

Systematic Theology: Reprobation

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Welcome. It's such a good turnout this evening for our Tuesday study. We're glad that you're with us here this evening and grateful for all of you joining us on the live stream. We have the privilege tonight of continuing our study in systematic theology. We started with the doctrine of revelation, biblical authority and what that means and its implications, then we turned to the character of God and studied his attributes at length, God is a Trinity, now we are in a study of his works. And two weeks ago we studied the doctrine of the divine decrees, a doctrine which teaches us from Scripture that God determined beforehand everything that would ever happen in the course of the universe. Last week we saw that that included his divine election of some to salvation. In other words, the divine decrees and what God determined before time began was that everything would happen in the universe and that includes the destiny of moral creatures and this is what we call the doctrine of predestination. It's a high and it's a lofty doctrine. It is something that the pride of man does not easily receive. We understand that and that doesn't bother us; we don't really care what the pride of man thinks at Truth Community Church. We just want to honor God by teaching what he has said in his word and we are content to let the consequences of that go wherever they may.

Now, election we said is God's eternal purpose to save some of the human race from sin in and by Jesus Christ. That leaves a question for us, that means that if that's true, what about everybody else? What about those that God did not determine to save from sin in and by Jesus Christ? What are we to say about that and how can we understand that? Well, that brings us to the other aspect of predestination which is called reprobation. Reprobation is the theological term for that and we have some heavy lifting to do tonight, no doubt about it, but we welcome that and embrace it.

Let me give you a definition of reprobation and then we will look at Scripture together this evening. What shall we say about the destiny of those who will never believe in Christ and how does that relate to God's eternal purpose? Here's a definition for you. I'll try to say it slowly: reprobation is God's eternal purpose to pass some men by with the operation of his special grace and to punish them for their sin. I'll say it one more time: reprobation is God's eternal purpose to pass some men by with the operation of his special grace and to punish them for their sin. In other words, God knew the collective composition of all of humanity that would ever live and die in the human race, election

tells us that he chose some to save and others he chose not to save and that they would eventually in time be punished for their sin.

Now, here's what I think is the key two words in that definition to help set the stage for everything that follows. We've said that reprobation is God's eternal purpose. I'm going to say it faster now, you need to catch up with me by this time. This is the third time. Reprobation is God's eternal purpose to pass some men by with the operation of his special grace and to punish them for their sin. "Their sin" being the key cornerstone to helping you think rightly through the doctrine that we are going to study tonight. You must remember those weighty words "their sin" because that determines everything in terms of how we think about this. The Bible is very clear, very definitive. 1 Kings 8:46 says, "there is no man who does not sin." "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," Romans 3:23 says. Romans 3:10 says, "there is none who does good, there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God." So when we think about humanity and we think about the ultimate destiny of humanity, we must remember and we must humble ourselves before the reality testified repeatedly by Scripture that all of humanity is guilty in sin. That determines everything. That helps us understand the whole concept and the whole context of what we're going to talk about tonight.

Now, with that definition of reprobation that God determined before time began that he would pass over some men in order to punish them for their sin, here's the question: why do we believe that? Why do we teach that? I realize for many of you maybe you've never heard this term before and if so, that's okay, that's why we teach these things so that you can hear them and understand and be prepared to think rightly. You know, there is something else that I would say here tonight that I think is very very crucial: the way that you approach these things, the way that you approach these high doctrines and the way that you think in very broad terms, is going to determine the outcome of whether you respond and receive them or not. We must remember as Andrew read from Proverbs 4 and as Andrew was saying so well at the conclusion of that Scripture reading, that wisdom begins with the knowledge of God and our thinking about anything must start with the character of God and who God is and who he is in his sovereignty and in his wisdom and in his grace and in his mercy and in his love and his omnipotence. You must start your thinking with God, not with man because if you start your thinking with God is high and lofty and sovereign over all and he is sovereign over all of his creation, then you're going to have a different attitude when we see God doing things that we might not have guessed. You're going to have a different attitude like that then if you start with a premise that man is basically good and man is entitled to things from God and God owes us and God is supposed to have a wonderful plan for my life and do everything the way I want him to do. You see, with one you come to God with a sense of entitlement and expectation, "God owes me," in the other you say, "God is sovereign and I must bow and defer to him." And the difference between those two is vast and there is nothing like the doctrines of election and reprobation to test a person's heart to see what they really think about God and what they think about themselves because when you resent God for being sovereign, that's showing something about your heart. When you say, "Lord, not my will but thine be done," then you come out in a completely different place.

