

Predestined For Hell?

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Romans 9 has been used to promote the doctrine of double predestination or reprobation. This is the belief that God, from the foundation of the world, decreed who would be saved and who would be lost. The famous Christian author A.W. Pink expressed it in these words:

God had a definite reason why He created men, a specific purpose why He created this and that individual, and in view of the eternal destination of His creatures, He purposed either that this one should spend eternity in Heaven or that this one should spend eternity in the Lake of Fire.¹

In contrast to this, the Bible abundantly makes it clear that God sincerely desires all people everywhere to be saved. He so loved the entire world of perishing sinners that he gave his one and only Son that whosoever would trust him shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). He desires all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). He is not willing that any ungodly men should perish (2 Peter 3:9).

There are two versions of Calvinistic teaching that I am aware of. The first is the one espoused by Calvin and Pink. In Calvin's words:

By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.²

The other version of Calvinism (commonly known as moderate Calvinism) attempts to soften the harsh implications of Calvin's system. This group of Calvinists believe that God actively predestines believers to salvation whilst passing over the rest leaving them in their sins. Both views are consistent within themselves but the end result is the same – God's love is limited to those who he chooses to save. Moderate Calvinists, such as John Piper, John MacArthur and Charles Ryrie, teach that God desires the salvation of all men but decrees the salvation of only some. This clearly presents some difficulties and therefore I do not hold to this view either. There are many good men who believe this but I prefer to take the advice of John F. Parkinson:

Calvin held that it was the doctrine of predestination which explained why some respond to the gospel and others do not. But the Bible does not give us the answer to that question. We should acknowledge that the issue takes us beyond what the Scriptures reveal and certainly far beyond the field of human enquiry. What the Bible does reveal is that the Bible gives eternal life to the “whosoever will” (Rev 22:17) and rejects those who “will not come” (John 5:39). But we certainly cannot explain why certain individuals believe while others do not, nor do we need to. Salvation is of the Lord, and there are depths which we cannot fathom.³

1 A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*. Provided by Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics www.crta.org

2 *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Book 3, Chapter 21.

3 *The Faith of God's Elect*, p48. Gospel Tract Publications 1999

Since Romans 9 is used to support “double-decree Calvinism” it is necessary to do a detailed study of this complex chapter. It logically follows from the glories of chapter 8, the truth that nothing can cut us off from Gods love and goes into a discourse about why Israel was apparently cut off from Gods love. In chapter 10, Paul expresses his passion for the entire nation to be saved. He states that they were cut off for approaching God on their own terms rather than the terms which God has appointed. Some within that nation had a tendency to believe they should automatically receive Gods favour by virtue of their Jewish ancestry and by keeping the Mosaic law. This is illustrated in the second chapter of Romans. The third chapter of the epistle puts the whole world, Jew and Gentile, into condemnation and that the righteousness of God is by faith in Jesus Christ.

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference (Romans 3:21-22)

Chapter 4 expands on chapter 3 by using Abraham as an illustration of justification by faith and in chapters 5 through 8 the apostle assures us of our sanctification and security in Christ. In chapters 10 and 11 we see that the Jewish people were cut off for their unbelief, and that they wrongly approached God by their own means and not by the way God had appointed - faith. The discourse in chapter 9 leads to this. To suddenly go into a discourse about predestination to heaven or hell and then revert back to faith in chapter 10 is to interrupt the flow of the epistle. It is true that God sovereignly chooses whom he will save and how will save them. This begs a deeper question: Who does God save and how does he save them? From the overall testimony of Scripture we conclude: God saves those who believe, and he saves them by grace. His choice is not mysterious or arbitrary. If we bear in mind that we are dealing with the issue of justification by faith as opposed to keeping the law we will see the true meaning of Romans 9.

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

Paul's great sorrow comes from the fact that his own countrymen are cut off from God, but he reminds us that the gifts God has bestowed up on them are still theirs - notice the *present* tense. From here Paul moves into using historical figures to illustrate a truth. Paul, as a Rabbi, was employing a first century method of interpretation known as *drash*, or what in English is known as an *allegory*. He is using these illustrations to enforce the truth that the righteousness God demands is the righteousness of faith and not the righteousness of human effort or descent.

