**Foundations (39 of 60) Election & Reprobation - RC Sproul**

If God elects some people for salvation, does He also elect others to damnation? Our topic today is predestination on Renewing Your Mind. Welcome to Renewing Your Mind with Dr. R.C. Sproul. I'm Lee Webb, and on this weekend edition of the program, we're in the midst of an engaging series titled Foundations, an overview of systematic theology.

Predestination is one of the most complex and misunderstood doctrines of the Christian faith. It raises questions like, on what basis does God choose to elect some and deny others? And what's the flip side to election, for the reprobate? The answers to these questions will deepen our appreciation for God's mercy, His love, and His grace. Here's the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries, Dr. R.C. Sproul.

When we hear the Christmas story read every year from Luke's gospel, we hear these words from chapter 2, and it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. And that little historical detail that Luke supplies for us in his narrative of the birth of Jesus calls attention to the authority of Caesar Augustus, who was one of the most powerful rulers of the ancient world. And when a ruler such as Caesar issues an imperial decree, that is a command that is imposed upon all of those under the dominion of Rome that must be obeyed.

And Luke tells us that because this decree went out from the emperor, that this was the historical reason behind Jesus being born in Bethlehem of Judea. But we realize as we read the rest of the story that long before Caesar Augustus ever thought about issuing a decree in human history that would lead to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, that from all eternity the Lord God Omnipotent had issued a decree that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. And there is a sense, as we will look at when we see the doctrine of providence, that above and beyond the decree of kings and emperors in this world always stands the decree of Almighty God.

And when we look at theology, one of the things we're concerned about is this whole matter of the divine decrees, because we know that God is sovereign, and His sovereignty has to do with His authority and government over all that He makes, that God rules the universe. The Lord God Omnipotent reigns. And when He issues a decree according to His counsel and His eternal plan, that decree must needs come to pass.

Now, we are concerned in the Scriptures with many aspects of God's eternal decrees. But the one that has provoked the most discussion and controversy and consternation has to do with those decrees that refer to His plan of salvation, chiefly with respect to the decree of election. And therein, we come face to face with this very difficult doctrine called the doctrine of predestination.

And that little word, predestination, I think provokes more theological discussion than perhaps any other word in the Bible. So let's look at it for a moment, predestination. Now, we all know what a destination is.

When we set out on a trip, we have a goal where we are headed, a place where we hope to reach and come safely in our arrival, and we call that goal our destination, the place where we are headed. Sometimes we speak of our destiny. People refer to destiny sometimes in pagan ways and speak about fate, which has nothing to do with the biblical concept of destiny.

Destiny has to do with that ultimate point to which we are headed that is, from all eternity, decreed by Almighty God. So with this business of destination or destiny, we attach, as the Scripture does, the prefix pre-, which means beforehand or in advance of. And so, the Scriptures speak about some aspect in which God, from all eternity, has decreed a destiny or a destination for His people.

If we would go, for example, to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, in the first chapter we read this statement in verse 3, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. Now, there are several aspects of this paragraph that I'd like to call attention to briefly. First of all, when Paul introduces the idea here of predestination and of election, three times he speaks of blessing or of blessedness.

For the Apostle Paul, the idea of divine predestination was not a concept that he regarded grimly or negatively, or did he see it as a curse on theology, but rather for the Apostle, the idea of divine predestination was an idea that provoked within him a sense of exultation, of glorifying God, and of great and massive gratitude. In other words, the Apostle Paul saw the doctrine of predestination as a blessing, a blessing that should evoke from us a sense of profound gratitude and of praise. And in Reformed theology, when we talk about this doctrine of predestination, we often use the language commonly that we call the doctrines of grace, because in predestination perhaps more than any other doctrine, we are confronted face to face with the depths and the riches of the mercy and the grace of Almighty God.

If we abstract our thinking about predestination and rip it out of the context of that blessedness, then we will struggle endlessly, I'm convinced, with this doctrine. I might also add, before we continue, that Calvin, who is often considered the king of the predestinarians, always used to say that the doctrine of predestination is one of those doctrines in the Bible that is so mysterious that it must be treated with great care and great humility, because it can so easily be misunderstood and distorted in such a way as to cast a shadow on the integrity of God and make God look like a tyrant who plays with His creatures, who rolls the dice, as it were, with respect to our salvation. And the distortions of this sort are so many that any sober treatment of this doctrine requires great diligence.

