



The Doctrine of Reprobation

Does God actively choose creatures for judgment?

The Doctrine of Reprobation

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Definition of Terms	2
Current Formulations	4
THE CHIEF DIFFICULTY	7
The Theological Problem	7
The Logical Problem	9
EXEGETICAL CONSIDERATIONS	15
Key Passages Used To Argue For Symmetry	15
Key Passages Used To Argue For Asymmetry	18
THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS	24
The Biblical Emphasis	28
CONCLUSION	30
BIBLIOGRAPHY	32

INTRODUCTION

Before one can appropriately contemplate the subject of predestination, the mystery and depth of God's love must first prime the heart and stir humble faith that rests in the promises of God. Indeed, the sacred Scriptures reveal promises that "come from a great God, they assure us of great love, they come to great sinners, they work for us great results, and deal with great matters."¹ A fitting place to begin, since the subject of one's eternal destiny, through the lens of salvation or damnation, is one of the greatest matters a mortal soul may consider.

"Unless we conclude that every human being is predestined to salvation, we must face the flip side of election."² The purpose of this booklet is to face the "flip side of election" and carefully consider what the word of God says concerning this very emotionally charged doctrine—traditionally referred to as the doctrine of reprobation. "The doctrine of election is one of the most difficult doctrines for believers to accept because it does not seem fair that God has chosen some and not others."³ How does

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *According to Promise: or, The Lord's Method of Dealing with His Chosen People* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1902), 64.

² R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 141.

³ J. Carl Laney, "The Decrees of God," in *Understanding Christian Theology*, edited by Charles Swindoll and Roy Zuck, 208-215 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 212.

predestination relate to those that are not elect? Does not the fact of electing *some* result in the rejection of others? Are those who are not elect predestined just as those who are? Is there an ordained decree of rejection and condemnation? Does God actively choose people for judgment and destine them to hell? In all reflections, this is a subject of surpassing solemnity; one that should be approached with humble caution, "a theme which should ever bring one to tears."⁴

Definition of Terms

Given the technical nature of this subject, a clear and consistent use of terms is essential. Several noteworthy terms have been used, and refined, by theologians to describe particular aspects of predestination. Terms of special interest to this study are as follows: single predestination, double predestination, reprobation, and preterition. *Single predestination* is generally the view "that God predestines and elects some to salvation while those who are not saved condemn themselves because of their sin and unbelief."⁵ In distinction, *double predestination* generally maintains "that God both predestines or elects some people to salvation and condemns

⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Biblical Theism Divine Decrees," *Bibliotheca Sacra* Volume 96, 383 (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1939), 268.

⁵ George Thomas Kurian, *Nelson's New Christian Dictionary: The Authoritative Resource on the Christian World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pubs., 2001), s.v., "Predestination, single."

others to perdition, both by eternal decrees."⁶ *Reprobation*, although strictly signifies "rejection,"⁷ in the context of predestination,⁸ commonly represents a foreordaining decree of some (nonelect) to condemnation, "not only negatively excepted from a participation of Christ and His salvation, but positively ordained to continue in their natural blindness, hardness of heart, etc., and that by the just judgment of God."⁹ The term may also be used in the context of the doctrine of rejection as a whole, which may or may not include the principle of decreed judgment. Finally, *preterition* is "a word derived from the Latin *praeter*, meaning beyond or past, and *praeteritus*, meaning that which is passed over. In theology it is used to refer to God's passing over of the nonelect, whom he allows to go their own way and perish for

⁶ *ibid.*, s.v., "Predestination, double."

⁷ From *reprobare* meaning "to reject."

⁸ "Scripture never uses the word 'reprobation'- sometimes used by theologians ancient and modern for a proposed or supposed decree of damnation." — Robert Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (Great Britain: Mentor Imprint; Christian Focus, 2005), 678. "The word reprobate (αδοξιμος) is not, so far as I know, applied in the Scriptures to the subject of predestination. Its etymology and usage would suggest the meaning of something rejected upon undergoing a test or trial, and hence, something condemned or rejected." — Robert Lewis Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1985), 238.

⁹ Girolamo Zanchi, Augustus Toplady and Justus Lipsius, *The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 72.

their sins."¹⁰ Shedd carefully argues that "preterition must not be confounded with condemnation . . . Much of the attack upon the general tenet of reprobation [in terms of mere non-election] arises from overlooking this distinction."¹¹ "It is intended by the choice of the word preterition to imply that God assumes no active attitude toward the nonelect other than to pass them by, leaving them under the just condemnation which their lost estate deserves."¹² The position that will be argued for in this study is precisely reflected in this concept of preterition and is against the concept of a strict "double predestination" wherein a foreordination to damnation is the intended meaning.

