

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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### THE DIFFICULT DOCTRINE OF REPROBATION (Part II)

**D**espite the overwhelming silence about the doctrine of reprobation on the part of most Evangelicals today, the great Christian theologians of the past were not so reticent.

*Augustine* (354-430): “He who said, ‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,’ loved Jacob of His undeserved grace, and hated Esau of His deserved judgment” (*Enchiridion*, xcvi).

*Martin Luther* (1483-1546): “the love and hate of God towards men is immutable and eternal, existing, not merely before there was any merit or work of ‘free-will,’ but before the world was made; [so] all things take place in us of necessity, according as He has from eternity loved or not loved ... faith and unbelief come to us by no work of our own, but through the love and hatred of God” (*The Bondage of the Will*, pp. 226, 228-229).

*John Calvin* (1509-1564): “Now a word concerning the reprobate, with whom the apostle is at the same time there concerned. For as Jacob, deserving nothing by good works, is taken into grace, so Esau, as yet undefiled by any crime, is hated [Rom. 9:13]” (*Institutes* 3.22.11). “While the reprobate are the vessels of the just wrath of God, and the elect vessels of his compassion, the ground of the distinction is to be sought in the pure will of God alone, which is the supreme rule of justice. While the elect receive the grace of adoption by faith, their election does not depend on faith but is prior in time and order. As the beginning of faith and perseverance in it arises from the gratuitous election of God, none are truly illuminated with faith, and none granted the spirit of regeneration, except those whom God elects. But it is necessary that the reprobate remain in their blindness or be deprived of such portion of faith as is in them. (*Calvin’s Theological Treatises*, p. 179.)

*John Knox* (1514-1572): “[God] will destroy all that speak lies. He hateth all that work iniquity; neither will he show himself merciful to such as maliciously offend. But all the sinners of the earth shall drink the dregs of that cup which the Eternal holdeth in his hands. For he will destroy all those that traitorously decline from him. They shall cry but he will not hear” (*An Answer to a great Number of Blasphemous Cavillations Written by an Anabaptist and Adversary to God’s Eternal Predestination* [London: Thomas Charde, 1591], pp. 403-404).

*Jerome Zanchius* (1516-1590): “When hatred is ascribed to God, it implies (1) a negation of benevolence, or a resolution not to have mercy on such and such men, nor to endue them with any of those graces which stand connected with eternal life. So, ‘Esau have I hated’ (Rom. 9), *i.e.*, ‘I did, from all eternity, determine within Myself not to have mercy on him.’ The sole cause of which awful negation is not merely the unworthiness of the persons hated, but the sovereignty and freedom of the Divine will. (2) It denotes displeasure and dislike, for sinners who are not interested in Christ cannot but be infinitely displeasing to and loathsome in the sight of eternal purity. (3) It signifies a positive will to punish and destroy the reprobate for their sins, of which will, the infliction of misery upon them hereafter, is but the necessary effect and actual execution? (*Absolute Predestination*, p. 44).

*William Perkins* (1558-1602): “This hatred of God is whereby he detesteth and abhorreth the reprobate when he is fallen into sin for the same sin. And this hatred which God has to man comes by the fall of Adam and is neither an antecedent nor a cause of God’s decree, but only a consequent and followeth the decree’ (*A Golden Chain*, chapter 53).

*B. B. Warfield* (1851-1921): “The whole presentation of the doctrine is such as either to imply or openly to assert, on its every emergence, the removal of the elect by the pure grace of God, not merely from a state of condemnation, but out of the company of the condemned – a company on whom the grace of God has no saving effect, and who are therefore left without hope in their sins; and the positive just reprobation of the impenitent for their sins is repeatedly explicitly taught in sharp contrast with the gratuitous salvation of the elect despite their sins. But, on the other hand, it is ever taught that, as the body out of which believers are chosen by God’s unsearchable grace is the mass of justly condemned sinners, so the destruction to which those that are passed by are left is the righteous recompense of their guilt. Thus the discrimination between men in the matter of eternal destiny is distinctly set forth as taking place in the interests of mercy and for the sake of salvation: from the fate which justly hangs over all, God is represented as in His infinite compassion rescuing those chosen to this end in His inscrutable counsels of mercy to the praise of the glory of His grace; while those that are left in their sins perish most deservedly, as the justice of God demands” (*The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield II*, p. 64).

