintained along the lines of a positive-negative schema.

The Reformed Confession: 1536

Our salvation is from God, but from ourselves there is nothing but sin and damnation. (Art. 9)

French Confession of Faith: 1559

We believe that from this corruption and general condemnation in which all men are plunged, God, according to his eternal and immutable counsel, calleth those whom he hath chosen by his goodness and mercy alone in our Lord Jesus Christ, without consideration of their works, to display in them the riches of his mercy; leaving the rest in this same corruption and condemnation to show in them his justice. (Art. XII)

The Belgic Confession of Faith: 1561

We believe that all the posterity of Adam, being thus fallen into perdition and ruin by the sin of our first parents, God then did manifest himself such as he is; that is to say, MERCIFUL AND JUST: MERCIFUL, since he delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom he, in his eternal and unchangeable council, of mere goodness hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without respect to their works: JUST, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves. (Art. XVI)

The Second Helvetic Confession: 1566

Finally, as often as God in Scripture is said or seems to do something evil, it is not thereby said that man does not do evil, but that God permits it and does not prevent it, according to his just judgment, who could prevent it if he wished, or because he turns man's evil into good. . . . St. Augustine writes in his *Enchiridion*: "What happens contrary to his will occurs, in a wonderful and ineffable way, not apart from his will. For it would not happen if he did not allow it. And yet he does not allow it unwillingly but willingly." (Art. VIII)

The Westminster Confession of Faith: 1643

As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected . . . are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power. through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

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 dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice. (Chap. III — Art. VI and VII)

These examples selected from confessional formulas of the Reformation indicate the care with which the doctrine of double predestination has been treated. The asymmetrical expression of the "double" aspect has been clearly maintained. This is in keeping with the care exhibited consistently throughout the history of the Church. The same kind of careful delineation can be seen in Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Zanchius, Turretini, Edwards, Hodge, Warfield, Bavinck, Berkouwer, *et al.*

### ***Foreordination to Reprobation***

In spite of the distinction of positive-negative with respect to the mode of God's activity toward the elect and the reprobate, we are left with the thorny question of God predestinating the reprobate. If God in any sense predestines or foreordains reprobation, doesn't this make the rejection of Christ by the reprobate absolutely certain and inevitable? And if the reprobate's reprobation is certain in light of predestination, doesn't this make God responsible for the sin of the reprobate? We must answer the first question in the affirmative, and the second in the negative.

If God foreordains anything, it is absolutely certain that what He foreordains will come to pass. The purpose of God can never be frustrated. Even God's foreknowledge or prescience makes future events certain with respect to time. That is to say, if God knows on Tuesday that I will drive to Pittsburgh on Friday, then there is no doubt that, come Friday, I will drive to Pittsburgh. Otherwise God's knowledge would have been in error. Yet, there is a significant difference between God's knowing that I would drive to Pittsburgh and God's ordaining that I would do so. Theoretically He could know of a future act without ordaining it, but He could not ordain it without knowing what it is that He is ordaining. But in either case, the future event would be certain with respect to time and the knowledge of God.

Luther, in discussing the traitorous act of Judas, says:

Have I not put on record in many books that I am talking about *necessity of immutability*? I know that the Father begets willingly, and that Judas betrayed Christ willingly. My point is that this act of the will in Judas was certainly and infallibly bound to take place, if God foreknew it. That is to say (if my meaning is not yet grasped), I distinguish two necessities: one I call *necessity of force* (*necessitatem violentam*), referring to action; the other I call *necessity of infallibility* (*necessitatem infallibilem*), referring to time. Let him who hears me understand that I am speaking of the latter, not the former; that is, I am not discussing whether Judas became a traitor willingly or unwillingly, but whether it was infallibly bound to come to pass that Judas should willingly betray Christ at a time predetermined by God.<sup>3</sup>

We see then, that what God knows in advance comes to pass by necessity or infallibly or necessity of immutability. But what about His foreordaining or predestinating what comes to pass? If God foreordains reprobation does this not obliterate the distinction between positive-negative and involve a *necessity of force*? If God foreordains reprobation does this not mean that God forces, compels, or coerces the reprobate to sin? Again the answer must be negative.