Current Formulations

That God, in His majestic wisdom, goodness, and love, has sovereignly predestined some by His gracious election unto the attainment of eternal life and pardon from the just judgment of

¹⁰ W. S. Reid, "Preterition," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 952.

¹¹ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1971), 433. He goes on to say, "Preterition is a sovereign act; condemnation is a judicial act. God passes by, or omits an individual in the bestowment of regenerating grace, because of his sovereign good pleasure (ευδοκία). But he condemns this individual to punishment, not because of his sovereign good pleasure, but because this individual is a sinner. To say that God condemns a man to punishment because he pleases, is erroneous; but to say that God omits to regenerate a man because he pleases, is true." — *ibid.*

¹² Chafer, 268.

their own sin through faith in Jesus Christ, is recognized as a thoroughly biblical doctrine upon which all further discussions mount.¹³ Within the biblical framework of election and predestination, there are two fundamental formulations that are central to the doctrine of reprobation. These are best classified as the *symmetrical* and *asymmetrical* views of predestination.¹⁴ The symmetrical view suggests that by eternal decree, God unconditionally elects some to eternal life and others to eternal damnation—symmetrically. The asymmetrical view suggests that

¹³ This is in plain disagreement with Hunt who asserts, "Never, however, is this word ['elect'] used to indicate that there is a select group who alone have been predestinated to be saved. *Never*." — Dave Hunt, *What Love Is This?* (Loyal Pub., 2002), 196, emphasis in the original. Or, Rice who calls it "a bad teaching, a false doctrine." — John R. Rice, *Predestined for Hell? No!* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Foundation, 1958), 85.

¹⁴ According to the definitions provided, "double predestination" accords with the *symmetrical* view while "single predestination" accords with the *asymmetrical* view. "The term 'predestination' has various meanings and covers a range of theological doctrines. As used here predestination is a genus with two species: the election by God of some for salvation, and the reprobation by God of others for damnation. This use marks out what is sometimes called double predestination (election and reprobation), accords with almost all common and much theological usage, and is convenient. However, I do not suppose that the two different divine decrees are fully parallel, and I recognize that some theologians reserve predestination for election and view reprobation as a quite different matter." — Stephen R. Munzer, "Self-Abandonment and Self-Denial: Quietism, Calvinism, and the Prospect of Hell," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, no. 4 (2005): 765.

by eternal decree, God unconditionally elects some to eternal life while eternal damnation is conditioned upon sin.

THE CHIEF DIFFICULTY

"The chief difficulty with the doctrine of Election, of course, arises in regard to the unsaved; and the Scriptures have given us no extended explanation of their state."¹⁵ This is true because the Scripture overtly focuses on God's positive election of sinners unto salvation, and yet "it is impossible actively to choose some from a company and not, at the same time and by the same process, actively reject the remainder."¹⁶ The problem appears to be twofold: (1) if God unconditionally and actively elects people to be damned, then His decree is fatalistic and the cause of damnation lies in God rather than the sinner; and (2) if God is the cause of life for those He elects and at the same time is not the cause of damnation for those He does not elect, and these are the only two possible destinies, then there appears to be a logical breakdown and some form of divine special pleading. Each of these apparent problems will be considered briefly in the general category of thought to which they belong.

The Theological Problem

Several theological difficulties arise when predestination is said to be exactly symmetrical. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is

¹⁵ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1972), 104-105.

¹⁶ Chafer, 268.

that of fatalism or hard-determinism. Berkouwer argues that "to speak simultaneously of election and rejection" is to speak "from a deterministic point of view."¹⁷ Carson rightly asserts that "Christians are not fatalists. The central line of Christian tradition neither sacrifices the utter sovereignty of God nor reduces the responsibility of his image-bearers."¹⁸ The practical extension of this view discourages all motives to exertion. Moreover, a fatalistic position flies in the face of personal, moral culpability and is therefore inconsistent with the multitude of scriptural warnings, exhortations, and promises that underscore man's moral responsibility before God. Another problem is that it renders the biblical teaching of retribution—earned punishment—a farce. Another closely related problem is that it invites the argument that God condemns arbitrarily and not on the basis of justice since the reprobate are elected to condemnation without any association of sin.¹⁹ Beyond these difficulties, proponents of a

¹⁷ G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 195.

¹⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 50-51.