In fact, I'm almost reluctant to deal with it in only one brief lecture and that's why I wrote a whole book on it called Chosen by God, so that I could explore for the layperson more of the nuances that are involved in this doctrine. And if you struggle with it, let me say to you, you're not alone. On the other hand, this is a doctrine, I believe, that is worth struggling with, because I think the more we probe it, the more we come to see the magnificence of God and the sweetness of His grace and of His mercy.

Now, the other thing I want to say before we continue on this is that if we are going to be biblical in our theology, we must have some doctrine of predestination, because it's the Bible that introduces the concept of predestination, not Calvin or Luther or Augustine, and I might say in passing that there's nothing in Calvin's doctrine of predestination that wasn't first in Luther, and there wasn't anything in Luther's doctrine of predestination that wasn't first in Augustine, and I think it's also safe to say there was nothing in Augustine's doctrine of predestination that wasn't first in Paul. And so, we find this doctrine has its roots not in the theologians of church history, but in the Scriptures themselves who set forth explicitly this concept of predestination. Again, Paul says here that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.

That the predestination that Paul is referring to here has to do with election. Election and predestination are not synonyms. They do not mean the same thing, though they are very closely related.

Predestination has to do with God's decrees concerning anything that He decrees from all eternity. A specific type of predestination is election, which has to do with God's choosing certain people in Christ to be adopted into the family of God, or in simple terms, to be saved. And the idea biblically is from all eternity, God has a plan of salvation in which from all eternity, He has chosen people, He has elected people to be adopted into His family.

Now, again, just about everybody who deals with this doctrine of predestination and the eternal decrees will agree that election is unto salvation and that election is in Christ. There's not a whole lot of disagreement or dispute about that. The two issues that arise with respect to predestination that are most controversial have to do with these two questions.

First of all, is there a flip side to election, which theologians call reprobation, which has to do with the negative side of the decrees of God? And the question is simply this, if from all eternity, God decrees that some people positively are chosen or elected by God unto salvation, does that not mean that there are some who are not chosen for salvation and therefore are from all eternity in the class of the non-elect or the class of what we would call the reprobate? And that raises the question of if predestination is God's plan of salvation, double, and I'll come to that in a moment. The other question that is so controversial is the question of what is the basis or the grounds upon which God makes His choice to elect people unto salvation. Now, probably one of the most popular versions of predestination is that view that is called the view of prescience.

Or the prescient view of predestination. And the word prescience, as you might know, the word science is in there, which comes from the Latin word for knowledge, and again the prefix pre- which means beforehand or in advance of. The prescient view means that God's election is based ultimately on His prior knowledge of what people will do or not do.

That is that God from all eternity looks down the corridors of time and He knows in advance, being omniscient, who will embrace Christ and who will reject Christ. And on the basis of that prior knowledge He chooses to adopt those whom He knows will make the proper decision and the proper choice. So that in the final analysis, God chooses us on the basis of His knowledge that we will choose Him.

Now, that's a very popular view of predestination. In my view, that does not explain the biblical doctrine of predestination. Frankly, I think it simply denies the biblical doctrine of predestination, because as I understand the Scriptures, what the Bible is saying is that we choose Him because He first chose us, and that the grounds of predestination are based solely on the good pleasure of God's own will.

As Paul says here in Ephesians, it says, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will, and to the praise of the glory of His grace. Now, in our biblical series, our overview of the Bible does to glory. I mentioned an anecdote in there of my little granddaughter, who when she was learning the children's catechism, one of the questions that she was asked is, why does God do what He does? And her answer that she gave in her baby talk was, for His glory.

That's why God does what He does, for His own glory. That the goal, the ultimate goal of God's decrees is for the glory of God, not to glorify us, but for His glory. And the decisions and the choices that He makes in His plan of salvation are based upon the good pleasure of His will.

