



WIPF & STOCK
An Imprint of WIPF and STOCK Publishers

199 West 8th Avenue, Ste. 3, Eugene, OR 97401
Telephone (541) 344-1528 • Fax (541) 344-1506
Visit our Web site at www.wipfandstock.com

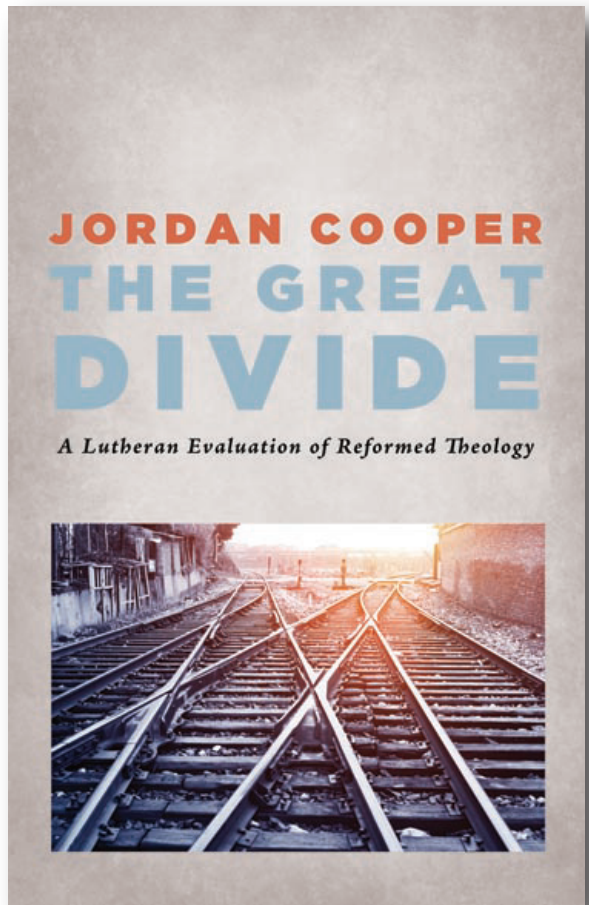
THE GREAT DIVIDE

A Lutheran Evaluation of Reformed Theology

JORDAN COOPER

Since the sixteenth century, the Protestant tradition has been divided. The Reformed and Lutheran reformations, though both committed to the doctrine of the sinner’s justification by faith alone, split over Zwingli and Luther’s disagreement over the nature of the Lord’s Supper. Since that time, the Reformed and Lutheran traditions have developed their own theological convictions, and continue to disagree with one another. It is incumbent upon students of the reformation, in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, to come to an understanding of what these differences are, and why they matter.

In *The Great Divide: A Lutheran Evaluation of Reformed Theology*, Jordan Cooper examines these differences from a Lutheran perspective. While seeking to help both sides come to a more nuanced understanding of one another, and writing in an irenic tone, Cooper contends that these differences do still matter. Throughout the work, Cooper engages with Reformed writers, both contemporary and old, and demonstrates that the Lutheran tradition is more consistent with the teachings of Scripture than the Reformed.



ISBN: 978-1-4982-2423-9

230 PP. | \$26 | PAPER

Jordan Cooper is pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Watseka, IL, and host of the Just and Sinner podcast. He is the author of *Christification: A Lutheran Approach to Theosis* (2014).

“This book delivers what it promises without getting distracted, overwhelmed, or muted with qualifications. Cooper speaks with clarity and conviction and makes plain the real differences that exist between the Reformed and the Lutheran branches of Reformation faith. The book can be read profitably by anyone committed to biblical fidelity and doctrinal integrity, but especially by those convinced that the differences between Wittenberg and Geneva are trivial and inconsequential, or cause for dismissive condemnations.”

—**JOEL BIERMANN**

Professor of Systematic Theology, Concordia Seminary

Media, Examination, and Review Copies:
Contact: James Stock
(541) 344-1528, ext 103 or James@wipfandstock.com

Orders: Contact your favorite bookseller or order directly from the publisher via phone (541) 344-1528, fax (541) 344-1506 or e-mail us at orders@wipfandstock.com

THE GREAT DIVIDE

A Lutheran Evaluation of Reformed Theology

JORDAN COOPER

WIPF & STOCK • Eugene, Oregon

THE GREAT DIVIDE
A Lutheran Evaluation of Reformed Theology

Copyright © 2015 Jordan Cooper. All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical publications or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher. Write: Permissions, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3, Eugene, OR 97401.

Wipf & Stock
An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401

www.wipfandstock.com

ISBN 13: 978-1-4982-2423-9

Manufactured in the U.S.A.

07/15/2015

Contents

Introduction | ix

Part I: Predestination and Free Will

- 1 Chosen in Christ: The Doctrine of Predestination | 3
- 2 Once for All: The Extent of the Atonement | 34
- 3 Shipwrecked Faith: A Lutheran Approach to Perseverance and Apostasy | 62

Part II: Worship and the Sacraments

- 4 Praising the Triune God: The Nature and Essence of Worship | 89
- 5 The Washing of Regeneration: The Sacrament of Baptism | 109
- 6 The Medicine of Immortality: The Lutheran Doctrine of Holy Communion | 136

Part III: Salvation

- 7 Justification by Faith: The Doctrine upon Which the Church Stands or Falls | 161
- 8 New Life in Christ: Sanctification and Vocation | 180

Bibliography | 211

1

Chosen in Christ The Doctrine of Predestination

PREDESTINATION IN THE REFORMED TRADITION

FOR SOME, THE NAME John Calvin is associated with the teaching that God predestines everything that occurs in the universe, especially as regards salvation and damnation. Calvin is seen as a supporter of fatalism, a man with misplaced theocratic hopes, and even as a murderer.¹ Despite these charges, which do little other than frighten the audience away from Reformed theology, the Calvinistic system is much broader and more nuanced than it is often given credit for. The Reformed theological system is all encompassing; it has its own unique approaches to the sacraments, church, eschatology, and redemptive history.² That being said, the Reformed church does focus much attention to the subject of predestination and the sovereignty of God. This flows from the Reformed tendency to view God's glory as a

1. For an example of a popular vitriolic critique of both the Calvinistic system and John Calvin himself, see Bryson, *Dark Side of Calvinism*.

2. R. Scott Clark has written a helpful work titled *Recovering the Reformed Confession*, which explains the historic Reformed confessional tradition in contrast to what is often mischaracterized as Reformed.