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and

Sara shall have a son. (6-9)

God does not bestow his favour based upon human works, or human effort, but by grace. *“They are not all Israel that are of Israel”* is restating the truth found in chapter 2:

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. (2:28,29)

A true Israelite is spiritual, one who is circumcised in heart due to his faith in God. An Israelite who is not circumcised in heart is not a saved Israelite. He has to come to God by the means he has provided. Ishmael was Abraham's own efforts to obtain Gods promise, whereas Isaac was Gods sovereignly appointed channel of blessing. It is not saying that God randomly chooses to save one person and damn another, but that he saves on his own terms - ie. *by faith*. The Israelites who disbelieved thought that just because they were descended from Abraham they were automatically in Gods favour. They were *“ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they didn’t subject themselves to the righteousness of God”*.

And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated (10-13)

Esau, being the elder, had the birthright. The purpose of God, according to election, is he sets aside what is “of the flesh” in favour of the “spiritual”. The lesson of this passage is the setting aside of “birthrights” in favour of *grace*. This was highlighted by John Wesley:

Is it unjust in God to give Jacob the blessing rather than Esau? or to accept believers, and them only. God forbid - In no wise. This is well consistent with justice; for he has a right to fix the terms on which he will show mercy, according to his declaration to Moses, petitioning for all the people, after they had committed idolatry with the golden calf. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy - According to the terms I myself have fixed. And I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion - Namely, on those only who submit to my terms, who accept of it in the way that I have appointed.⁴

As regards to the historical case of Jacob and Esau, there is no record as to whether Esau was eternally saved or not. The purpose here is not that Jacob would be saved and Esau would be lost but that the elder would serve the younger - eternal salvation is not even in view in the historical setting, although it is the topic of the illustration. It teaches us that God does not regard ancestry or birthright when he bestows his blessing - it is entirely of his own grace. The quotation *“Jacob I loved and Esau I hated”* was taken from Malachi in reference, not to the individuals, but to the nations. In Malachi Edom is used interchangeably with Esau. Israel was promised the Messiah and his kingdom whilst Edom was turned into a wasteland. The promise relates not to salvation but to

⁴ John Wesley, Commentary on Romans 9:18, Provided by Christian Classics Ethereal Library (www.ccel.org)

earthly blessings. Gods love for Jacob does not mean that individual Jews don't need to be saved and, conversely, Gods hatred of Esau does not mean that Edomites cannot be eternally saved.

The fact that Esau and Jacob had neither done good nor bad when God made his decision illustrates *grace* again. God did not choose either based upon what they deserved, but he gave the birthright to the younger – the one who did not have any claim on it and the one who certainly did not work for it. A picture of salvation. The case of Esau illustrates the fact that God does not regard ancestry or birthright as the means of automatic salvation.

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. (14-16)

God shows mercy to whom he wills, how he wills. This truth, however, does not stand alone. There are other Bible passages which teach that Gods mercy is never refused to anyone who desires it, and that mercy is available through the Lord Jesus Christ:

For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (10:12-13)

Taking into account both of these truths, we can summarise it as follows: God will have compassion on whom he will have compassion, the one who approaches him by faith and not by works of the law. The phrase “not of him who wills nor of him who runs” means that Gods blessing is not obtained by human effort.

For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. (v17)

God is in control of history and brought him onto the scene. This verse does not mean that Pharaoh was doomed from the time of his birth, but that was “raised up” in order that God may show his glory against him. Gods glory was not here to be displayed in sending Pharaoh to eternal perdition but by visiting Egypt with the judgments recorded in Exodus. Spiros Zodhiates⁵ points out that the same Greek word for “*raised up*” in this passage is also used in 1 Corinthians 6:14 where it is promised that God will *raise us up* as he raised Christ Jesus from the dead. It has nothing to do with Pharaohs birth, but his *earthly position of power*. Pharaoh was completely in the wrong to be mistreating the Hebrews in the first place and wrong to harden his own heart in the second place. God further hardened him to accelerate him on the cruel path he had already chosen in order to accomplish his purpose.

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth (v18)

⁵ Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible, AMG Publishers.