Now, the normal objection you hear at that point is to say, well, this means God is arbitrary. If the reason why He chooses one person rather than another is not found in those people, then doesn't that mean that God is whimsical and capricious, tyrannical, and arbitrary? No, the Bible does say that the basis for His choosing rests upon His will and His pleasure. But we notice that it is His good pleasure, because there's no such thing as the bad pleasure of God's will.

Whatever God chooses, the choice that He makes is based upon His internal righteousness, His character that we looked at before, His own goodness. God doesn't know how to make a bad choice. God does not know how to do anything that is evil.

And so, Paul is praising God for the plan of salvation that he executes, which is based upon God's will, on the pleasure of His will, and on the good pleasure of His will. Now, what Paul hints at here in Ephesians, he develops much more fully in his epistle to the Romans, particularly in Romans chapter 8 and chapter 9. But because of the constraints of time here, we'll look briefly simply at chapter 9. In chapter 9, verse 10, Paul writes these words, "'Not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac, for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand not of works, but of him who calls, it was said to her, the older shall serve the younger, as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.'" Now, what Paul is saying here is that from all eternity, God makes a decision to redeem Jacob and not Esau, who were children of the same family, indeed who were twins. They were wombmates, if you will.

And God, before they have been born, before they have done any good or evil, declares that He will give His benevolent and complacent love to one and to withhold it from the other. And then He goes on to say this in verse 14, "'What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness in God?'' Now, this is a critical point that Paul is making here, because those who construct a doctrine of predestination that is based upon human choice in the final analysis, and they give that theory saying, well, God chooses on the basis of whom He knows will choose Him, no one has ever protested against that doctrine by saying that that suggests something unrighteous in God. It's only when you conceive of predestination as being really rooted in the divine, sovereign good pleasure that people raise the question about the righteousness of God, and that Paul anticipates immediately this objection, which is the objection that every Reformed theologian has heard a thousand times, comforts me that we have the correct understanding of what the Apostle is saying here, because he raises the question rhetorically himself.

Does this mean that there's unrighteousness of God, and what's his answer? Certainly not. By no means, God forbid, are the various translations to his answer. And then he says, he reminds us of the Old Testament teaching, for he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.

He reminds us that it is His sovereign, divine prerogative to dispense His grace and mercy however He chooses to do it. Now, remember when I was talking about the communicable attributes of God, and I talked about the justice of God, and I talked about everything outside the category of justice as being non-justice, and I put some circles up here on the blackboard, and I talked about outside of the character of justice is mercy, but also there is injustice. Injustice is evil.

Mercy is not. And when God considers a race of fallen human beings who are depraved and in rebellion against Him, God decrees from all eternity to give mercy to some and justice to the other. Esau received justice.

Jacob received grace. Nobody received injustice. God never punishes innocent people, but He does redeem guilty people.

But He doesn't redeem them all. He is under no obligation to redeem any. The amazing thing is that He redeems some.

So Paul then gives a conclusion in verse 16, So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. Verse 18, Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. Now, I don't see how Paul could be any more clear that the grounds for our election is not based on our running, our doing, our choosing, or our willing, but it rests ultimately on the sovereign will of God.

The sovereignty of God in the realm of election and reprobation. That's our topic on this weekend edition of Renewing Your Mind with Dr. R. C. Sproul. As you can hear from this clear presentation about theology, Ligonier Ministries seeks to bridge the gap between Sunday school and seminary by helping Bible students understand the essential doctrines of the Christian faith.

We want to help people grow deeper in their knowledge of God and His holiness. And with that desire, we're pleased to offer you all 60 messages from Dr. Sproul in the current study of Doctrine and Life. The comprehensive series is titled Foundations, an overview of systematic theology.

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Call 1-800-435-4343. That's 1-800-435-4343. Or go online to rymoffer.com. Well anytime you have a discussion about election and the sovereignty of God like we did today, you immediately face the question, what is it that God does when He intervenes in a person's life in order to bring them to faith? Dr. Sproul addresses this important issue next time.

Meet us here next week on Renewing Your Mind, the radio outreach of Ligonier Ministries in Sanford, Florida.