Part I: Predestination and Free Will

central tenant of theology.³ In contrast to this, soteriology is central for the Lutheran tradition.⁴

John Calvin was highly influenced by the predestinarian theology of Augustine and Luther's treatise *On the Bondage of the Will*.⁵ In contrast to certain strands of medieval Roman Catholic theology, Calvin held to a high view of original sin, arguing that salvation is impossible apart from irresistible grace. This irresistible grace is given to the elect alone. Calvin went beyond much of the earlier Augustinian tradition⁶ in his affirmation of double predestination, purporting that God predestines the reprobate as well as the saved to their eternal destiny. There is some debate regarding Calvin's view of the atonement. Some have proposed that the doctrine of limited atonement was an innovation of Calvin's student Theodore Beza (1519–1605) and does not reflect Calvin's own teaching.⁷

3. There is, of course, some debate as to the validity of a *Centraldogmen* in Christianity. Muller argues against the idea of a central dogma in *Christ and the Decree*. Whether or not one will label predestination or the glory of God as *the* central tenant of Reformed theology, it is apparent that these ideas are far more prominent in the Reformed than the Lutheran tradition.

4. Herman Bavinck says as much when he defines the difference between the two traditions in the following words: "The difference seems to be conveyed best by saying that the Reformed Christian thinks theologically, the Lutheran anthropologically. The Reformed person is not content with an exclusively historical stance but raises his sights to the idea, the eternal decree of God. By contrast the Lutheran takes his position in the midst of the history of redemption and feels no need to enter more deeply into the counsel of God. For the Reformed, therefore, election is at the heart of the church; for Lutherans, justification is the article by which the church stands or falls. Among the former the primary question is: How is the glory of God advanced? Among the latter it is: How does a human get saved? The struggle of the former is above all else paganism—idolatry; the latter against Judaism—works-righteousness. The Reformed person does not rest until he has traced all things retrospectively to the divine decree, tracing down the 'wherefore' of all things, and has prospectively made all things subservient to the glory of God; the Lutheran is content with the 'that' and enjoys the salvation in which he is, by faith, a participant" (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 1:177).

5. The best translation of this work is that of J. I. Packer, though it is to be noted that the forward has a clear Calvinistic bias. The influence of Augustine on Calvin is shown most clearly in Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*.

6. Such as in the Canons of the Council of Orange in 529. These canons can be found in Stucco, *Not without Us*, 117–23. The post-Augustinian tradition, as taught by the late Prosper of Aquitaine and Caesarius of Arles, denies any sense of double predestination while affirming universal grace.

7. The major work which argues that a distinction exists between Calvin and the later Reformed tradition is R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*. In contradistinction to this view, see Raymond A. Blacketer's article "Blaming Beza: The Development

Chosen in Christ

The Arminian conflict in many ways defined the Calvinist movement. The “five points of Calvinism” were formulated in response to Arminian protests and have become a popular means of confessing the teachings of the Calvinist Reformation.⁸ The Arminian, or “Remonstrant,” movement followed the teachings of Jacob Arminius (1560–1609). Though he admired Calvin and was a student of Beza, Arminius disagreed with certain tenants of Reformed theology. According to Arminius’s reading of Paul’s struggle with sin in Romans 7, Paul described himself as struggling between good and evil prior to conversion.⁹ This negates a Calvinistic understanding of total depravity, wherein it is only after irresistible grace confronts the sinner that a struggle between good and evil begins. Arminius also feared that Calvin’s views led to determinism and made God the cause of evil. Thus, Arminius argued that this doctrine should be amended. In his view, predestination is not unconditional but is based upon foreseen faith. In contrast to Calvin’s insistence, Arminius defended the position that grace is resistible. Arminius quickly drew much support behind his cause.¹⁰

The young Remonstrant movement ran into several difficulties with the necessity of agreeing with the Heidelberg Catechism and the Dutch Confession as a prerequisite for ordination. These documents contained unambiguous statements about Calvinistic predestination. In response to this, a petition was drawn which contained five points that defined Arminian theology: limited depravity, election based on foreseen faith, universal atonement, the resistible nature of grace, and the reality of apostasy.¹¹

In response to the five statements of the Remonstrants, the Dutch church convened a council in 1618 known as the Synod of Dort.¹² At this synod, the Heidelberg Catechism was reaffirmed and the Arminian position

of Definite Atonement in the Reformed Tradition,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven He Came*, 121–42.

8. Historically, Calvinism has been defined as a much broader theological movement than the five points. However, due to the popularity of the New Calvinist movement, and following such Calvinist writers as Lorraine Boettner, it has become the primary way in which Calvinism is popularly known.

9. This is discussed in his essay, “A Dissertation of the True and Genuine Sense,” in Arminius, *Works 2*.

10. Arminius’s most important works relating to predestination have been compiled in the volume *Arminius Speaks*.

11. However, it is to be noted that there was a variety of opinion on the topic of apostasy within the Arminian movement.

12. The Canons of Dort as well as a brief history may be found in Scott, *Articles of the Synod of Dort*. This is where much of the above history is cited from.

Part I: Predestination and Free Will

was condemned as heretical. At first both ecclesiastical and governmental punishments were enacted against the Arminians; they were released from ordination and were banished from the country. There were even certain cases of more severe punishment. Eventually, toleration was promoted and the Arminians and Calvinists continued in their own diverging streams of theology.

PREDESTINATION IN THE LUTHERAN TRADITION

Lutherans are more often than not left out of the discussion regarding predestination. It is common to hear Calvinism and Arminianism expressed as two alternative theological systems, to the neglect of a third option.¹³ The Lutheran approach to predestination serves as a mediating view between both Calvinistic particularism and Arminian free will theology. A biblical approach adopts both the Arminian insistence of the universal nature of God's saving will, along with the Calvinist contention that salvation occurs *sola gratia*.

The history of the doctrine of election within the Lutheran church is a complex one. Martin Luther famously defended a monergistic understanding of predestination against the humanist Erasmus in his *Bondage of the Will*. Like Augustine before him, Luther argued that man's will is captive to sin. Of his own power, man is not able to come to faith.¹⁴ Luther expresses this idea clearly in his Small Catechism: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."¹⁵ Luther argued that God's election is the cause of man's conversion and preservation in the faith. In an explanation of the election of Jacob in Romans 9, Luther writes that "God called Jacob before he was born, because He loved him, and that He was not loved by Jacob first, nor influenced by any desert on Jacob's part."¹⁶ This election is a free gift without any foreseen merit or faith on the part of man.

13. See, for example, Horton, *For Calvinism*, and Olson, *Against Calvinism*. This series attempts to give both the Arminian and Calvinistic views of election, and Lutheranism is glaringly absent from the discussion.

14. Gerhard Forde and Robert Kolb have both written on the importance of Luther's *Bondage of the Will*. See Forde, *Captivation of the Will*, and Kolb, *Bound Choice*.

15. Luther, *Small Catechism*, 17.

16. Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 226.