So with that bit of introduction, we are off to a flying start here this evening. Why do we believe that the Bible teaches the doctrine of reprobation and what does reprobation mean that God purposed beforehand to punish some men for their sin? Why do we believe that? Well, let's start here. What we're going to do is we're going to start at the end and then work our way back to the beginning is how we're going to approach it this evening. So we will start in the future and then we will work our way back.

Why do we believe that the Bible teaches reprobation? Well, here's point 1 for those of you taking notes, or as they say in baseball, those of you keeping score at home: the reality of final judgment. The reality of final judgment. Now look, we all agree, I'm going to assume here, we all agree that Scripture teaches that there will be a final judgment on the wicked at the end of time; that God has appointed a place called hell in which he will punish men for their sins eternally. For those who reject Christ and even for those who have never heard of Christ, they are still guilty and they will suffer the consequences of their guilt with eternal judgment. The Bible teaches that so plainly and so clearly.

Just to have one Scripture passage to set that in your mind, turn to Matthew 25 with me. Matthew 25 and in verse 41 we're kind of picking up the statements about judgment in the middle of them just for the sake of time, Jesus says in Matthew 25:41,

41 Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; 43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.'

Their lives and their indifference to spiritual reality is showing the sinfully strained position of their heart from God. And in verse 46 he says,

46 These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Jesus says that there is a group that is headed to eternal judgment. You could look at Matthew 7, you could look at 2 Thessalonians 1 just for other places among many others that would teach this doctrine. So here's the thing, beloved: we look to eternity future, we look to the end of the age here, maybe more accurately stated, and we look to the future and we see that hell is real and that the punishment of sinners is actually going to take place. God has revealed that and stated it plainly and clearly in Scripture and there is no denying that. You can only deny hell by denying the Bible and we don't want to go there. That's not a good place to go. Denying the Bible will eventually lead you to hell and so these things kind of go together.

Now, here's the question, I'll state it as a question: did the fact that there was going to be eternal judgment on sinners, did that surprise God after creation began? That answers the question. Before time began, did God know that there would be an eternal judgment of

sinner? Well, obviously the answer to that is yes. God is omniscient. He knows everything and he has always known everything. He has never learned anything. He has always had a perfect and complete knowledge of everything without respect to time. We studied that as we studied his omniscience. Well look, if God knew that that was going to happen, then it didn't surprise him and as he has decreed what would happen, he decreed that there would be an eternal judgment and therefore he decreed also those that would be in eternal judgment. This is part of his sovereignty. This is part of his purpose.

So we realize, there are kind of two aspects here that a friend of mine pointed out to me to help me think about it rightly. There is the decree of God before time began where he determined who would be punished forever, but then the execution of that and the working out of that takes place in time when the judgment actually occurs. So in between we come back to the fact that man falls into sin, man lives as a guilty sinner, as a rebel to God, and as the outworking of that judgment is just and right and appropriate. This is not a surprise to God. It is not outside of what he decreed and purposed to occur, so we have to come to grips with the fact that final judgment teaches us to expect the fact that God planned that to happen all along. God has never – please get this kind of language out of your mind – God has never had to resort to a Plan B. God has never had to respond to unexpected circumstances and say, "Oh, I didn't see that one coming. Now what do I do?" God is not like that. We're like that but God is not. So we realize, we look at the reality of the testimony of Scripture to final judgment and we reverse engineer it, so to speak, and say, "Then this must have been part of God's plan." And what we've done here is simply taken that which is familiar to help bridge the gap to that which is perhaps less familiar to us as we begin. The reality of final judgment teaches us to expect the doctrine of reprobation.

Now, let's do it this way, let's go to point 2 here this evening and look more specifically at Scripture texts that would talk about it more specifically. Point 2 for your outline would be: the reality about reprobation. The reality about reprobation or stated differently, the scriptural texts that teach us about reprobation. Where do we find this taught in Scripture, this idea that God planned for the destruction of some before time began? Where would we find this taught in Scripture? Well, how many hours do you have? This is not an isolated concept in Scripture. We'll look at four passages that will help you see that God, and here's the way that I want you to think about it at this point, is that God had distinguishing purposes for the human race. For some he had the distinct purpose that he would save them and they would become heirs of glory and heirs of Christ. For others, he determined that they would not enjoy that blessing, that grace, and they would simply be punished for their sin. Distinguishing purposes in his dealing with humanity.