¹⁹ The symmetrical view of predestination is most often associated with a supralapsarian view concerning the order of decrees, which insists that a decree of reprobation is determined logically prior to the Fall and sin (see Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998], 489.). If a decree to condemn is determined prior to the determination to allow the soul to sin, then it can hardly be argued that such a condemnation exemplifies justice.

strict symmetrical view "mistakenly say that God is the chargeable cause of the loss of the lost. Hence, their view makes God the author of sin."²⁰ This view of symmetry "seeks a complete balance between election and reprobation. The key idea is this: Just as God intervenes in the lives of the elect to create faith in their hearts, so God equally intervenes in the lives of the reprobate to create or work unbelief in their hearts."²¹ This is no less than a "dreadful error"²² that "involves God in coercing sin. This does radical violence to the integrity of God's character."²³ From a theological standpoint, if these arguments are true, they mount to expose a fatal flaw in the symmetrical view of predestination.

The Logical Problem

Unlike the difficulties associated with the symmetrical view, the prevailing objection to the asymmetrical view of predestination is not theological, but rather logical. "All Calvinists, like it or not, must hold some form of double-predestination—the logic of their position demands it."²⁴ This argument claims that a non-election is

²⁰ W. E. Best, *God's Eternal Decree* (Houston, TX: South Belt Assembly of Christ, 1992), 23.

²¹ Sproul, 142.

²² "Equal ultimacy is based on a concept of symmetry. . . . Equal ultimacy is not the Reformed or Calvinist view of predestination. Some have called it 'hyper-Calvinism'." — Sproul, 142.

²³ *ibid*, 143.

²⁴ Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen but Free* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 206.

an election, "by all the rules of antithesis."²⁵ "Consequently, whoever holds the doctrine of election, must hold the antithetic doctrine of reprobation."²⁶

There are two basic categories of response, if the asymmetrical view should offer a defense: (1) attempt to resolve the apparent logical contradiction; or (2) appeal to another priority that does not answer to the rules of antithesis. It may be argued that this second category could offer a legitimate argument by declaring this to be a *paradox*.²⁷ There is no shortage of examples of paradox in the truth of Scripture. For example, Jesus taught that a person must lose his life to find it, that the first will be last and the last will be first, and that "he who believes in Me will live even if he dies" (Jn 11:25). Both the Incarnation and the death of Christ, when pressed logically prove to be paradoxical and yet

²⁵ Zanchi, 72. "So that, from His actually leaving some men in final impenitency and unbelief, we assuredly gather that it was His everlasting determination so to do, and consequently that He reprobated some from before the foundation of the world. And as this inference is strictly rational, so is it perfectly Scriptural." — *ibid*.

²⁶ Shedd, 430. Berkhof agrees: "The doctrine of reprobation naturally follows from the logic of the situation. The decree of election inevitably implies the decree of reprobation. . . . If He has chosen or elected some, then He has by that very fact also rejected others." — Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 117-18.

²⁷ "A seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that may in fact be true. An apparently sound statement or proposition which leads to a logically unacceptable conclusion." — *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. "Paradox."

profoundly true. In biblical paradox, we see that reason alone cannot be the final authority. The truth or falsity of a particular doctrine ultimately rests upon the biblical witness. Along these lines, Berkouwer offers a test, "Does the confessional manner of speaking of rejection [pre-damnation] find its origin in the logical conclusion that election implies rejection? Or does it find its origin in the testimony of Scripture itself?"²⁸ "What settles the matter is that the doctrine of reprobation is biblical, and not just as an implication from the doctrine of election."²⁹ In answer to the rational demands of logic, we must humbly resolve that God's revelation to mankind, contained in the inspired writings of Holy Scripture, is a reasonable revelation. It is without error, it cannot fail, and it is without contradiction. When difficulties are encountered, we must not shrink from the challenge to pursue a logically consistent solution. In short, we must affirm the authority of revelation over reason while maintaining that biblical faith is reasonable. So in the end, if the greatest argument against symmetry is theological (violation of Scripture) and the greatest argument against asymmetry is logical (violation of reason), we must choose the asymmetrical view—which by virtue of this arrangement, becomes the most reasonable option.

Having argued for the possibility of paradox in view of the authority of Scripture, there remains a few logical considerations

²⁸ Berkouwer, 173.

²⁹ John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2006), 180.

that may serve toward a resolution of the apparent logical contradiction. First, it has already been demonstrated that a symmetrically "double predestination" is inconsistent with human responsibility and righteous retribution (justice of God). If this position is to be sustained, then it too must resort to the claim of paradox to avoid contradicting clearly explicit teaching in Scripture. Symmetry here does not resolve asymmetry elsewhere, it only shifts the logical burden. Second, it may be argued that a precise antithesis does not necessarily assume full symmetry. By this it is suggested that there is a minimum of three tiers involved in the scope of predestination, as revealed in Scripture, namely: (A) *election* (God's initiative), (B) *act of will* (human volition), and (C) *retribution* (God's judgment of human desires and choices). What is the opposite of election (A)? It certainly cannot be damnation (C), which is revealed by God only as a consequence to sin (B). The antithesis to election (A) is not damnation (C), but rather preterition (A) ("passing over, not choosing"). Just as election (A) is not identical with eternal life (C), so non-election (A) is not identical to eternal damnation (C). Condemnation (C) is consequential to sin (B), just as eternal life (C) is consequential to faith (B).³⁰ According to this arrangement, God's active choice to elect or not elect is symmetrical, and therefore His act of election is logically coherent. His non-choice is a real choice and He alone is