Chosen in Christ

After the death of Luther, the Lutheran party split into two primary factions. One was the Phillipist school, under the leadership of Melancthon, and the other the Gnesio Lutheran party, under the leadership of Matthius Flacius.¹⁷ The Phillipist school rejected Luther's Augustinianism and viewed man's free will as an instrument of conversion. The chief proponents of this view were Johann Pfeffinger and Viktorin Strigel. For support, these theologians used a statement made by Melancthon in his 1535 edition of the *Loci Communes*, in which he attributed to conversion three causes, including the Holy Spirit, the word of God, and man's will. The Gnesio Lutherans responded by arguing that the effect of Adam's fall was so great that apart from grace, man would never assent to the gospel. God must first enlighten man's mind and free his will that he may repent and believe; man's will is purely passive in conversion. This discussion was settled by the Formula of Concord in favor of the Gnesio Lutheran party. Article II of the Solid Declaration states, "people who are spiritually dead in sins cannot on the basis of their own strength dispose themselves or turn themselves toward appropriate spiritual, heavenly righteousness and life, if the Son of God has not made them alive and freed them from the death of sin" (FC SD II.11).¹⁸ The Formula of Concord says of election that "it is false and incorrect to teach that not only the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ but also something in us is a cause of God's election, and for this reason God chose us for eternal life. For he had chosen us in Christ not only before we were born [Rom 9:11], indeed 'before the foundation of the world'" (FC SD XI.88). Thus, Luther's doctrine of both free will and predestination is defended. It is confessed that man is so affected by sin that faith is impossible apart from grace, and that election is unconditional.

The first great dogmatic text of the Lutheran scholastic period, Martin Chemnitz's *Loci Theologici*, defended the position outlined in the Confessions.¹⁹ However, into the seventeenth century, Lutheran dogmatians began to soften the doctrine of predestination. It was said that God chose man *intuitu fidei* (in view of faith), rather than the unconditional predestination taught by both Luther and the Lutheran Confessional documents.²⁰ While

17. On this debate see Klug, "Free Will, or Human Powers," in Preus et al., *A Contemporary Look*, and also Kolb, *Bound Choice*.

18. All references to the Book of Concord are from Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, unless otherwise noted.

19. Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, 393–474.

20. Robert Preus identifies this shift, writing, "In only one article is there clearly a departure from the theology of the Formula of Concord on the part of seventeenth century

Part I: Predestination and Free Will

the scholastics affirmed that man is converted and saved apart from his own works, and they still held to the deadness of man in sin, they argued against the Calvinists that God's election is conditional.²¹ Because grace is universal, they argued, and man's unbelief is a result of his own resistance rather than God's predetermination, those whom God elected were those who did not resist grace. Thus non-resistance became a cause of election.²²

In the nineteenth century, predestination again became a subject of controversy within Lutheranism. American theologian and pastor C. F. W. Walther unintentionally found himself in a controversy over the issue of predestination.²³ During a Missouri Synod convention in 1868, Walther made a statement about God's election being unconditional. This statement was soon attacked by Gottfried Fritschel. A heated controversy began over the relationship between faith and predestination. For the Waltherian party, election is unconditional. It is a free act of God wherein God elects certain individuals unto salvation. He argued that proposing anything else negated the principle of *sola gratia*, giving humans credit in some manner for personal salvation.²⁴ Walther was accused of being a closet Calvinist, and Walther defended himself by demonstrating his rejection of double predestination and limited atonement, and by showing the continuity of his own view with that of Luther and the Confessions.²⁵ This led some churches

Lutheranism: the doctrine of predestination and election" (Robert Preus, "The Formula of Concord," in Klemet I. Preus, *Doctrine Is Life*, 249). This essay is helpful in explaining the nature of this divergence.

21. B. B. Warfield argues that Lutheranism is essentially on the same side as Arminianism due to its confession of conditional election in his book *Plan of Salvation*. Unfortunately, Warfield ignores the Synodical Conference's position on the issue.

22. The earlier writers who used this phrase, such as Hunnius and Gerhard, still defended a monergistic approach to election. According to Gerhard, God chooses man based on foreseen faith. However, the faith that is foreseen is in no way the work of man, but is the work of God through Word and Sacrament. See Gerhard's discussion on election in *On Creation and Predestination*, 122–250. Later writers were not so careful, and argued that the human will is in some sense a cause of conversion. Hollaz writes, for example, "The election to eternal life of men corrupted by sin was made by the most merciful God, in consideration of faith in Christ remaining steadfast to the end of life" (quoted in Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, 288).

23. This controversy is documented rather well in August R. Suelflow's biography of Walther, *Servant of the Word*.

24. This debate has been summarized well Thuesen, *Predestination*, 136–71.

25. Walther's essays on the topic have been compiled in Walther, *Predestination in Lutheran Perspective*.

Chosen in Christ

to split away from the Synodical Conference²⁶ under Walther's leadership, while other major figures within the Synodical Conference, such as Adolf Hoenecke and Francis Pieper, defended Walther's critique of *intuitu fidei*.²⁷ Ultimately, the Waltherian position would become that of the Missouri Synod, Wisconsin Synod, and various other American Lutheran church bodies.²⁸

EXAMINING THE FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM

Though it may be somewhat simplistic to explain a Lutheran approach to election by examining the five points of Calvinism, it is a helpful means to organize the discussion around certain topics confessed in the Reformed tradition.²⁹ The issues of both the extent of the atonement and the nature of perseverance have their own chapters in this present work; thus limited atonement and perseverance of the saints will not be discussed here.

Total Depravity

The first of the five points of Calvinism is total depravity. The Westminster Confession describes this doctrine as the concept that "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto" (WCF IX.3). The phrase "total depravity" may lend itself to confusion; it seems to imply that the children of Adam are as depraved as is possible. However, as the Westminster Confession demonstrates, the proposal is not utter depravity (the view that people are as evil as they possibly could be), but that human depravity is so deep that

26. The Synodical Conference was one of four major groups of Lutheran church bodies in early American Lutheranism. The Synodical Conference was generally the most conservative.

27. Pieper catalogues the controversy and gives a defense of the Missouriian position in *Conversion and Election*.

28. The Waltherian approach to predestination was adopted by the Synodical Conference, but both the General Synod and the General Council generally rejected this view. For a defense of the opposing doctrine of predestination, see Keyser, *Election and Conversion*.

29. This is essential to do in light of the contemporary utilization of the "five points" as a summary of Reformed predestinarian theology.

Part I: Predestination and Free Will

it hinders one from approaching God apart from grace.³⁰ Apart from grace, no human being would have faith; faith is a divine gift.

On this point, the Lutheran Reformation agrees. Luther confessed similar concerns to that professed in the first point of Calvinism. Article II of the Formula of Concord contains a lengthy discussion and defense of a Lutheran perspective on free will. The Confessions state,

That in spiritual and divine matters, the mind, heart, and will of the unrebored human being can in absolutely no way, on the basis of its own natural powers, understand, believe, accept, consider, will, begin, accomplish, do, effect, or cooperate. Instead, it is completely dead to the good—completely corrupted. This means that in this human nature, after the fall and before rebirth, there is not a spark of spiritual power left or present with which human beings can prepare themselves for the grace of God or accept grace as it is offered. (FC SD II.7)

Along with the Reformed, the Lutheran Reformation confessed that apart from grace, all are in a state of spiritual death. It takes the divine work of God to cause one to repent and believe. Both repentance and faith are gifts from God, given by grace.