If God, when He is decreeing reprobation, does so in consideration of the reprobate's being already fallen, then He does not coerce him to sin. To be reprobate is to be left in sin, not pushed or forced to sin. If the decree of reprobation were made without a view to the fall, then the objection to double predestination would be valid and God would be properly charged with being the author of sin. But Reformed theologians have been careful to avoid such a blasphemous notion. Berkouwer states the boundaries of the discussion clearly:

On the one hand, we want to maintain the freedom of God in election, and on the other hand, we want to avoid any conclusion which would make God the cause of sin and unbelief.<sup>4</sup>

God's decree of reprobation, given in light of the fall, is a decree to justice, not injustice. In this view the biblical *a priori* that God is neither the cause nor the author of sin is safeguarded. Turretini says, "We have proved the object of predestination to be man considered as fallen, sin ought necessarily to be supposed as the condition in him who is reprobated, no less than him who is elected."<sup>5</sup> He writes elsewhere:

The negative act includes two, both preterition, by which in the election of some as well to glory as to grace, he neglected and slighted others, which is evident from the event of election, and *negative desertion*, by which he left them in the corrupt mass and in their misery; which, however, is as to be understood, 1. That they are not excepted from the laws of common providence, but remain subject to them, nor are immediately deprived of all God's favor, but only of the saving and vivifying which is the fruit of election, 2. That preterition and desertion; not indeed from the nature of preterition and desertion itself, and the force of the denied grace itself, but from the nature of the corrupt free will, and the force of corruption in it; as he who does not cure the disease of a sick man, is not the cause per se of the disease, nor of the results flowing from it; so sins are *the consequents*, rather than the *effects* of reprobation, necessarily bringing about the futurition of the event, but yet not infusing nor producing the wickedness.<sup>6</sup>

The importance of viewing the decree of reprobation in light of the fall is seen in the ongoing discussions between Reformed theologians concerning infra- and supra-lapsarianism. Both viewpoints include the fall in God's decree. Both view the decree of preterition in terms of divine permission. The real issue between the positions concerns the *logical order* of the decrees. In the supralapsarian view the decree of election and reprobation is logically prior to the decree to permit the fall. In the infralapsarian view the decree to permit the fall is logically prior to the decree to election and reprobation.

Though this writer favors the infralapsarian view along the lines developed by Turretini, it is important to note that both views see election and reprobation in light of the fall and avoid the awful conclusion that God is the author of sin. Both views protect the boundaries Berkouwer mentions.

Only in a positive-positive schema of predestination does *double-predestination* leave us with a capricious deity whose sovereign decrees manifest a divine tyranny. Reformed theology has consistently eschewed such a hyper-supralapsarianism. Opponents of Calvinism, however, persistently caricature the straw man of hyper-supralapsarianism, doing violence to the Reformed faith and assaulting the dignity of God's sovereignty.

We rejoice in the biblical clarity which reveals God's sovereignty in majestic terms. We rejoice in the knowledge of divine mercy and grace that go to such extremes to redeem the elect. We rejoice that God's glory and honor are manifested both in His mercy and in His justice.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

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### Chapter Notes

1. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p. 326.
2. Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), p. 206.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
4. G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), p. 181.
5. Francois Turretini, *Theological institutes* (Typescript manuscript of *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, 3 vols., 1679-1685), trans. George Musgrave Giger. D.D., p. 98.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

## “What is Hyper-Calvinism”

Sam Storms

<http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/what-is-hyper-calvinism>

Unfortunately, the label *Hyper-Calvinist* is used frequently in our day to insult or ridicule anyone who is more Calvinistic than oneself. As far as the Pelagians are concerned, semi-Pelagians are hyper-Calvinists. As far as semi-Pelagians are concerned, Arminians are hyper-Calvinists. As far as Arminians are concerned, four-point Calvinists are hyper-Calvinists. As far as four-point Calvinists are concerned, five-point Calvinists are hyper-Calvinists. Depending on where you find yourself on the theological spectrum, everyone (except the Pelagian) is a hyper-Calvinist. Oh yes, and as far as authentic hyper-Calvinists are concerned, everyone else is just confused!

