



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 151

Objections against the Reformed doctrine of predestination – By far the greatest objection raised against the Reformed doctrine of predestination is that it is unfair, presenting a God who differentiates between people, showing grace to some but not to others, causing some to be saved but sending others to hell. In the Arminian view God chooses people based on His foreknowledge of how people will respond to the gospel message when they hear it in the future; and so in their opinion God remains just and fair.

Now if in Romans 9 Paul was teaching the Arminian view of predestination then we would expect no one to object, as no one would have questioned God's fairness or justice, as in that view God would be saving those who would believe in Jesus. But that is not what happens in Romans 9. After noting God's love of Jacob and hatred of Esau, in verse 14 Paul asks, "What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part?" Why would Paul ask this question? Paul clearly anticipated protests or objections from his readers or even his opponents, to his teaching on God's sovereignty and the unconditional nature of His election; the very same questions that the great majority of Christians ask today about this doctrine.

Why else would Paul ask such a question? Who would have said that there is injustice in God or that His decision is unfair, if Paul was teaching that God chooses based on people's foreseen decision or faith? But the question of God's justice always comes up against the Reformed view, because it seems that God deals with people unfairly. So is there injustice with God? Paul emphatically says, "By no means!"

When people say that God is unjust or unfair, they are really saying that with respect to salvation God needs to treat everyone equally; but that is an unbiblical notion. First, God is not dealing with innocent people, rather He is dealing with sinful human beings, dead in their sins and trespasses, and by nature children of wrath, who are all deserving of God's wrath and punishment (Genesis 6:5; Psalm 14:3; Romans 3:9-18; Ephesians 2:1-3). Second, by definition grace is an undeserved, unmerited and voluntary favor, it is a gift, and not something owed. No sinner deserves grace, otherwise grace would no longer be grace (Roman 11:6). It is God's sovereign and absolute prerogative to give grace to whomever He wills (Romans 9:15-16, 18). Third, with respect to the reprobates, God is not holding back people from heaven who desire to be with God; rather these are all sinful people, who actually hate God, and love their sins, and desire to be as far away from God and His holiness as possible (Romans 1:18-32; Revelation 22:11). Thus He gives them over to themselves, to be and to do what they want.

RC Sproul explains predestination using the categories of justice and non-justice, with non-justice consisting of mercy and injustice. All sinners deserve justice, which would be eternal hell. And as part of His eternal decree this is what God has determined to do with some sinners. Other sinners, however, do not receive God's justice but receive His mercy, and thus are saved. God gives these sinners mercy, which is non-justice. Thus some receive justice, others mercy, but no one receives injustice.

In Romans 9:19 Paul raises another question which he anticipates his readers will ask, saying, "You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who can resist His will?" Such people are questioning the justice of God, and in reality are blaming Him for the unbelief of the non-elect. Paul has harsh words for such people, saying, "But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" (v. 20). With this Paul rebukes sinful man, exposing his arrogance and irreverence in questioning God (Job 38:1-3; 40:1-8; 42:1-6).

We are to always remember who God is and who we are. The Bible does not give us all the answers regarding God's sovereign will, thus it remains a mystery to us. And though we may ask God about these things, we must be careful to ask in a respectful manner, never accusing God of sin or injustice, or demanding answers that satisfy us. In doing so we are committing blasphemy against the Lord.