Though in agreement with the Reformed confessions of faith, there are some common Reformed explanations of depravity which go beyond that of the Lutheran Confessions. In the mid-eighteenth century, Jonathan Edwards published a much discussed work titled *Freedom of the Will*.³¹ In this volume, Edwards sought not to contradict Luther's concept of the bondage of the will, but to defend it through philosophical argumentation. However, in doing so, Edwards purports a pure determinism regarding every action of will rather than simply defending man's inability to approach God due to sin.³² Edwards does this through defining the will as "that

30. R. C. Sproul explains this distinction: "Total depravity means radical corruption. We must be careful to note the difference between total depravity and 'utter' depravity. To be utterly depraved is to be as wicked as one could possibly be. Hitler was extremely depraved, but he could have been worse than he was. I am sinner. Yet I could sin more often and more severely than I actually do. I am not utterly depraved, but I am totally depraved. For total depravity means that I and everyone else are depraved or corrupt in the totality of our being. There is no part of us that is left untouched by sin. Our minds, our wills, and our bodies are affected by evil. We speak sinful words, do sinful deeds, have impure thoughts. Our very bodies suffer from the ravages of sin" (*Essential Truths*, 147-48).

31. Edwards, *Works* 1

32. Reformed scholar Richard Muller points this out in his lecture "Jonathan Edwards

Chosen in Christ

power, or principle of mind, by which it is capable of choosing: an act of the Will is the same as an act of choosing or choice.”³³ Thus one’s choices and actions are initiated in the mind. The way that the mind chooses, according to Edwards, is not by a process of contemplation and consequently making a libertarian free-will decision, but according to one’s greatest desire. One always chooses what is desired most. Edwards purports that the “very act of choosing one thing rather than another, is preferring that thing, and that is setting a higher value on that thing . . . Choice or preference cannot be before itself in the same instance . . . it cannot be the foundation of itself, or the consequence of itself.”³⁴ Within this framework, Edwards promotes an argument for total depravity. A sinner is born to desire sin rather than goodness and truth. Therefore, since desire determines choice, one must choose sin and cannot choose good. The problem with Edwards’s argument is that it promotes a view of free will that goes beyond the intention of biblical statements on the topic. Scripture emphasizes human lack of free will regarding conversion, but not as a general principle. In Edwards’s view, no action of human beings is free because every action is determined by one’s greatest desire, which one has an inability to change. In contrast to Edwards’s approach, the Augsburg Confession states, “Concerning free will they [the Lutheran churches] teach that the human will has some freedom in producing civil righteousness, and choosing things subject to reason. However, it does not have the power to produce the righteousness of God or spiritual righteousness without the Holy Spirit” (AC XVIII.1–3). The lack of free will that man has is not in reference to ordinary actions such as which parking space one should take, what one should eat for breakfast, etc., but it references a lack of spiritual freedom.³⁵

The Lutheran and Reformed traditions are in agreement regarding the nature of depravity and one’s sinful state before God. For both, the extent of sin negates the possibility of faith and repentance apart from an act of grace. However, the popular explanation of Edwards of the nature of bondage and freedom adopted by many Reformed writers goes beyond the

and the Absence of Free Choice.” Muller argues that Edwards’s position has more in common with eighteenth-century British philosophy than classical Calvinism.

33. Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 4–5.

34. *Ibid.*, 19.

35. Gustaf Wingren speaks of this in terms of freedom in things “below us,” but not in things “above us.” See Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 15–23.

Part I: Predestination and Free Will

Lutheran approach by adopting pure determinism and addresses an issue not intended by Lutheran discussions of bondage and free choice.³⁶

Unconditional Election

The second point in the Calvinistic system is unconditional election. This is the teaching that predestination is an unconditional act. God's act of choosing people for salvation, therefore, is not in view of future faith or merit but is the cause of future faith and good works. In eternity past, God chose specific individuals unto salvation. The Canons of Dort express the idea with the following words:

Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault, from their primitive state of rectitude, into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom he from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of Salvation. (CD I.7)

In this statement it is demonstrated that the cause of God's act of predestination is God's "sovereign good pleasure" and an act of "his own will." There is no human condition behind God's choice, but only an act of grace.

There is some agreement in the Lutheran Confessions regarding the unconditional nature of one's election. The Formula of Concord states,

God's eternal election not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect but is also a cause of our salvation and whatever pertains to it, on the basis of the gracious will and good pleasure of God in Christ Jesus. As this cause, it creates, effects, aids, and promotes our salvation. Our salvation is founded upon it so that "the gates of hell" [Matt. 16:18] may not have any power against this salvation, as is written, "No one will snatch the sheep out of my hand" [John 10:28]. And again, "As many as had been destined for eternal life became believers" [Acts 13:48]. (FC SD XI.8)

In contrast to the *intuitu fidei* approach of later scholastic Lutheranism and the Arminian position, the Lutheran reformers argued that election is not a decision of God based merely on foreseen faith, but is itself a cause of

36. Edwards's explanation has been popularized especially by the work of John Gerstner. See, for example, Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards*.

Chosen in Christ

faith. Election is an unconditional act, wherein God freely gives salvation through faith, apart from any work on the part of man. Regarding the positive aspect of predestination, there is thus agreement on its unconditional nature.

However, the Calvinist and Lutheran Reformations proceeded with divergent views regarding the nature of damnation. In the Lutheran tradition, it is confessed that

The eternal election of God, however, or *praedestinatio* (that is, God's preordination to salvation), does not apply to both the godly and the evil, but instead only to the children of God, who are chosen and predestined to eternal life, "before the foundation of the world" was laid, as Paul says (Eph. 1[:4, 5]): He chose us in Christ Jesus and "preordained us to adoption as his children." (FC SD XI.5)

Thus it is confessed that predestination is single. Election extends only to the children of God and not to the reprobate. Lutheran theology has been purposefully careful about the attribution of evil to God's will. Though God's providence extends over all things both good and evil, and nothing happens apart from God's allowance, God is not active in the predestinating decree of evil actions. The purpose of the doctrine of election is to give assurance to God's people and to serve as a reminder that salvation comes *sola gratia* and is not an abstract discussion regarding God's sovereignty.³⁷

Reformed Lapsarian Views

In the Reformed tradition, there are various approaches to the decree of reprobation. Some theologians have argued for an active decree of reprobation by God, whereas others have argued that the act is merely passive. These have been divided into the infralapsarian and supralapsarian traditions, along with the less prominent tradition of Amyrauldianism.³⁸

37. I recognize that many Reformed writers will object to this characterization, but it is stated by Bavinck that "The Reformed person does not rest until he has traced all things retrospectively to the divine decree, tracing down the 'wherefore' of all things, and has prospectively made all things subservient to the glory of God; the Lutheran is content with the 'that' and enjoys the salvation in which he is, by faith, a participant" (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 1:177).

38. However, some theologians, such as Bavinck, have rejected any attempt to formulate a lapsarian view. See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*. These theologians argue (I think rightly) that such discussion is speculative and unhelpful.