Well, let's look at four passages rather quickly. Proverbs 16. As you're turning there, let me assure you that we're going to do everything we can to answer the difficult questions that are in your mind, especially if this is new teaching to you; all of that we have planned to deal with in the course of this 60 minute message. Proverbs 16:4 says that,

4 The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.

That God as he was planning creation, as he was establishing his purposes, had a place for the wicked indicating that there would be a time that they would exist and they would flourish, and then there would be a day of judgment upon them as well. God planned that. It didn't surprise him. He didn't have to sort this out later. And coming back, you just realize that your view of God, if you have a high view of God and a high view of his sovereignty, these things make perfect sense. When you read Scripture, if man is at the center of your theology, not only do they not make sense, not only does it not seem possible to you, you have to start to twist very clear Scriptures in order to make them say what you want them to say rather than just letting them speak and say what they say.

Well, with that in mind, turn to Matthew 11. Again, we're just looking at Scriptures that point us in this direction of the distinguishing purposes of God. Matthew 11:25, again, the distinguishing purposes of God on display in verse 25 of Matthew 11.

25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants."

"God, you have shown these things to some and you have hidden them from others."
Verse 26,

26 Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.

God determined that some would receive the revelation of salvation, they would receive the understanding, and others would hear the Scriptures but not understand them. It was part of his purpose.

Other words from our Lord in John 17 speak to this distinction in God's purpose with some of humanity in grace under election, and others in their sin and left to their sin. John 17, beginning in verse 9. This is Jesus praying prior to his crucifixion and he is praying for his disciples and you can see this woven, the electing purposes of God woven throughout the way that Jesus is praying. And brothers and sisters in Christ, if ever there was a time for us to step back and humble ourselves, surely it is a time to humble ourselves when Christ is praying to his Father on the eve of his crucifixion and for us to just let Christ say what he says without sitting in judgment on it because it violates some kind of sense of human entitlement or justice. Notice what Jesus says in John 17:6. By the way, as I say that, I have complete confidence that you and I are perfectly aligned in the way that we are approaching Scripture tonight, and that we are approaching this wanting simply to see what God says. So in verse 6 Jesus says,

6 I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world

There were men that God gave to Christ out of the world. The whole world didn't receive this, there were men that were given this privilege.

they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. 7 Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; 8 for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.

Now watch this, verse 9,

9 I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; 10 and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them.

Jesus makes a distinction between those that he is praying for. He says, "I ask on behalf of my disciples. I am not asking on behalf of the world." He is making a distinction in the groups of the men in what he says there. And in verse 20 he goes on and he says,

20 I do not ask on behalf of these alone [meaning his disciples in his day and age], but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one

So, "I'm not just praying for the men here, I'm praying for everyone who will believe in the future." In other words, in his high priestly prayer here in John 17, Jesus prayed for people like you because you are among those who believed through the word of the apostle. Christ was praying for you, praying for me even in that time, those who would believe through their word. This is so high and sacred, the glory of what we are able to see here.

One more, 1 Peter 2:7 and 8. 1 Peter 2 after the book of Hebrews. 1 Peter after Hebrews and also after James, I should say. 1 Peter 2:7 and 8 says speaking about Christ as the precious cornerstone, it says,

7 this precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, [do you see the distinction, do you see how both groups are included in the same text?] "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone," 8 and, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"

Some were built on Christ, some will trip over him and not believe. And verse 8 says,

they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

God appointed this lot for them. God determined that this would happen.

So these texts taken together show that God intentionally deliberately planned to include some in his saving mercies and to exclude others. The some that he included, we say he elected them to grace. Those that have been excluded, fall under the doctrine of reprobation. The doctrine of reprobation one more time says that reprobation is God's eternal purpose to pass some men by with the operation of his special grace and to punish them for their sin.