*A. W. Pink* (1886-1952): “‘Thou hatest all *workers* of iniquity’—not merely the works of iniquity. Here, then, is a flat repudiation of present teaching that, God hates sin but loves the sinner; Scripture says, ‘Thou *hatest* all workers of iniquity’ (Ps. 5:5)! ‘God is *angry* with the wicked every day.’ ‘He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but *the wrath of God*’—not ‘*shall* abide,’ but even now—‘*abideth* on him’ (Ps. 5:5; 8:11; John 3:36). Can God ‘love’ the one on whom His ‘wrath’ abides? Again; is it not evident that the words ‘The love of God *which is in Christ Jesus*’ (Rom. 8:39) mark a limitation, both in the sphere and objects of His love? Again; is it not plain from the words ‘Jacob have I loved, *but Esau have I hated*’ (Rom. 9:13) that God does not love everybody? ... Is it conceivable that God will love the damned in the Lake of Fire? Yet, if He loves them now He will do so then, seeing that His love knows no change—He is ‘*without variableness* or shadow of turning!’” (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 248).

*Lorraine Boettner* (1901-1990): “Those who hold the doctrine of Election but deny that of Reprobation can lay but little claim to consistency. To affirm the former while denying the latter makes the decree of predestination an illogical and lop-sided decree. The creed which states the former but denies the latter will resemble a wounded eagle attempting to fly with but one wing. In the interests of a ‘mild Calvinism’ some have been inclined to give up the doctrine of Reprobation, and this term (in itself a very innocent term) has been the entering wedge for harmful attacks upon Calvinism pure and simple. ‘Mild Calvinism’ is synonymous with sickly Calvinism, and sickness, if not cured, is the beginning of the end.” (*The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, p. 105).

*John Murray* (1898-1975): “[Divine hatred can] scarcely be reduced to that of not loving or loving less ... the evidence would require, to say the least, the thought of disfavour, disapprobation, displeasure. There is also a vehement quality that may not be discounted ... We are compelled, therefore, to find in this word a declaration of the sovereign counsel of God as it is concerned with the ultimate destinies of men” (*Romans*, vol. 2, pp. 22, 24).

*James Montgomery Boice* (1938-2000): “although hatred in God is of a different character than hatred in sinful human beings—his is a holy hatred—hate in God nevertheless does imply disapproval ... [Esau] was the object of [God’s] displeasure ... Since the selection involved in the words love and hate was made before either of the children was born, the words must involve a double predestination in which, on the one hand, Jacob was destined to salvation and, on the other hand, Esau was destined to be passed over and thus to perish” (*Romans*, vol. 3, p. 1062).

## REVIEW

*First*, reprobation, like election, is a decree of God. It is not an act of God in history. It is not a reaction of God in time to men’s sins. In election and reprobation, God is NOT conditioned by His creatures. Like election, reprobation is *eternal*.

*Second*, it is *Sovereign and unconditional*. It is not based on foreseen unbelief, no more than election is based on foreseen faith. The Westminster Confession of faith that was cited last week, emphatically repudiates a conditional reprobation in Chapter III, Article ii.

*Third*, reprobation is a decree concerning *specific persons*. Esau, Pharaoh (Rom. 9:13, 17). Judas (John 13:18, Acts 1:25), Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli (I Sam. 2:25), etc. It is not just a general decree to damn whoever in time does not believe. In this also it is like election which is personal. God either shows mercy or He hardens – there is no middle category.

## I AN ACT OF GOD

This is an expression that is frequently used in the world of insurance to describe an act which is accepted legally as being outside human control. But the phrase ‘act of God’ occurs in religious texts, specifically referring to acts that God has undertaken, dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This ‘act of God’ is that which is used in legal and insurance circles when discussing any act which is outside human control and therefore not the responsibility of any individual or corporation. The term was first used in this way in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Peter Simmonds’ *Dictionary of Trade Products*, 1858, uses the term: “Force-majeure, a French commercial term for unavoidable accidents in the transport of goods, from superior force, the act of God, etc.”<sup>1</sup> Warfield took note of this mentality and wrote, “Men may be unable to understand the place which the incidents, as they unroll themselves before their eyes, take in the developing plot of the great drama: they may, nay, must, therefore stand astonished and confounded before this or that which befalls them or befalls the world. Hence arise to them problems – the problem of the petty, the problem of the inexplicable, the problem of suffering, the problem of sin (e.g., Eccl. Xi. 5). But, in the infinite wisdom of the Lord of all the earth, each event falls with exact precision into its proper place in the unfolding of His eternal plan; nothing, however small, however strange, occurs without His ordering, or without its peculiar fitness for its place in the working out of His purpose; and the end of all shall be the manifestation of His glory, and the accumulation of His praise. This is the Old Testament philosophy of the universe – a world-view which attains concrete unity in an absolute Divine teleology, in the compactness of an eternal decree, or purpose, or plan, of which all that comes to pass is the development in time.”<sup>2</sup>