³⁰ It should be noted that there is no intrinsic efficacy of faith. Christ and His vicarious atonement alone are the efficient means of salvation—which may properly be classified in this same category (B), then received individually by faith (B).

responsible for it. But this is not to say that God is responsible for the damnation of the wicked, for damnation is not a direct consequence of non-election (A), but rather of sin and corruption (B).³¹ To proceed within the biblical framework of predestination, we must at once dismiss all unbiblical notions of universal salvation (cf. Matt 25:31-46), inherent goodness (cf. Ps 51:5; 58:3), and meritorious works (cf. Titus 3:5), and place before us the universal fall (cf. Rom 3:10-11; 5:12) and culpability of humanity in sin (cf. Rom 3:12-18; 5:18) and the depraved inability of man to choose God (cf. John 6:44; Eph 2:1-8). Consequently, the desires and choices (B) of all mankind (elect and non-elect) are willfully depraved, each person rendering himself worthy of God's judgment (C). Thus, the asymmetrical view maintains that God is the efficient cause of election³² and at the same time man is his own efficient cause of condemnation. Asymmetry is observed in that the Lord actively intervenes only in the lives of the elect. Only when these tiers are collapsed or confused does the asymmetrical view pose a logical difficulty. At this point, the apparent logical

³¹ God's judgments "do not result from [God's choices of preterition], so as to be their consequences, but they are actually caused only by the sin of man and are causally related only to it. It is neither as an effect of Election or Rejection or of Preterition that man has fallen, or sins, or is condemned, or will be destroyed. The simple effect is that he is not rescued, and consequently is left where he would have been without these acts. They do not lead to destruction. They simply do not rescue from it." — James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), 362.

³² Including reprobation in terms of preterition.

problem has been relieved. This solution, however, is not without its own difficulties, at least in our minds, since there remains the situation wherein God elects some, leaving others, with perfect knowledge of their sinful condition and the devastating consequences of His judgment against all sin. Great caution must be taken here, since the finite human capacity can only see dimly (cf. 1 Cor 13:12) what it must trust to be perfectly holy, just, good, and loving in God and His purposes in election. A key factor, second only to a high and holy view of God, is a proper view of self in light of perfect and holy justice. It so readily escapes our senses that emphatically every human being, save Jesus Christ, has been and is worthy of damnation before an impeccably holy God. Lastly, God has revealed proper limitations and boundaries to the reach of man's mind to acquire knowledge that is reserved for the holy counsel of the Trinity. Deuteronomy 29:29 plainly states, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever." In quoting this verse, Calvin wisely stated, "this text may never lead us to be silent about election, but rather must teach us to distinguish where the boundary of God's Word lies."³³

³³ Berkouwer, 15.

EXEGETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is beyond the scope of this analysis to engage in detailed exposition. The intention here is to furnish a few exegetical highlights of a few key passages related to this subject. It has already been suggested that "the concept of God choosing some people to disbelieve and be condemned seems unfair and is contrary to God's mercy. The ultimate question for students of Scripture is whether this doctrine is biblical."³⁴

Key Passages Used To Argue For Symmetry

Romans 9:10–23 presents "the chief text about reprobation."³⁵ This passage, perhaps more clearly than any other, addresses the subject of predestination and reprobation head on.³⁶ Though there is considerable debate over a number of features of this passage, the most exegetically sound conclusions include: (1) an argument for personal salvation (predestination), (2) a context of a completely free and sovereign choice, elected by God without being moved by the objects of His choosing, and (3) "hate" does

³⁴ Laney, 213.

³⁵ Frame, 180.

³⁶ R.C. Sproul openly declares his "struggle" with this passage, which "is not over whether the passage teaches double predestination [in a positive/negative sense]. It clearly does that. My struggle is with the fact that this text supplies ammunition for the advocates of equal ultimacy. It sounds like God is actively making people sinners. But that is not required by the text." — Sproul, 153.

