



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 150

Good pleasure of His will – One of the most explicit and detailed passages in the Bible regarding predestination is Romans 9. In verses 6 to 7 Paul explains that not all who are of ethnic Israel belong to the true Israel of God, for not all of Abraham’s descendants are automatically the true children of Abraham, but only those who are heirs of the promise God gave to Abraham. Though Isaac and Ishmael were both Abraham’s children, God chose Isaac and gave the promise through him.

Now some may say, of course God chose Isaac, for he was the son of Sarah, but Ishmael was the son of Hagar, a slave woman (Galatians 4:22-26). But in Romans 9:10-13 Paul goes on and writes about Isaac’s children, with God saying, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” Jacob and Esau were twins, thus by nature almost equal; they were from the same Jewish father and mother, thus from the same family, so clearly God’s choice had nothing to do with their heritage or parentage. Paul goes even further stating that God’s decision was made even before they were born, and even before they had done anything, good or bad. So God’s decision had nothing to do with any foreseen action, decision, or even faith. In reality both Jacob and Esau were sinful by nature, right from birth, and this became evident in their lives (Genesis 25:27-34; 27:1-40; Hebrews 12:16). Thus they lacked any merit before God. In reality they were both by nature objects of God’s displeasure and wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3); but God ordained to graciously save one and justly leave the other under His condemnation.

God’s love toward Jacob is a special, redemptive love, where in spite of his sinfulness God chose to enter into an intimate relationship with him, to save him, and to make him the object of His electing and gracious love. With regards to God’s hatred we must be careful to not understand this as some sadistic detestation or vengeful attitude on the part of God toward Esau; nor are we to weaken it to merely mean loving less. Rather the context of the chapter denotes God’s decision to not enter into a special and redemptive relationship with Esau, to reject him, and thus leave him to divine judgment. Thus God’s electing love of one sinner over another is unconditional and unrelated to anything outside of Him (vv. 15-16). Romans 9 not only repudiates the prescient view of predestination, but it utterly destroys it.

So the obvious question before us is, “Why did God choose to love some people in such a way, and predestinate them to salvation?” More broadly the question is, “What is the ultimate reason or motive for God’s predestination of people?” Though God’s predestination remains a mystery to us, Paul does give an answer to this question, stating that the eternal purpose of God is the ground of predestination (Romans 9:11; 2 Timothy 1:9). In Romans 9:21-24 Paul uses the analogy of a potter and clay, and states that God, as the potter, makes two kinds of vessels from the clay, those for honorable use, referring to the elect and their salvation, and those for dishonorable use, referring to the reprobate and their damnation. What is significant is that both vessels are made from the same lump of clay, meaning both the elect and the reprobate come from the same fallen and sinful humanity in Adam (Romans 3:10-12).

Predestination manifests various attributes of God. In election His love, grace, mercy and compassion are displayed. In reprobation His holiness, justice, righteousness, power and wrath are displayed. Whenever any attribute of God is made manifest, then ultimately His glory is further revealed. His grace toward sinners manifests His glory, but His justice toward sinners also manifests His glory (Westminster Confession of Faith - Chapter 3, Sections 5 and 7). In Ephesians 1:5-12 Paul says that God’s predestination is based on His purpose, the good pleasure of His will, that is, God does what pleases Him, and that is good, and ultimately all of this is for His glory (Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 48:11; Matthew 11:25-26; Romans 9:11, 18). The Bible gives no other reasons. John Calvin writes that “Beyond this [the will of God] he allows us not to proceed.” RC Sproul writes, “God is glorified by the judgment of the wicked in hell just as much as he is glorified by the rescue of the saints in heaven.” God’s glory is the sole and supreme motive of everything God does, including the election and reprobation of sinners.