- A. **Human Responsibility.** The Apostle declared that the failure of the vast majority of the Jews in his day to obtain what they were seeking stemmed from their own flawed understanding and misplaced zeal (cf. Rom. 10:2).
- B. **God’s Activity.** The internal cause is attributed to God. He *hardens*. There is some question over the meaning of the word rendered, “were blinded” (KJV). The verb, derived from a word referring to a callous, or a stone, is used metaphorically in the New Testament of the heart becoming hardened or calloused (cf. v. 25 [the noun here]; 2 Cor. 3:14). In this context, however, it may have the force of “were blinded,” as the KJV renders it. The following citations, with their references to the eyes, gives some support to this (cf. Mark 4:12; John 12:40; II Cor. 3:14). The word relates to both the mind and the will. The truth that men may be hardened spiritually is a stumbling block to the natural man, who resists both the biblical view of man and the biblical view of the divine sovereignty. That attitude we must avoid and, if puzzled or perplexed, let us bow before Scripture and await God’s future clarification of the mystery. Two mistakes have sometimes been made in handling the puzzling, “were hardened.” Without proper consideration of the context, some have explained the words as they hardened themselves. While human responsibility is underscored in this passage, the immediate context makes plain that God is the author of this *judicial* hardening. Others have been guilty of a second mistake. They have stressed the passive voice incorrectly, as if Paul was trying to avoid any suggestion that God performed the hardening. Morris writes, “The passive may well ascribe the hardening to God (the passive was often used as a reverent way of avoiding the name of God). But, while it is certainly true that God did the hardening in verse 8, it is the people who do the stumbling in verse 11 and it is possible that the passive here is a

neutral expression which may be taken either way. In either case we must remember that those who failed God did not do so because they had been hardened, but they were hardened because they had failed him.”<sup>3</sup> In the discussion of such things we often forget an important truth: No one deserves the grace and mercy of God. God would be perfectly just in condemning all. The fact that He has graciously rescued His people is no basis for the charge of unfairness; it is a thrilling magnification of His love and grace. There is no evidence anywhere in Scripture that God prevents a seeking soul from coming to a saving knowledge of Him. On the other hand, there is every indication that, when one does come to Him and is saved, it is traceable to the efficacious drawing of the Father (cf. John 6:44). We rest in these truths.<sup>4</sup> Boettner said it well, “The condemnation of the non-elect is designed primarily to furnish an eternal exhibition, before men and angels, of God’s hatred for sin, or, in other words, it is to be an eternal manifestation of the justice of God. This decree displays one of the divine attributes which apart from it could never have been adequately appreciated. The salvation of some through a redeemer is designed to display the attributes of love, mercy, and holiness. The attributes of wisdom, power, and sovereignty are displayed in the treatment of both groups. Hence the truth of the Scripture statement that, “Jehovah hath made everything for its own end; Yea, even the wicked for the day of evil,” Prov. 16:4... This decree of reprobation also serves subordinate purposes in regard to the elect; for in beholding the rejection and final state of the wicked, (1) they learn what they too would have suffered had not grace stepped in to their relief, and they appreciate more deeply the riches of divine love... (2) It furnishes a most powerful motive for thankfulness that they have received such high blessings.”<sup>5</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** The late Reformed theologian Paul Jewett, wrote an excellent book on this subject, and after dealing with a host of exegetical and theological problems wisely concluded, “Rather than probe the question of the reprobate, rather than seek to ‘explain’ the texts which speak of their end, we would do well to heed the example of Scripture, which teaches us to worship him whose awesome severity is just, even as his mercy is everlasting. The Song of Moses—which is in heaven’s hymnbook (rev. 15:3-4) – is occasioned by the judgment of the Egyptians as well as by the deliverance of the Israelites (Exod. 14-15). Well might God’s people burst forth in songs of gratitude at the Red Sea, for they know themselves to be the beneficiaries of his great deliverance. But their worship is foiled by the note of judgment reiterated – like the theme of Ravel’s *Bolero* – in plague after plague on Egypt, culminating at last as the waters overwhelm the Egyptian hosts, the purpose for which God raised Pharaoh up (Rom. 9:17). It is as this dark purpose is fulfilled that his saving purpose is also fulfilled. But why this should be is his secret.”<sup>6</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/23550.html>

<sup>2</sup> The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield II (rpt. Baker, 1981) p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> L. Morris, The Epistle to the Romans (IVP, 1989) p. 403.

<sup>4</sup> S. Lewis Johnson Jr., class lecture notes (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> L. Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination (P & R, 1964) p. 122.

<sup>6</sup> P. Jewett, Election & Predestination (Eerdmans 1985) p. 134. He also said, “To *confess* such a truth is not to *explain* it. Mystery confronts us on every side. Formal logic would suggest that where we have paradox, we have a screw loose in our argument. But there is a difference between those paradoxes that result from fallacious argument and paradoxes that mark the limits of human thought. All rational thinkers have been compelled to recognize the seeming finality of paradox in this latter sense, the existence of the so-called *insolubilia*.”