Part I: Predestination and Free Will

The divide in the Reformed camp regarding double predestination centers on a discussion of God's eternal decrees and their logical order. It is argued that the "golden chain of salvation" in Romans 8 gives precedence for such a distinction.³⁹ In Romans 8, Paul distinguishes between God's decrees of foreknowledge, predestination, justification, and glorification. This allows for further distinctions in the divine will. These distinctions do not refer to a temporal order of decrees because all are simultaneous, but they are related to the logical order of God's decree.

The most prominent Reformed view is infralapsarianism.⁴⁰ Infralapsarianism means "after the fall" (coming from the Latin prefix *infra*, meaning "after" or "below," and the term *lapsus*, meaning "fall"). In the infralapsarian system, the order of God's decrees is as follows: First, God decreed to create the human race; secondly, God decreed the fall, causing everyone to fall into sin; third, God decreed to save some fallen people and leave those remaining in sin; and finally, God decreed the atonement for the elect alone. While still remaining double predestinarian, this perspective takes a less active approach to the act of reprobation. God reprobates only in view of the fall and sin. God is active in that he decides specifically not to grant redemption or atonement for these reprobate individuals, but not in creating sin in them or causing their specific rebellion. This perspective is reflected in the Westminster Confession of Faith, as well as the Canons of Dort. The majority of those in attendance at the formation of each of these confessional documents were infralapsarian, though not exclusively. It is held by several of the most popular Calvinistic theologians, including Charles Hodge, Lorraine Boettner, and Francis Turretin.⁴¹

For a defense of Amyraut's theology, see Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*. In this work, Armstrong argues that Amyraut represents Calvin's theology better than does the scholastic tradition. I am not ultimately persuaded by Armstrong's thesis, as the writing is often more hagiographic than convincing as scholarship.

39. "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom 8:29–30). John Murray utilizes the text in this manner in *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*.

40. See Hodge's discussion of the infralapsarian position in *Systematic Theology* 2:319–21.

41. Dr. Curt Daniel gives a list of those committed to this position, including those mentioned, and to the supralapsarian position, in *History and Theology of Calvinism*.

Chosen in Christ

The other lapsarian perspective is that of supralapsarianism.⁴² This term means “before the fall” (the Latin prefix *supra* meaning either “before” or “above”). In this system, the logical order of decrees is first to reprobate some and elect others; secondly to create human beings to bring about such election and reprobation; thirdly to cause the fall; and finally to send Christ so that atonement might be made for the elect only. In this system, predestination to both death and life is active. Creation is a means to bring about the giving of life through election and death through reprobation. God does not elect and reprobate in view of sin, but allows for sin as a means to elect and condemn. God’s glory in damnation and salvation is thus the purpose of creation itself.⁴³ Due to its implications regarding the relationship between sin and God’s decree, this approach has failed to gain much support. There were, however, several supralapsarians present at both the Synod of Dort and the Westminster Assembly, though the other perspective is reflected in the confessional documents of both synods. Popular supralapsarian theologians include Theodore Beza, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Hoeksema.⁴⁴ The supralapsarian position is also that of the nineteenth-century hyper-Calvinist movement in Europe. However, most supralapsarians reject hyper-Calvinism.⁴⁵

Finally, there is a third school in the discussion which seeks to limit God’s role in damnation, known as Amyraldianism.⁴⁶ The seventeenth-century French Reformed theologian Moses Amyraut argued that both a Calvinistic doctrine of election and universal atonement could be main-

42. Hodge’s discussion of this perspective in *Systematic Theology* 2:316–19 is also quite helpful.

43. This is explicated throughout Herman Hoeksema’s *Reformed Dogmatics*. More recently, Robert Reymond is a proponent of what he labels a “modified supralapsarianism.” See Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*.

44. I would point again to Dr. Curt Daniel’s book *History and Theology of Calvinism*.

45. Though some claim that all extreme Calvinists are hyper-Calvinists, there is a historical belief system and movement with defining characteristics differing from that of most Calvinists. Hyper-Calvinists believe that unbelievers do not have a duty to believe since God does not want them to. Thus, unbelief is not a sin for the reprobate. They also oppose the free offer of the gospel confessed by traditional Calvinism. Other views prominent within hyper-Calvinism are eternal justification, the denial of common grace, the neglect of evangelism, denial that non-Calvinists (or even non-hyper-Calvinists) can be saved, and the belief that God actively creates sin in the hearts of the reprobate. A prominent contemporary example of hyper-Calvinism (albeit in a more moderate form) can be found in Engelsma, *Hyper Calvinism*.

46. Hodge also writes about this view with the term “hypothetical universalism” in *Systematic Theology* 2:321–24.

Part I: Predestination and Free Will

tained. Amyraut argued that God's decree of atonement precedes the decree of election and reprobation. God first decrees that Christ will die as the universal substitute for humankind. Because none would believe due to sin, then apart from election none would benefit from the atonement. Because of this, God chose to elect some and leave others in sin. Thus, Amyraut argued, it can be confessed both that election is particular and atonement is universal. In this sense, Amyraut's perspective is similar to that of the Lutheran Confessions, though Amyraut still maintained the doctrine of double predestination. Prominent Amyraldians include Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, and contemporary Baptist theologian Bruce Ware.⁴⁷

Lutheran theologians have historically rejected all three of these positions, especially because of their adamant denial of double predestination. In the Lutheran perspective, election refers to the children of God alone and has no reference to the rejection of grace on behalf of the reprobate.⁴⁸ While one's salvation is attributed solely to grace, one's damnation is attributed solely to a rejection of grace rather than God's decree. A distinction has often been made between God's antecedent and consequent will. God's antecedent will is universal, for the salvation of all; his consequent will, which is in view of the rejection that is offered toward the gospel, is for the salvation of the elect and the damnation of those who reject the gospel. Revere Franklin Weidner writes:

The will of God is said to be antecedent and consequent, a) not with regard to time, as though the former preceded the latter in time; b) nor with regard to the divine will itself, as though two actually distinct wills in God were affirmed, for the divine will is the essence itself of God, with a connoted object, conceived under the mode of an act of volition; c) but from the order of our reason, according to a diverse consideration of the objects, because, according to our mode of conception, God's willing eternal salvation to men, and His providing the means of grace, are anterior to His will to confer in act eternal salvation upon those who would to the

47. See Amar Djaballah, "Controversy on Universal Grace: A Historical Survey of Moise Amyraut's," in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven He Came*.

48. Pieper, for example, writes, "Clearly and emphatically Scripture teaches that Christians owe their whole Christian state in time, specifically also their faith, to their eternal election; but with the same clarity and emphasis Scripture also excludes the thought that the unbelief of the lost can be traced to predestination to damnation" (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* 3:495).

Chosen in Christ

end believe in Christ, or to assign eternal condemnation to the impenitent.⁴⁹

In contrast to the Reformed theology, God's antecedent will, in view of the fallen human race in its entirety, is for the salvation of all. It is only in view of the active rejection of God's call that anyone is damned. There are several reasons for accepting the Lutheran approach to predestination in contrast to the various lapsarian views.