not mean "love less." Paul does not use any of the technical terms associated with the doctrine, like, *elect*, *predestine*, *foreknow*, *ordain*, or *choose* (except in v.11). It is evident that the primary burden of Paul's argument focuses God's choice being free from all contingencies (cf. vv. 11, 15, 16, 18, 21, 24) for the purpose of manifesting His mercy (cf. vv. 15, 16, 18, 23) and glory (cf. vv. 17, 23). In v. 11, Paul uses the singular form for both "purpose" and "choice," which may include more than one actual choice, but may also be indicative of the singular "choice" communicated to Rebekah in v.12, which is explained in terms of v.13. Thus, His "love" for Jacob and "hate" for Esau, may be construed as two sides to the same "choice" (cf. v.11). This may offer a possible parallel with the argument advanced in this booklet. One point that has been suggested as an active intervention of God in the life of the reprobate is seen in v.18 concerning the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. "It cannot be made too emphatic that God's attitude toward Pharaoh was that He *endured* with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon the vessels of mercy which He prepared beforehand for glory."³⁷ Lastly, it has been argued that v.22 teaches a symmetrical double predestination. "It is probably significant that when Paul used the participle *κατηρτισμένα* ('prepared') in referring to the nonelect in Romans 9:22, he did not specify God as the subject as he did when

³⁷ J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1962), 155.

he wrote of the elect's destiny in 9:23. The difference is subtle, but significant."³⁸ In sum,

it has been made clear that the creditable cause of the salvation of the saved is not in them, but in 'God who showeth mercy' (Romans 9:16). It has been made clear that no one can in the slightest degree contribute toward or cooperate in his own salvation. Those who are saved are saved by the amazing grace of God. On the other hand, the Scripture is equally clear that the chargeable cause of the loss of the lost is in the lost.³⁹

Two other verses have been associated with the argument for a symmetrical view of predestination: 1 Peter 2:8 and Jude 4 (cf. Prov 16:4; Exodus 4:21; Isaiah 6:9-10). In response to these, Hodge argues:

The Apostle Peter speaks of those who "stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed." (1 Pet. ii. 8.) And Jude speaks of certain men who had "crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation." (Jude 4.) This foreordination to condemnation is indeed a judicial act, as is taught in Rom. ix. 22. God condemns no man, and foreordains no man to condemnation, except on account of his sin. But the preterition of such men, leaving them, rather than others equally guilty, to suffer the penalty of their sins, is distinctly declared to be a sovereign act.⁴⁰

³⁸ Laney, 214.

³⁹ Buswell, 154.

⁴⁰ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 346.

Key Passages Used To Argue For Asymmetry

While there are a few passages that appear to suggest some form of pre-ordained condemnation, approaching a symmetrical view of predestination, the overwhelming tenor of Scripture best accords with asymmetry.

Ephesians 1:4–6 presents a strong argument for an asymmetric view of predestination. First, it is noteworthy to observe that unlike the previous passages that are sometimes used to advance an argument for the symmetric view, this passage employs the technical terms that are used elsewhere to unambiguously discuss God's sovereign election of individuals unto salvation. A key observation of this passage is that in v.4 the technical term "chose" (ἐξελέξατο) is used in relation to Christ, namely "He chose us in Him." In this election takes place in Christ. There is no corresponding sphere within which the reprobate may be "chosen." Secondly, the technical term "predestined" takes place "in love" (v.4). It may be argued that love exemplifies the means of predestination in general, which would argue for an asymmetrical view. Furthermore, "In love He predestined us to adoption," which indicates the immediate objective of predestination as being for the purpose of "adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself" and that "according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (vv. 5-6). MacArthur explains how the love of God is key in understanding positive election of sinners to glory as he comments on this verse:

God's love for the elect is an infinite, eternal, saving love. We know from Scripture that this great love was the very cause of our election (Eph. 2:4). Such love clearly is

not directed toward all of mankind indiscriminately, but is bestowed uniquely and individually on those whom God chose in eternity past.

But from that, it does not follow that God's attitude toward those He did not elect must be unmitigated hatred. Surely His pleading with the lost, His offers of mercy to the reprobate, and the call of the gospel to all who hear are all sincere expressions of the heart of a loving God. Remember, He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but tenderly calls sinners to turn from their evil ways and live. He freely offers the water of life to all (Isa. 55:1; Rev. 22:17). Those truths are not at all incompatible with the truth of divine sovereignty.⁴¹

Each of these elements argues for an asymmetrical perspective of predestination since there is no corollary for them concerning the reprobate.⁴² "It is hence, an error to think of election apart from the high and holy ends which God had in mind when He did it."⁴³

⁴¹ John MacArthur, *The God Who Loves* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 17.

⁴² In response to this passage, Newman says, "This passage in no way supports what has been classically known as double predestination—namely, that God, before all time, has chosen some persons for salvation while damning other individuals to reprobation. . . . What our passage does affirm is that God's sovereign purposes work in paradoxical conjunction with human freedom: Divine election/predestination and human response are only as incompatible as are the cross and resurrection of Jesus." — Carey C. Newman, "Election and Predestination in Ephesians 1:4–6a," in *Review and Expositor* Volume 93, 2 (Louisville, KY: Review and Expositor, 1996), 234.

