



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 149

Election and reprobation – With respect to humanity, the biblical doctrine of predestination has two parts, for it not only includes the doctrine of election, that is, God’s choosing of certain people to salvation, but also the doctrine of reprobation, that is, God’s determination to pass over the rest of humanity to damnation (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 3, Section 3). The prescient view of predestination rejects a second or negative aspect of the doctrine of predestination, teaching that God’s predestination is dependent on God’s foreknowledge of man’s response to the gospel, good or bad. Thus they hold to such a single predestination view.

Double predestination – The Reformed view of predestination affirms both sides of predestination, the positive and the negative, election and reprobation. Those whom God chooses unto salvation are the elect, thus the doctrine of election; and those whom God leaves unto damnation are the reprobate, thus the doctrine of reprobation. And if some are elect then obviously others are non-elect, and so predestination must logically and inevitably be double. Therefore, the Reformed doctrine of predestination is sometimes known as double-predestination. Though the Bible does not say as much about the doctrine of reprobation as it does about the doctrine of election, it nevertheless clearly teaches it (Matthew 11:25-26; Romans 11:7-8; 1 Peter 2:7-8, Jude 1:4). Having said this, the term double predestination has often been misunderstood and incorrectly defined; therefore it is important for us to understand it biblically, and to articulate it accurately.

Some describe double predestination as God operating equally with respect to the salvation of the elect and the damnation of the reprobate. This view teaches that just as God acts directly on certain sinners, the elect, bringing them to faith in order to bring their election to realization, so in the same way He acts directly on the rest of sinners, the reprobate, keeping them from faith in order to bring their reprobation to realization. Therefore this defines a symmetrical view of predestination, affirming a positive-positive view of God’s intervention. This view is usually held by hyper-Calvinists, and often used by others to caricature the Reformed view. However, this is not the historically held Reformed doctrine of double predestination. The Reformed view teaches that though God decrees some to salvation and others to damnation, and though He operates directly and positively on the elect sinners to effect the fulfillment of their election, He does not operate directly and positively on the non-elect sinners to effect the fulfillment of their reprobation. This view affirms a positive-negative view of God’s intervention.

Upon those whom God has elected unto salvation in eternity past, God does in time positively intervene to regenerate them from spiritual death to spiritual life, saving them from their corrupt state and thus accomplishing their salvation. But with respect to those whom He has not elected, He does not positively intervene, rather He negatively passes over them, leaving them in their spiritually sinful state. God does not create sin or unbelief in them in order for them to be condemned, rather they are already dead in their sins and trespasses, and already in a state of condemnation (John 3:18). Thus the Reformed view rejects the symmetrical or equal view of the two sides of predestination, accurately defining the differences between election and reprobation, showing that God does not act equally in these (Romans 9:18). Election is grounded in God’s grace, whereas reprobation is grounded in His justice.

Some argue that the Bible does teach that God hardens the hearts of people so they would not believe (Exodus 7:3, 13; Joshua 11:18-20; Isaiah 6:10; John 12:40), but this does not mean that God creates an evil disposition in the hearts and wills of people, who would have otherwise believed in Him; rather He punishes them for their already evil hearts and ways, and simply steps aside and withdraws His hedge of grace, giving them over to their wickedness (Psalm 81:10-12; Romans 1:24-28). RC Sproul explains, “When abandoning people, God abandons them to themselves. Far from taking away their free will, he delivers them over to their free will, by which they choose to do the evil desires of their hearts.”