The word “harden” means to “make firm”, “make stiff” or “to make strong”⁶. It does not mean that God has turned Pharaoh's heart against him but that God has made him firm in his already rebellious state. Hebrew Christian scholar Alfred Edersheim, commenting on this stage of Jewish history, said:

Although in our English version only the word "harden" is used, in the Hebrew original three different terms are employed, of which one (as in Exodus 7:3) literally means to make hard or insensible, the other (as in 10:1) to make heavy, that is, unimpressionable, and the third (as in 14:4), to make firm or stiff, so as to be immovable. Now it is remarkable, that of the twenty passages which speak of Pharaoh's hardening, exactly ten ascribe it to Pharaoh himself, and ten to God, and that in both cases precisely the same three terms are used. Thus the making "hard," "heavy," and "firm" of the heart is exactly as often and in precisely the same terms traced to the agency of Pharaoh himself as to that of God...after each of the first five plagues (7:22; 8:15; 8:19; 8:32; 9:7) the hardening is also expressly attributed to Pharaoh himself. Only when still resisting after the sixth plague do we read for the first time, that "the Lord made firm the heart of Pharaoh" (9:12). But even so, space for repentance must have been left, for after the seventh plague we read again (9:34) that "Pharaoh made heavy his heart;" and it is only after the eighth plague that the agency is exclusively ascribed to God. Moreover, we have to consider the progress of this hardening on the part of Pharaoh, by which at last his sin became ripe for judgment.⁷

God shows mercy upon the one who comes to him in faith and, conversely, makes the obstinate unbeliever firm in their rebellion against him.

Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

This verse has been misused to silence any honest enquiry into the so-called “mystery of election”. God does not rudely speak to believers when they humbly enquire into matters as other scriptural records show and neither does Paul. This question is not an honest enquiry from a believing heart but a heckle from a scoffer. Paul met plenty of these during his ministry. Instead of entertaining these critics Paul would give crushing answers and not bother to argue in detail. It is often the best strategy to employ when an enquiry isn't genuine and some Christians wisely use this today. Throughout Romans Paul had been anticipating his opponents responses to his teaching based on his experience. He does so earlier on in Romans:

For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is

⁶ Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius. The KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon. The Hebrew words are *chazaq*, *kabed* and *qashah*

⁷ Alfred Edersheim, Bible History, Chapter 5.

just. (3:7-8).

Notice the similarity here to the question in Romans 9: “Why does God find fault?”.

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (v19-21)

The clay and potter picture is also employed in Jeremiah 18. The potter did not create the clay with the initial purpose of destruction, but decided it was fit for judgment by its rebellion and disobedience.

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them (Jer 18:1-10)

In this *clay and potter* illustration, the potter intended Israel to be of valuable use and but because it was marred in his hands he had to decide an alternate use for it. If the clay had repented the potter would reconsider the judgment he had pronounced against it. If it persisted in its rebellion it would become a vessel to *dishonour*. This illustrates that the potters purpose is not capricious.

What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (v22-24)

Notice the phrase “*endured with much patience*”. In chapter 10 God says concerning Israel “*all day long I stretched out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.*” This patience means that the potter is not desiring to destroy them. God does not delight in the death of any sinner.

Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? says the Lord GOD; and not rather that he should return from his way, and live?...For I have no pleasure in the death of him who dies, says the Lord GOD: therefore turn yourselves, and live (Ezekiel 18:23,32)

But observe also the phrase “*fitted to destruction*”. Some Calvinists assert that this means God created them for eternal destruction. A.W. Pink stated:

Romans 9:22 is clearly a continuation in thought of verse 21, and verse 21 is part of the Apostle's reply to the question raised in verse 20: therefore, to fairly follow out the figure, it must be God Himself who "fits" unto destruction the vessels of wrath. Should it be asked how God does this, the answer, necessarily, is, objectively, -He fits the non-elect unto destruction by His fore-ordinating decrees. Should it be asked why God does this, the answer must be, To promote His own glory, i.e., the glory of His justice, power and wrath. "The sum of the Apostle's answer here is, that the grand object of God, both in the election and the reprobation of men, is that which is paramount to all things else in the creation of men, namely, His own glory" (Robert Haldane).⁸

This begs some questions: Why would God create somebody for destruction when he has no pleasure in destroying them? Why would God endure them with much patience if that was his intention anyway? Why would God plead stretch out his hands to a disobedient and obstinate people if he had no intention of saving them?