Now, the four texts that we have looked at there, those are all very helpful but the central text is found in Romans 9 and I invite you to turn to Romans 9 with me as we get into this in even greater depth and detail now, understanding I'm holding out the promise for you that the difficult questions that are associated with this still lie ahead that we are going to deal with here this evening. Scripture teaches this, that God has distinguishing purposes for some versus others, and in Romans 9:9, the Apostle Paul deals with this very difficult issue. He says in verse 9, I'll read through verse 13,

9 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son." 10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; 11 for [watch this] though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, 12 it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Notice what is going on here in this passage. Two twins in the womb of Rebekah. They have not been born yet. They have not done anything good or bad and God has a purpose that he would bless Jacob and not bless Esau. And Paul says that God did this, look at verse 11 with me, that this happened, "so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not according to works." It's not that Jacob had somehow been better than Esau in the womb, the assumption is they are equal in the womb, but God chose Jacob that the younger one would rule over Esau, that he would prevail over Esau, and it says that God determined this not because of anything in them but because of him who calls. It was God's purpose that he wanted it to be that way. The destinies, in other words, of Jacob and Esau were set before they were born is the point of that.

Now, when it says that, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated," you shouldn't think about that in sentimental emotional terms like we use those words, "Oh, I love that person. I hate that person." We shouldn't think about it that way. That sharp distinction is simply speaking to the distinguishing purpose of God between the two. His favor was upon Jacob, it was not upon Esau.

Now, for those of you that have looked into this issue at all, this is far more than choosing nations that would arise out of the loins of those two men. This is individual election, individual reprobation. Nations are comprised of individuals. People try to avoid this doctrine by saying, "Oh, Paul is just talking about nations here, not individuals." Well,

what are nations except a collection of people, of individuals? So that objection doesn't go anywhere. God's eternal plan was to save some and to judge others. That's the reality that Scripture speaks to.

Now, that weighty truth brings all kinds of questions. I get that. And we'll try to deal with these one by one. I think I've got three, maybe four. I've got four questions that are really going to take up the bulk of our time here this evening. I have an illustration that I want to give to you. We'll take a little breather with a bit of an illustration here that I think works that will help you understand things a little better. Election and reprobation are like two sides of the same coin, in one sense, the coin being God's predestinating purpose. On heads you have election, on tails you have reprobation. These two doctrines are joined together. They rise and fall together. You can't have single predestination and then say, "Well, I don't want to talk about the rest of it." That doesn't honor Scripture. That's just abdicating your role as a teacher to say we're not even going to talk about that or let's avoid that question and just focus on the good stuff. Well, what if God has also revealed what we consider some bad stuff? Shouldn't we honor the whole counsel of God and teach it too? Shouldn't we come to grips with all of Scripture, not just the parts that are pleasing to us? So election to salvation implies reprobation to damnation and it's not just a theological construct, it's not just something that Calvinists have made up in the past 500 years. This is the teaching of the Bible. It would be true if Calvin had never been born.

Now, with that said, here's the point of the coin illustration. Yes, it is one coin but sometimes I say things that are so simplistic I'm ashamed of myself, but isn't it true that when you look at heads on a coin, that heads looks a little different than tails does? Heads is different from tails, that's why they flip it before a game. "Okay, call it in the air." Now, here's the meaning of this, here's the point of this and I'll make this summary statement and then we'll work all of this out. Election and reprobation are not identical in the way that they work. Yes, God made a choice before time began but the way that this works out is different between the two. In election, God made a choice to do something with sinners, God made a choice that he would actively work in their hearts in order to lead them surely to salvation in time. God determined that. That's heads. Same coin, same choice but tails looks a little different, right? And in reprobation, reprobation is not exactly the same in its outworking that election is. In reprobation, the definition is very important. God made a choice that he would not work like that in the hearts of the reprobate, instead he would simply leave them, he would allow them to continue in sin and not show that kind of grace to them. So election and saving grace is active, God working directly on the human heart in order to make sure that these men are saved. In reprobation, God passively says, "I will not do that work in them. They will be left to themselves. They will be left to their sin and the judgment that takes place in future time for them will be just and deserved and I will punish them accordingly." That's the difference. Heads and tails are the same coin, not quite exactly the same. If you have a coin that has heads on both sides, it's probably counterfeit or you might have something that is worth \$1 million but we're not talking about coins here anymore. Heads is different from tails, the way God works in election is different from the way that he works in reprobation. That point is really critical to understand.