⁴³ Culver, 677.

Another powerfully clear passage is found in Romans 6:23, which states, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." It should be sufficient to observe that there is an unmistakable asymmetry in this concise presentation. Death is presented as "the wages of sin" whereas "eternal life" is declared as a "free gift of God . . . in Christ Jesus our Lord." The asymmetry presented here perfectly resonates with the argument for an asymmetric view of predestination. First, death (damnation) is the consequence for personal sin, which is orthogonal to the matter of election. Second, eternal life results ultimately from the gift (given to those who are positively elected). Lastly, this also accords with the thrust of the glory of predestination seen elsewhere, namely that of grace.

We should recognize, as do the Canons of Dordt (one of the Reformed confessions), that election and reprobation are not simple parallels to one another. When God elects people to salvation, he decrees that they will be saved apart from their works. But when God reprobates, he decrees that they will be punished because of their works. Works, then, play a role in the outworking of reprobation that they do not play in the outworking of election.⁴⁴

Another key passage is found in the Gospel of John. John 3:16–21 presents an unmistakable asymmetry concerning the eternal destiny of human beings. By the use of a simple adverb John 3:18 stresses the impending reality of unbelievers, namely that they are condemned "already" (*ēdē*). This is reinforced with

⁴⁴ Frame, 181.

the perfect of *krinō* (“to judge”), presenting their condition as an already present reality with lasting effect awaiting realization. What should be noted concerning asymmetry is that this “condemned already” is assigned to the indiscriminate “whoever” (ESV), meaning everyone who does not trust in Christ. This is strengthened by the following verse, “And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). This “explains that the root cause of the condemnation of unbelievers is their rejection of the light because of their love for the darkness.”⁴⁵

J. C. Ryle captures the impression well when he says,

The words before us form a suitable conclusion to the glorious tidings which we have just been considering. They completely clear God of injustice in the condemnation of sinners. They show in simple and unmistakable terms, that although man's salvation is entirely of God, his ruin, if he is lost, will be entirely from himself. He will reap the fruit of his own sowing. . . . It supplies an answer to a common cavil of the enemies of God's truth. There is no decreed reprobation, excluding any one from heaven.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Kruse, 119. “This is the cause of condemnation; or this is the reason why men are punished” (Barnes, 208). “John is not saying that God has decreed that people who do such and such things are condemned” (Morris, 207). “Those who believe in the name of the Son of God, as we have already learned (John 1:12), become God's children; for those who will not believe there is no alternative but self-incurred judgment.” (Bruce, 91).

⁴⁶ J.C. Ryle, *Gospel of John*, 144-145.

This is further amplified by the asymmetrical conclusion of the pericope, "For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God" (3:20-21). "The purpose of these three verses, then, is not to encourage readers to think they fall into a deterministic category bound up with their intrinsic nature, but to make them see the imminence of their danger (the verdict is being declared), and the fundamentally moral reasons why people hate the light."⁴⁷ Ryle adds,

There is no unwillingness on God's part to receive any sinner, however great his sins. God has sent "light" into the world, and if man will not come to the light, the fault is entirely on man's side. His blood will be on his own head, if he makes shipwreck of his soul. The blame will be at his own door, if he misses heaven. His eternal misery will be the result of his own choice. His destruction will be the work of his own hand. God loved him, and was willing to save him; but he "loved darkness," and therefore darkness must be his everlasting portion.⁴⁸

John 3 concludes with striking asymmetry, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

⁴⁷ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 208.

⁴⁸ Ryle, 145.

Other passages that overtly argue in favor of asymmetry, will be considered below in less detail.

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

How does predestination fit into a unified view of theology? Does the symmetrical or asymmetrical view best accord with other doctrines? Considering the big picture offers a number of additional points of reflection on this subject. The whole concept of the doctrine of salvation is unmistakably centered on the coming of the Son of God to the world for the redemption of a people to Himself. Immediately we are confronted with an asymmetric doctrine that is closely linked to predestination,⁴⁹ namely that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15), who "did not come to judge the world, but to save the world" (John 12:47). God's salvation of sinners exalts His glorious grace. Why does God reveal the reality that He elects us for salvation and not *vice versa*? The Scripture seems clear; it is to make known His claim to receive rightful credit for His gracious work in the lives of the redeemed. Yet, nowhere does the Lord seek "credit" for the damnation of sinners. To the contrary, He says, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways!" (Ezekiel 33:11). The Lord aligns Himself