Perhaps we should use the label with more of a historical awareness of its origin and application. That which historically has separated biblical Calvinism from hyper-Calvinism is the denial by the latter of the external gospel call. Hyper-Calvinism, explains David Engelsma, is the denial

“that God, in the preaching of the gospel, calls everyone who hears the preaching to repent and believe. It is the denial that the church should call everyone in the preaching. It is the denial that the unregenerated have a duty to repent and believe. It manifests itself in the practice of the preacher’s addressing the call of the gospel, ‘repent and believe on Christ crucified,’ only to those in his audience who show signs of regeneration, and thereby of election, namely, some conviction of sin and some interest in salvation” (David Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980], pp. 10-11).

This view was held by several Congregational and Baptist ministers in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is not to say, however, that no one embraces this view today. Included among these were Joseph Hussey (1660-1726), Lewis Wayman (d. 1764), and John Brine (1703-65). For additional historical information,

see Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity* (London: The Olive Tree, 1967).

It has been customary to place the name of John Gill (b. 1697) at the head of this list as the paradigmatic hyper-Calvinist. This charge may need to be re-examined in the light of certain conclusions reached by Thomas J. Nettles in his book, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), pp. 73-107, 385-91.

According to hyper-Calvinism, *the extent of preaching is determined by the extent of regeneration*. Only those who show evidence of the latter are proper recipients or objects of the former. The principal difficulty with this is that Scripture sanctions no such restriction on the proclamation of Christ and the call to repent and believe. Jesus left his disciples with clear and unequivocal marching orders, to wit, that “repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

When the apostle Paul preached on Mars Hill he made no effort to distinguish between those he thought were or were not elect, and therefore regenerate. Such knowledge belongs to God alone. Rather, Paul’s gospel took the form of an indiscriminate and universal proclamation: “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30).

I can only conclude that the external call of the gospel is a vital element in biblical Christianity. To deny it is to deviate from true Calvinism in a most serious way. However, for the sake of clarity (and even charity) perhaps we ought to drop the label *hyper-Calvinist* and simply refer to those who hold that view as *wrong*.

Related to this issue is the question of regeneration and human responsibility. If regeneration is wholly a work of God and therefore the ground and cause of faith, what becomes of a man’s individual responsibility to believe the gospel? John Murray’s comments are most helpful in answering this question:

“The causal priority of regeneration is no excuse for our unbelief and no alibi for sloth or indifference or despair. We

may never plead our own depravity as any reason for not believing, nor our inability as any excuse for unbelief. To argue that we should not repent and believe until we are generated is to introduce confusion in the relation that regeneration sustains to our responsibility. We never know that we are regenerated until we repent and believe. The gospel of grace addresses itself to our responsibility in the demand for repentance and faith. Just as the unknown purposes of God are not the rule of our conduct nor the grounds upon which we act, so the inscrutable operations of God are not the rule or ground of our action, but his revealed will. The rule for us in every case is the revealed will presented to our consciousness. Our belief, our knowledge that we have been regenerated is never the ground upon which we exercise faith in Christ, even though the fact of regeneration is always the source from which issues the exercise of faith and repentance” (“Regeneration,” 188-89).

### “Free Will”

Jerry Nelson

We all know that we have the ability to make choices. We call that freedom or free will. But if we investigate the concept a little more carefully, we understand there are limitations to our free will. We usually define free will as the ability to choose with absolute indifference – under no compulsion of any kind (internal or external). This would suggest that the human will is “inclined to neither good nor evil but it exists in a state of moral neutrality.” (Sproul, *Grace Unknown*, 131)

But that is contrary to what the Bible teaches. The Bible says we are not morally neutral, we are limited. We are influenced in our choices. The Bible says we are influenced by sin – we are captive to sin, we are dead in our sins.

In fact we are influenced by the strongest inclination at the moment. R.C. Sproul illustrates it this way: We want to lose weight and decide to diet. We do well until hunger becomes a stronger inclination than our desire to lose weight. We choose based on inclination. <sup>(ibid)</sup> We are free to make choices but our choices are limited.