First, this discussion delves into areas of God's eternal will and nature which are both theologically unnecessary and irrelevant to the central scriptural themes. Scripture does not extensively discuss abstract truths about God or the nature of eternal decree, but speaks rather to that which affects the hearer. Though the developments of systematic theology can be a valid extrapolation of biblical material, Scripture is not primarily a philosophical text; it does not give any precedent for abstract speculation about that which is not directly addressed. Paul's argument in Romans 8 regarding foreknowledge, election, justification, and glorification is not grounds for distinguishing eternal decrees. Paul does not contextually propound a logical order of God's decrees, but gives assurance to his readers that they are elect and justified and will receive eternal life.⁵⁰ Even if Paul was attempting to propose an order to God's decrees, this would still not be justification for further speculation regarding the order of God's other decrees which have not been explicitly stated.⁵¹ The Lutheran Reformation openly denied such speculation in the following section of the Formula of Concord:

49. Weidner, *Theologia*, 71. Weidner's statement is a summary of Hollaz and Quenstedt.

50. I do not deny that this text does give some grounds for treating an *ordo salutis*, though this must not remain abstract. The *ordo salutis* is a historic Lutheran teaching, as in Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*.

51. It is to be noted that Calvin himself cautioned against such speculation: "Not to take too long, let us remember here, as in all religious doctrine, that we ought to hold to one rule of modesty and sobriety: not to speak, or guess, or even to seek to know, concerning obscure matters anything except what has been imparted to us by God's Word. Furthermore, in the reading of Scripture we ought ceaselessly to endeavor to seek out and meditate upon those things which make for our edification. Let us not indulge in curiosity or the investigation of unprofitable things. And because the Lord willed to instruct us, not in fruitless questions, but in sound godliness, in the fear of his name, in true trust, and in the duties of holiness, let us be satisfied with this knowledge. For this reason, if we would be duly wise, we must leave those empty speculations which idle men have taught apart from God's Word concerning the nature, orders, and number of angels" (*Institutes* I.XIV.4). The Reformed tradition has often cautioned against speculation, but on this point they have not heeded their own warnings.

Part I: Predestination and Free Will

Nor is this eternal election or ordination of God to eternal life to be considered in God's secret, inscrutable counsel in such a bare manner as though it comprised nothing further, or as though nothing more belonged to it, and nothing more were to be considered in it, than that God foresaw who and how many were to be saved, who and how many were to be damned, or that He only held a [sort of military] muster, thus: "This one shall be saved, that one shall be damned; this one shall remain steadfast [in faith to the end], that one shall not remain steadfast." (FC SD XI.9)⁵²

That which pertains to God's decree is part of the "hidden God," of the aspects of God not to be peered into by humans. Rather than giving an explanation of the hidden God, the doctrine of election is meant to give assurance, and to promote the gracious and eternal nature of God's promise.⁵³

Another significant difficulty with the first two lapsarian approaches is that election necessarily becomes the central and primary soteriological category. In both approaches, the eternal decree of election and reprobation precedes that of the atonement. Thus, the cross and resurrection become a means to bring about election. First God elects and only secondly God decrees the cross as an instrument of saving the elect. This is necessitated with the confession of limited atonement. This displaces the cross as the primary soteriological event in redemptive history. In a Lutheran and biblical approach, election is God's means to bring people to the cross, as opposed to the Calvinistic approach, which argues the opposite.⁵⁴ This is demonstrated especially in the first chapter of Ephesians:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly

52. From the Triglotta.

53. The hidden/revealed God distinction is explicated by Luther in *Bondage of the Will*. Richard Muller defines this doctrine, writing, "The paradox of God's unknowability and self-manifestations as stated by Luther. The issue is not that God has been hidden and has now revealed himself, but rather that the revelation that has been given to man defies the wisdom of the world because it is the revelation of the hidden God. God is revealed in hiddenness and hidden in his revelation. He reveals himself paradoxically to thwart the proud, under the opposite, omnipotence manifest on the cross" (*Dictionary*, 90).

54. Lutherans have continually emphasized the Christological nature of God's election. Weidner writes, "The true judgment concerning predestination must not be learned 1) from reason, 2) nor from the Law of God, 3) but alone from the Holy Gospel concerning Christ, in which it is clearly testified that 'God hath shut up all unto disobedience that he might have mercy upon all' (Rom. 11:32), 'not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance' (2 Pet. 3:9)" (*Theologia*, 69).

Chosen in Christ

places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Eph 1:3–10)

Notice the centrality of Christ in the discussion of election. One is chosen “in Christ,” not abstractly. In the Reformed view, one could not be chosen “in Christ” because the decree of the incarnation is a response to election. However, in Paul’s view, election is already in view of Christ, the incarnate God. The incarnation is a universal solution for sin which God brings to individuals through election. If Paul had believed in either a supralapsarian or infralapsarian view of predestination, he could have stated that one was chosen by God through the second person of the Trinity or in the Spirit, but not *in Christ*—the title of the incarnate Messiah. Paul also assumes that election is unto the blessings he enumerates, including the forgiveness of sins through the cross. This is the opposite of what the Reformed purport.⁵⁵ It is clear that Paul placed the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ at the center of his theology. All other soteriological categories are merely means to bring this salvation to God’s people.

Finally, all three of these approaches err in the context in which election is placed.⁵⁶ Sovereignty becomes a—or *the*—central category in all

55. The Reformed tradition has not always placed election in a more central place than the cross. Calvin urges, for example, “We cannot find the certainty of our election in ourselves; and not even in God the Father, if we look at him apart from the Son. Christ, then, is the mirror in which we ought, and in which, without deception, we may contemplate our election . . . if we are in communion with Christ, we have proof sufficiently clear and strong that we are written in the Book of Life” (*Institutes* III.XXIV.5). The problem is in the consistency of holding to the cross as central when one argues that the cross is a secondary consideration in God’s eternal decree. If the cross is a means to bring about election, this necessarily makes election a more fundamental soteriological category.

56. Many Reformed dogmaticians include the doctrine of election under Theology Proper, thus placing it in the midst of a discussion of God’s decrees in general. Some examples of this tendency are Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 216–17; and Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 2:337–405. This is a departure from Calvin himself, who places the doctrine of predestination in a soteriological context (Calvin, *Institutes* Book III, XXI).

Part I: Predestination and Free Will

theological discussions. Election often centers on God's decree and self-glorification, rather than God's gracious response to his creation, which fell through sin.⁵⁷ One text which is often utilized in such discussions is also from Ephesians 1. It is observed that God "works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph 1:11).⁵⁸ However, the broader discussion is not about God's sovereignty and self-glorification through damnation and salvation, but is in reference to the cross and all of the blessings that Christians obtain through Christ. The above statement of Paul is not a ground for arguing that lapsarian approaches to sovereignty are valid; rather, it demonstrates that the biblical context of the doctrine of sovereignty is to give assurance to the anxious Christian that God's providential care is powerful and unending. To argue otherwise removes election from its Pauline context.