⁴⁹ "[Bavinck] points out that Scripture uses words like *prothesis*, *prognosis* and *proorismos* almost exclusively for the predestination unto salvation, and for that reason, says he, it is not correct to co-ordinate the predestination *ad mortem* with the predestination *ad vitam*, and then to consider death as well as life as final goal." — Berkouwer, 176.

asymmetrically with the praise of His grace, insisting that "salvation is from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9) and "boasting is excluded" (Rom 3:27). "God has chosen . . . and God has chosen . . . God has chosen . . . that no man should boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord' " (1 Cor 1:27–31). Predestination, then, accords best with the asymmetric doctrines of salvation, including: grace (*salvation: undeserved / damnation: deserved*), regeneration (*new creation / no change*), adoption (*new relationship / no change*), redemption (*paid for / no change*), imputation (*righteousness credited / no change*), reconciliation (*reversal of enmity / no change*), forgiven (*pardoned of all sin / no change*), sanctification (*cleansing / no change*), repentance (*turning away from sin and back to God / no change*) and foreknowledge (*before the foundation of the world / "never knew you"*).

Another related doctrine that exemplifies an asymmetric model is the ordained shadow of the substance that was fulfilled in Christ, namely the Passover. The Passover illustrates the nature of asymmetry with respect to a single active intention. At the first Passover, instead of salvation, God's judgment was the active intention, and those who were spared were passed over—nothing was actively imposed upon them by the angel of death, those who were passed over were left to their existing and desired condition. This illustration is only intended to depict this particular aspect of leaving one to their existing condition, while actively imposing upon those not passed over. The idea is inverted when applied to

election to life, since the active intention is to graciously bestow new life, faith, and love. The asymmetry is seen in that those who are not elected, are not actively imposed upon, but rather are left to their existing and desired condition. Shedd illustrates this well:

While, then, election is the efficient cause of salvation, preterition is not the efficient cause of perdition. If I hold up a stone in my hand, my holding it up is the efficient cause of its not falling; but if I let it go, my letting it go is not the efficient cause of its falling. The efficient cause, in this case, is the force of gravity. Non-prevention is inaction, and inaction is not causation. On the side of election, the efficient cause of salvation is the Holy Spirit in regeneration; but on the side of reprobation, the efficient cause of perdition is the self-determination of the human will.⁵⁰

This is consonant with Rom 1:28, "God gave them over to a depraved mind" (cf. Rom 1:24, 26).⁵¹ This too is asymmetrical, since to the reprobate, He gives them to their own desires, withdrawing His constraining influence, whereas to the elect He "draws" them (cf. John 6:44). The hardening of hearts may be considered in like fashion.⁵² The depraved human heart is like a

⁵⁰ Shedd, 445.

⁵¹ "Paul's argument concerning God giving men up (Rom. 1:24,26,28) proves that positive reprobation is founded on the sinfulness of its objects." — Best, 28.

⁵² "In God's ultimate act of judgment he gives sinners over to their sins. In effect, he abandons them to their own desires. So it was with Pharaoh. By this act of judgment, God did not blemish his own righteousness by creating fresh evil in Pharaoh's heart. He established his own

water tower with its desires (water) stored up within. Sin flows out of the heart (cf. Matt 12:34; Mark 7:21) like water flows out of a water tower's faucet. Restriction against uncontrolled free expression is maintained by its valve. The hardening of a heart is realized in the increasing expression of its own depravity (release of water). Thus, when the Lord "hardens" a heart, He actively turns its valve so as to withdraw His constraining force imposed against the pressure within. If there was no water pressure, there would be no flow of water, even if the valve was opened. Just as water flow finds its source and root cause in water pressure and not the opening of a valve, so final culpability lies with the creature's desires (water pressure) and not some imposition of God, even if He actively hardens a heart (actively opens a valve). Therefore, just as a water valve imposes no active influence to produce water flow, so God imposes no active influence on the nonelect in their craving and actualizing sin.

What about judgment? This two is asymmetric. Whereas God loves without a cause outside Himself, "God is not angry without a cause!"⁵³ Furthermore, with regard to the election itself, if it is suggested to be purely symmetrical, then there are no biblical grounds to suggest that God would predestine a soul—not associated with sin—to wrath. "There can be no ordination to

righteousness by punishing the evil that was already there in Pharaoh. This is how we must understand double predestination." —Sproul, 147.

⁵³ Buswell, 156.

wrath which does not contemplate its objects as already sinful. Negative and positive reprobation must be distinguished."⁵⁴

What about the doctrine of retribution? What about the doctrine of repentance? Consider the election of angels. They are not able to repent, a reality that is contrasted by humans. If humans are without genuine hope of repentance, then why is so much made of repentance in Scripture?