According to W.E. Vine⁹, the word “fitted” in this passage is in the middle voice, indicating that the objects of wrath have *made themselves* for destruction.. Greek scholars Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich and Church historian Phillip Schaff concurred with Vines interpretation.¹⁰ A.T. Robertson asserted that the word “made” means a “*state of readiness*”. The *Amplified Bible*, the *Jewish New Testament* and Greek scholar M.R. Vincent translate the word *made* as *ripe*¹¹. Fruit needs to be ripe for eating, and it becomes ripe of it’s own accord in due time. Charles C. Ryrie also uses this word in his comments on this verse in Romans, stating that the objects of wrath are “*ripe for destruction because of their own actions of rejecting the truth*”.¹² This interpretation of the passage is widely accepted and makes much more sense of the flow of the passage, as well as harmonizing with the rest of the Bible.

People who know the truth and reject it, like Pharaoh, are fit for destruction. Men prepare themselves for destruction, but God prepares believers for glory. Those who regard themselves as “moderate Calvinists” agree on this point. C.H. Spurgeon stated:

If God hated Esau, it was because he deserved to be hated. Do you observe how Scripture always guards this conclusion? Turn to the ninth chapter of Romans, where we have selected our text, see how careful the Holy Spirit is here, in the 22nd verse. "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory." But it does not say anything about fitting men for destruction; they fitted themselves. They did that: God had nothing to do with it. But when men are saved,

⁸ A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*. Provided by Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics www.cрта.org

⁹ *Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers 1984, p241

¹⁰ Phillip Schaff, *History of The Christian Church*, Book 8, Chapter XIV, Provided by www.ccel.org

¹¹ David H. Stern, Translator, *Jewish New Testament Publications Inc 1979*

¹² *Ryrie Study Bible*, Moody Press, Chicago 1994, p1711

God fits them for that. All the glory to God in salvation; all the blame to men in damnation.¹³

Matthew Henry, a puritan and therefore typically Calvinistic, made similar comments on this passage:

God endured them with much long-suffering —exercised a great deal of patience towards them, let them alone to fill up the measure of sin, to grow till they were ripe for ruin, and so they became fitted for destruction, fitted by their own sin and self-hardening. The reigning corruptions and wickedness of the soul are its preparedness and disposedness for hell: a soul is hereby made combustible matter, fit for the flames of hell.

Those who continue in their obstinacy are treasuring up for themselves wrath in the day of wrath, revelation, and of the righteous judgment of God (cf. 2:5).

What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. (v30-32)

Paul asks “what is the conclusion of all that we have said”. Israel tried to establish their own righteousness and so cut themselves off. The responsibility for their rejection is laid at their own door.

For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.(v32-33)

The conclusion is now reached. Jesus Christ stands between God The Father and the human race. Those who reject him will stumble upon him and those who believe will have hope. If the unbelievers had not stumbled over the “rock of offense” and approached God through faith in Jesus Christ they would have been given mercy.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.
(10:1)

Paul sincerely desires the salvation of Israel as a whole. Is Paul more loving and righteous than God? Or is Paul just reflecting Gods own desire for them?

But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people (10:21)

Romans 9 does not in any way teach that human beings are helpless pawns in the hands of an arbitrary God who decides to damn one person and to save another for arbitrary reasons. It does

¹³ Jacob and Esau, Sermon 241, The Spurgeon Archive.

teach that God judges people on their response to “the rock of offense” Jesus Christ. C.H. Spurgeon leaves us with many thoughts to consider:

Do you believe that God created man and arbitrarily, sovereignly—it is the same thing—created that man, with no other intention, than that of damning him? Made him, and yet, for no other reason than that of destroying him for ever? Well, if you can believe it, I pity you, that is all I can say: you deserve pity, that you should think so meanly of God, whose mercy endureth for ever. You are quite right when you say the reason why God loves a man, is because God does do so; there is no reason in the man. But do not give the same answer as to why God hates a man. If God deals with any man severely, it is because that man deserves all he gets. In hell there will not be a solitary soul that will say to God, O Lord, thou hast treated me worse than I deserve! But every lost spirit will be made to feel that he has got his deserts, that his destruction lies at his own door and not at the door of God; that God had nothing to do with his condemnation, except as the Judge condemns the criminal, but that he himself brought damnation upon his own head, as the result of his own evil works. Justice is that which damns a man; it is mercy, it is free grace, that saves; sovereignty holds the scale of love; it is justice holds the other scale. Who can put that into the hand of sovereignty? That were to libel God and to dishonour him¹⁴

14 Jacob and Esau, Sermon 241, The Spurgeon Archive