Refuting Double Predestination

There are several theological and exegetical arguments proposed in support of double predestinarianism. Perhaps the most common is that of the logic of its relation to positive predestination unto life. If God has elected some for salvation, as Scripture teaches, then logically predestination unto death follows. If God elects some, he chooses specifically not to elect others.⁵⁹ Though logically coherent, this approach negates the scriptural confession of God's universal saving will. This will be demonstrated in the following chapter regarding the extent of the atonement. Though there is no logical solution to the dilemma of God's active role in election and his non-involvement in reprobation, this paradox reflects New Testament teaching. God's will is mysterious, and one must not go beyond the biblical testimony regarding the subject in an attempt to harmonize two truths which are seemingly in tension with one another.⁶⁰

57. This, again, is demonstrated by Bavinck, who notes that idolatry is the primary enemy for Reformed theology, due to its emphasis on the glory of God, and legalism for the Lutheran, because of the Lutheran soteriological emphasis (*Reformed Dogmatics* 1:177). There are, however, likely some Reformed theologians who would disagree with this statement.

58. For example, see Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 169.

59. Lorraine Boettner argues this way in *Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 113–17.

60. Steven P. Mueller notes that "Double predestination is logical, and it takes part of the Scriptures very seriously, but it also adds to the Scriptures by means of logic. It may seem logical to assume that God has predestined some to hell, but it is not Biblical"

Chosen in Christ

The truth of single predestination can be demonstrated by looking at various texts which discuss the difference between God's active role in election unto life, and his inactive role in damnation. Scripture often speaks of hell as that which was prepared specifically for the devil. Matthew writes, "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Matt 25:41). In God's act of sending people to judgment, it is not claimed that this punishment was foreordained for these individuals; rather this judgment was foreordained for fallen angels. Contrast this with God's active role in preparing heaven for the elect: "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:2-3). In contrast to the fate of the wicked, the reward of the righteous had been predestined and prepared beforehand. One is consciously prepared, while the other is an unfortunate result of unbelief.⁶¹ This does not reflect either the supralapsarian or infralapsarian approach to double predestination, which both argue for an active role of God in reprobation to some extent.

Sovereignty, election, and predestination are terms used in the context of salvation, giving encouragement to Christians and reminding them of their continual dependence on grace.⁶² They are not used to describe the actions or fate of those who are damned. Rather, damnation is always a result of personal sin and rejection of Christ. Paul attributes damnation to those "who do not obey the gospel" (2 Thess 1:8), thus placing the cause of damnation solely on unbelief. Peter writes that heretics bring "upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Pet 2:1). In this epistle, Peter later speaks of a condemnation of these particular heretics from "long ago" (2 Pet 2:3). However,

(Mueller, *Called to Believe*, 291-92).

61. "Even though God desires the salvation of all humans (1 Timothy 2:4), Scripture warns us that not all will receive his free gift of salvation. There will be people who reject God's grace and choose to follow their own will and ways (Romans 2:8). The means of grace, including the Gospel, may be resisted (Matthew 23:37, Acts 13:46). While God does not want anyone to reject his gift of salvation, he will not force salvation on them. He will allow them to choose eternity without him" (Mueller, *Called to Believe*, 287).

62. John Molstad writes, "Our election gives us assurance because it drives us to the Word, where we are told that, through Christ's saving work, places in heaven are reserved for us believers" (Molstad, *Predestination*, 57).

Part I: Predestination and Free Will

this does not necessitate double predestination, but merely that in view of their heresies, these men would be punished and suffer damnation.⁶³

The most common text used to defend the concept of double predestination is Romans 9⁶⁴. This chapter is an extended discussion on the election of grace, the nature of true Israel, and God's sovereignty. The Pauline argument begins:

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son." And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 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 him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Rom 9:6–13)

Paul has a specific purpose in this argument other than delving into God's sovereign decrees regarding election and reprobation. In chapters 9–11 of Romans, Paul deals with the question of the nature of true Israel. He puts forth a lengthy argument that those who constitute Israel, inheritors of the Abrahamic promise, are those who have faith in Christ rather than simply those born into Jewish ethnicity. It might seem to some that since ethnic Jews did not accept the messianic claims of Jesus, this implies that God's promises regarding Israel's redemption have not been fulfilled. Thus,

63. When speaking of double-predestination Calvinists fail to distinguish between God's foreknowledge and predestination. The Formula of Concord argues that predestination refers only to salvation, whereas damnation and evil actions are not eternally decreed by God, but simply foreknown. Weidner writes, "The foreknowledge of God is nothing else than that God knows all things before they happen (Dan. 2:28). This foreknowledge is occupied alike with the godly and the wicked; but it is not the cause of evil or of sin, nor the cause that men perish, for which they themselves are responsible" (Weidner, *Theologia*, 69).

64. The most in-depth discussion of this issue from a Calvinistic perspective is John Piper's doctoral dissertation, published as *Justification of God*. This work merits a much more in-depth rebuttal than can be offered in a work such as this. Perhaps this will be a future doctoral student's work rather than my own.

Chosen in Christ

it seems that the word has failed to do what was promised. Paul argues that the word of God has not failed, because these promises refer not to the nation as a whole, but to specific individuals who have faith. In light of this, Paul promotes the idea of election. The Old Testament witnessed to the corporate election of Israel, wherein God chose one specific nation among others to give his promises. Paul argues that behind corporate election there is a more profound reality that God has elected individuals as the true Israel. Thus, by grace, people are elected, given faith, and made part of the true Israel.

Note that the quotation Paul utilizes regarding Jacob and Esau originally had reference to the nations which descended from each of them (Mal 1:1–3). The statement does not mean that God predestined Jacob unto life and Esau unto death.⁶⁵ That being said, Paul does expand the national principle used in its original context to make a point about individuals. The point has nothing to do with damnation, but has reference to the election of grace. Paul does not utilize this quotation to emphasize that God hated Esau, but that God loved Jacob. He writes that the twins had “done nothing good or bad.” This is a demonstration of election, of God’s gracious choice to bless Jacob regardless of his merits or demerits. The point Paul is making is this: the story of Jacob and Esau is about a firstborn son who loses his birthright to his younger brother, who, according to normal human law, would not be given the birthright. God decided before their birth that Jacob would be chosen as the one who would carry the line of Israel to his descendants, rather than Esau. God did not make this choice based on anything that Jacob would do, but solely by an act of grace. This example of God’s unconditional and unmerited favor corresponds with the nature of true Israel. Just as Jacob was made a great nation and given the promise by grace alone, God creates the true Israel by grace alone, choosing people apart from their works.⁶⁶

The Pauline argument then continues,

65. Johann Gerhard writes, “[Calvinists] corrupt the genuine meaning of the words, for ‘hating’ here should not be taken positively for an absolute hatred, but negatively, so that it is the same thing as esteeming less, namely, in the conferral of external privileges and benefits” (Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces VIII–XI*, 154).