Another asymmetrical picture is given in Revelation 20:12–13, where the "book of life" contains the names of the elect. But there is no corresponding "book of death" identified. This figure seems to offer the closest approximation to a predestination record, if that is indeed the intention of the text, and it only contains names of those guaranteed life.

The Biblical Emphasis

When considering the doctrine of reprobation, the biblical emphasis cannot be stressed enough. A candid observation indicates that "the Bible often speaks of people elected for Heaven: It never speaks of anybody who is elected or chosen to go to Hell."⁵⁵ It is to heaven, and it is initiated by God. "The emphasis in the Old Testament doctrine of election is always on God's initiative."⁵⁶ A predominate theme, inseparably linked to election, is the doctrine of grace. "God's election is everywhere represented

⁵⁴ Best, 28.

⁵⁵ Rice, 88.

⁵⁶ David Clotfelter, *Sinners in the Hands of a Good God: Reconciling Divine Judgment and Mercy* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 117.

in Scripture, as an act of mercy."⁵⁷ "Because the only difference between the vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy is the sovereign grace of God that changes the heart of the rebel sinner and turns him from being a God-hater into a God-lover."⁵⁸ So thoughts of predestination should immediately invoke thoughts of God's grace and love (cf. Eph 1:4-11). The greatness of Christ and the cost of salvation by God must not be neglected in this context; we must not rob the glory of God from a true manifestation of His love. God makes much of His love. This grace and love join to minister peace and comfort, security and assurance (cf. Rom 8:28-39).⁵⁹ Thanksgiving is another emphasis in the Scripture (cf. 2 Thess 2:13). Another important biblical emphasis is on the freedom and wisdom of God.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Dabney, 240.

⁵⁸ James R. White, and Norman L. Geisler, *The Potter's Freedom: A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal of Norman Geisler's Chosen but Free* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publications, 2000), 214.

⁵⁹ "In reference to Romans 8:28-39, "What is Paul's main point in this passage? . . . What is the foundation of this love? God's foreknowledge and predestination of them from all eternity. They will always be loved because they have always been loved. And what is the guarantee and proof of this love? The death of Christ. . . . Can these things be said of those who never come to Christ?" — Clotfelter, 167.

⁶⁰ "It represents God, not as arbitrary, but as exercising the free choice of a wise and sovereign will, in ways and for reasons which are inscrutable to us." — Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1976), 787.

CONCLUSION

“It should be stated most emphatically that the plan of salvation is not parallel with, nor symmetrical with the fact of reprobation.”⁶¹ An asymmetric view of predestination best accords with the biblical evidence.⁶² We understand God's active intervention in the course of human destiny only in terms of a positive predestination of the elect.⁶³ With regard to the label, “double predestination,” it is not helpful and may confound the principle. As to the doctrine of reprobation, the view that is most consistent with the biblical

⁶¹ Buswell, 154. “But ‘double predestination’, as I have encountered the usage of the phrase, seems to indicate the view that salvation and loss are but two sides of one perfectly symmetrical pattern, and that God is the chargeable cause of the loss of the lost, just as truly He is the creditable cause of the salvation of the saved. If this be the meaning of the phrase, it must certainly be rejected as wholly unsupported by the Scripture and clearly denied by the same.” — Buswell, 155. For terminology sake, we may agree with Culver's suggestion, “If, as logic compels, one must include the damnation of the non-elect in the decrees and give it the name of reprobation, then as several suggest, we must regard election as an efficacious decree and reprobation as a permissive decree.” — Culver, 680.

⁶² Cf. Dabney, 242-243; Berkhof, 116-117; Best, 25; Boyce, 361; Shedd, 433; Sproul, 142; Strong, 790; Zanchius, 72.

⁶³ It has been suggested that predestination with respect to the elect and nonelect be referred to in terms of a positive / negative predestination. The elect are positively (actively) chosen in grace and the nonelect are negatively (passively, as passed-over) left to themselves.

record maintains that reprobation is defined in terms of preterition (or passing over) without confusing God's election and the consequence of man's sin.

In sum, reprobation as here defined, (1) makes no man a sinner, (2) imposes no active influence on the nonelect, (3) election or preterition is based not upon the worth or demerit of the person, both are deserving of judgment, (4) withholding grace renders the nonelect in no worse condition and is consistent with God's goodness, (5) there is no possibility of a nonelect joining the company of the elect, and (6) the final end of both elect and nonelect is the glory of God. How does one respond to such a doctrine? Tell of His wondrous grace and praise Him!

I look for heavenly blessedness, not as the result of my own efforts, but as the gift of God's free favour. My hope is fixed alone upon the free and gratuitous love of God to guilty men, by the which he has given his Son Jesus Christ to put away sin, and to bring in everlasting righteousness for those who deserve it not.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Spurgeon, 9.

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