Think of it this way: Does God have free will? Of course, he does. God is totally free. But even God is limited; he is morally unable to sin. He is free, but only for goodness. He has no desire or inclination to sin. And yet we would say he is totally free.

So it is with the unregenerate, the non-Christian. He is totally free to do what he is capable of. And the Bible says that he is incapable of doing anything righteous. And judged by God's holy standard, the unsaved person is able only to sin. He is free but only within the bounds of his moral nature.

Yes we have free will, freedom, but only within the range of options available to us. The non-Christian is not free to follow God, nor does he want to. It will take the supernatural intervention of God's Spirit through regeneration and effectual calling to give the non-Christian the ability to believe and follow Christ.

See Piper below from a sermon delivered on Nov 3, 2002

"When I entered seminary I believed in the freedom of my will, in the sense that it was ultimately self-determining. I had not learned this from the Bible; I absorbed it from the independent, self-sufficient, self-esteeming, self-exalting air that you and I breathe every day of our lives in America. The sovereignty of God meant that he can do anything with me that I give him permission to do. With this frame of mind I entered a class on Philippians with Daniel Fuller and class on the doctrine of salvation with James Morgan.

In Philippians I was confronted with the intractable ground clause of chapter 2 verse 13: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure," which made God the will beneath my will and the worker beneath my work. The question was not whether I had a will; the question was why I willed what I willed. And the ultimate answer – not the only answer – was God.

In the class on salvation we dealt head on with the doctrines of unconditional election and irresistible grace. Romans 9 was the watershed text and the one that changed my life forever. Romans 9:11-12 said, "Though they [Jacob and Esau] were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad – in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call

– she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’” And when Paul raised the question in verse 14, “Is there injustice on God's part?” He says, no, and quotes Moses (in verse 15): “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” And when he raises the question in verse 19, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” He answers in verse 21, “Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use?”

Emotions run high when you feel your man-centered world crumbling around you. I met Dr. Morgan in the hall one day. After a few minutes of heated argument about the freedom of my will, I held a pen in front of his face and dropped it to the floor. Then I said, with not as much respect as a student ought to have, “I [!] dropped it.” Somehow that was supposed to prove that my choice to drop the pen was not governed by anything but my sovereign self. But thanks be to God’s mercy and patience, at the end of the semester I wrote in my blue book for the final exam, “Romans 9 is like a tiger going about devouring free-willers like me.” That was the end of my love affair with human autonomy and the ultimate self-determination of my will. My worldview simply could not stand against the scriptures, especially Romans 9. And it was the beginning of a lifelong passion to see and savor the supremacy of God in absolutely everything.”

Does God’s Choice of us nullify our choice of God and the necessity of our faithfulness to him?

From John Piper, December 8, 2002 sermon:

“Before we look at the rest of the text (Romans 9) let me make sure you are not jumping to unwarranted and unbiblical conclusions. This teaching of Romans 9 does not contradict the truth that Jacob and Esau and you and I make choices in life and will be held responsible for those choices. If Jacob is saved he will be saved by faith. And if Esau is finally condemned, he will be condemned for his evil deeds and unbelief. Our final judgment will accord with the way we have responded to the gospel in this life. **Which means that our final entry into heaven or to hell is not unconditional.** To be finally saved we must have believed. And to be lost we must have sinned and not believed. No one will stand on the precipice of hell and be able to say, "I don't deserve this."

Just one text to show this: Romans 2:7-8, "To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury." **In other words, unconditional election does not contradict the necessity of the obedience of faith for final salvation, or the necessity of the disobedience of unbelief for damnation. What unconditional election does is knock from underneath salvation every ground of human boasting, and replaces it with the unshakable electing love and purpose of God (v. 11b).**

The will to believe is saving, and the will not to believe is damning. We are held responsible for both. But underneath both is God's free and unconditional election of who will be saved and who will not. The elect believe. The non-elect do not believe. We are not sovereign, self-determining, autonomous beings. Only God is. **How God renders certain the belief and unbelief of men without undermining our accountability I do not fully understand.** **If this stretches your mind to the breaking point, better that your minds be broken than that the scriptures be broken.** And even better yet would be to let your mind and heart be enlarged rather than broken, so that they can contain all that the Scriptures teach.

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