66. Gerhard adopts this interpretation, writing, “The true spiritual seed of Abraham is reckoned not on the basis of carnal birth nor on the basis of the merits of works, but on the basis of God who calls and by virtue of faith which embraces the divine promise” (ibid.).

Part I: Predestination and Free Will

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. (Rom 9:14–18)

Paul continues his argument by promoting the concept that mercy and compassion are unmerited. Grace does not depend "on human will or exertion, but on God, who had mercy." This supports Paul's insistence that the true Israel includes those who are saved by grace. Paul then expands this concept to a discussion regarding God's sovereignty more broadly. He does this through the example of Pharaoh, whom God is said to harden. Some claim that this is a reference to reprobation. Notice, however, the original context in which Pharaoh was said to be hardened by God. Throughout the book of Exodus, a process is described wherein Pharaoh becomes more hardened toward the people of Israel. It does not speak exclusively of God's act of hardening, but also of Pharaoh hardening his own heart. Exodus 8 states for example that "when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the Lord had said" (Exod 8:15). Hardening Pharaoh's heart is not evidence of God's active predestination of Pharaoh unto death, but is a result and punishment for Pharaoh's own sin. Pharaoh's continual resistance to God's grace and his harsh attitude toward the Israelites resulted in a punishment wherein God gave Pharaoh over to his sin. This is consistent with what Paul writes in the beginning of Romans, wherein he speaks of God's giving one over to sin as a punishment for previous unbelief and sinful indulgence. "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen" (Rom 1:24–25). The example supports Paul's insistence on God's sovereignty, but it does not necessitate the concept of double predestination. Pharaoh's hardening is a result of his own sin rather than being predestined unto death.

The rest of Paul's argument is along similar lines. Paul defends God's right to harden hearts and to choose people apart from works. God is said

Chosen in Christ

to “endure with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (Rom 9:22). Johann Gerhard explains this text, writing,

The application is as follows. As the potter has the power to fashion out of one and the same lump some vessels for honor and some for dishonor, so God is not unjust if He prepares vessels of mercy for glory and very tenderly tolerates vessels of wrath suited for destruction to make known his power. The Apostle states this with precisely these words, which move from the lesser to the greater. If one cannot accuse the potter for making a vessel for dishonor out of material that does not fight back, all the less can one accuse God of injustice for taking away His grace from people (such as Pharaoh) who insolently resist Him, and for surrendering to Satan for hardening that workmanship which fought back against its Maker, and for discarding it unto destruction.⁶⁷

After discussing the patience God has toward vessels of wrath, Paul gets back to his original theme that not all of national Israel is of true Israel by telling his readers that God calls people from both the Jews and the Gentiles. He then gives the reason that not all of national Israel is saved. It is not because they had been predestined to death; rather, “Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works” (Rom 9:32). The Jews did not accept the doctrine of salvation by grace—that which Paul is attempting to prove in this chapter—but sought justification through the law. Thus, the cause of reprobation is unbelief.

This discussion continues for two more chapters. In chapter 10, Paul emphasizes salvation by grace, the unity of Jews and Gentiles, and the necessity of evangelism. After a lengthy discussion of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the covenant in chapter 11, he expresses his desire for the salvation of all, both Jews and Gentiles:

For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. (Rom 9:30–32)

The nature of the parallel between those who have been “consigned to disobedience” and those on whom God desires to have mercy necessitates that “all” is universal. As all have sinned, all are given grace. The conclusion to Paul’s discussion which extends from chapters 9 through 11 is that God

67. *Ibid.*, 159.

Part I: Predestination and Free Will

convicts all so that he might have mercy on all. Because in Paul's perspective this is a conclusion which can be drawn from his writing, double predestination is clearly not intended in chapter 9 because this would contradict Paul's insistence that God's desire for salvation is universal.

Double predestination is not a biblical concept. It is a logical extrapolation from the teaching of positive predestination, but it does not have exegetical support. Scripture blames damnation entirely on one's own sin and not in any sense on God's foreordination. While Romans 9 is an admittedly difficult text, it does not necessitate a double-predestinarian reading. This is confirmed by examining the cited verses in their original context, following the logic of Paul's argument regarding true Israel, and through the application Paul himself makes at the conclusion of his argument that God desires to have mercy on all.

Irresistible Grace

The doctrine of irresistible grace is the belief that saving grace always results in conversion. The Westminster Confession describes the doctrine as follows:

All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by his almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace. (WCF X.1)

This statement confesses two primary convictions. The first is that all who are predestined unto life will receive salvation; God's grace will not fail to convert those whom he has elected in eternity past. The second is that it is the elect alone who receive saving grace; thus, saving grace is always irresistible and results in eschatological blessing.

The first of the two statements is confessed by the Lutheran Confessions. The elect will be finally saved. The Formula of Concord states, for example, that "Thus he wills, finally, to save and glorify forever in eternal life those whom he has elected, called, and justified" (FC SD XI.22). Pieper

Chosen in Christ

writes similarly that “The elect are only those actually saved, for Scripture teaches that without fail all elect enter eternal life.”⁶⁸ In this sense the Lutheran tradition confesses irresistible grace, in that those who are elect will be effectually saved. Election always results in salvation; however, grace is not limited to the elect. Regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, and other soteriological blessings are given through the means of grace indiscriminately. They are not the property of the elect alone.

The Reformed can speak of the universal nature of grace in a different sense than regenerating or justifying grace. It is proposed that there is a “common grace”⁶⁹ which is given to all people.⁷⁰ This refers to various external benefits which God can bestow upon people. The Westminster Confession purports that “Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved” (WCF X.4). Restraining grace is that by which God restrains the evil desires and intentions of people, allowing them to live externally honorable lives. Common grace is also demonstrated in that God gives talents to the non-regenerate. Unbelievers are allowed to benefit the world with great art, literature, architecture, etc.⁷¹ They also are given the undeserved benefits of life and happiness.

Common grace is not soteriological, and refers primarily to external blessings rather than genuine spiritual good.⁷² Because of the limited nature of common grace, the Reformed also promote the concept of a universal gospel offer.⁷³ The gospel is truly offered to all people, elect and reprobate alike. Thus, people can reject and resist grace in the sense of a refusal to accept the universal offer. There is, however, no true grace given to the non-elect in the sense of that which regenerates and saves.

68. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* 3:479.

69. See Keller, *What Is Common Grace?*

70. There are some Calvinists, notably those associated with the Presbyterian Reformed Church, who reject the teaching of common grace. Herman Hoeksema rejected the teaching of common grace which was associated with Abraham Kuyper. See Engelsma, *Common Grace Revisited*.

71. This is discussed in some detail by Abraham Kuyper in *Lectures on Calvinism*.

72. However, it is to be noted that sometimes this terminology can be used to discuss the temporal delay of judgment prior to death. See Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 153–60.

73. This has been emphasized in discussions with hyper-Calvinism. See Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism*.