Now with that said, let's face the tough questions about reprobation, that's point 3: facing the tough questions about reprobation. You know, there is nothing that I enjoy more than defending the character of God and vindicating God against all kinds of unrighteous things that are said by men who do not believe the Bible, and we can just face these questions directly. We are not afraid of the hard questions. Hard questions bring forth really good answers when they are handled properly and that's what we're going to try to do here this evening, anyway.

Here's the first question: does reprobation make God unjust? Does it make God unjust? Is it unfair for God to choose to save some and not others, indeed, to determine that others would be punished for their sin eternally? And to an unsanctified mind, to somebody who is not familiar with biblical teaching, that's an immediate obvious objection. "Wait, this doesn't seem fair to me." How do we deal with that question and how do we answer that question? Does reprobation make God unjust? Well, let me give you a technical term to answer that question for you, the technical term is: no. No, this does not make God unjust. In fact, Paul goes on, Paul anticipates that objection in verse 14 of Romans 9. There is really nothing new in human thought in the 2,000 intervening years since the time of the Apostle Paul. The same things that people object to today were the objections that Paul anticipated in the holy writ of Scripture. In light of what he said about Jacob and Esau, chosen before they had done anything good or bad, he anticipates the objection in verse 14.

14 What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? [and his answer is] May it never be!

The idea is God forbid! Absolutely not! No way! Don't even think that way! And if we go back and one of the things that I like about the way that we are approaching the study of systematic theology is that there is a cumulative impact and you have reference points that you can go back to as you get into these difficulties. You remember, most of you, that we taught on the holiness of God and that there is absolutely no moral defect in him. We talked about his attributes. Well, his attributes inform our understanding of this. Just from a pure standpoint of his attributes we say, "No, absolutely not! It could not possibly be an explanation about the doctrine of reprobation that God has been unjust because that would violate his holiness and that is a first principle that can never be broken. We never go there." So we say, "Okay, we're still left with the question." We're not saying that the theological equivalent of, "Be quiet!" We taught our children not to say, "Shut up!" so I didn't want to use it there. We're not telling people just theological, "Be quiet!" but we realize that God's holiness means that could not possibly be the right answer.

Now, let's answer it more specifically. Does reprobation make God unjust? The technical answer is no and here's the way that we must think about this and, oh, if you'll embrace this, the way it will elevate God in your thinking and make you a creature who worships rather than a creature who accuses God. God is the sovereign Creator. God set the universe in motion. It was entirely his prerogative to do with it whatever he wanted to do.

Scripture says that salvation belongs to the Lord and Paul uses those kinds of principles to develop his answer to that objection about the possible injustice of God.

Look at verse 15 with me,

15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

God says, "Look, I'm God. I'll have mercy on who I want to. I'll have compassion on who I want to. By what right does anyone in a creaturely position make accusation or call me to account for what I do with my attributes?" You can't do that. That's inconceivable on an infinitesimally, ridiculously small example. You know, none of you, I don't think, none of you would see a police officer in the process of arresting someone for drunken driving and try to interfere with his judgment and say, "Excuse me, Officer Jones, I don't think you should be doing it this way." You have enough respect for the police officer that you say, "Yeah, that's your jurisdiction. You do what you want. I'm not a cop. This isn't for me to decide." Well, multiply that by infinity and say, "Oh yeah, God, do you know what? You are God, why don't you do what you think is best. Why don't you have mercy on who you want." Because that would be right.

He goes on and says in verse 16, and notice, I love the way that Paul does not compromise on the point but he meets the objection and in a judo move takes the momentum of the objection and turns it against them, and not only does he not back away from it, he definitively answers it and says,

16 So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

Who is saved depends on the God who shows mercy, not on the man who wills or runs. It's not based on what man does. It is ultimately determined by God. In verse 17 it says,

17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth." 18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

Wow. I mean, can it be any more plain than that? So in response to the question, "Does reprobation make God unjust?" No, God is the Creator, he can do whatever he wants and if he decides to have mercy on some and harden others, that is entirely his prerogative. It is not for us to object and to accuse him of injustice.

Now, watch this, let's develop this thought a little further if we can, and we can. Remember what I said at the start in the definition that "their sin" was crucial to receiving this doctrine properly? Here's the way that you must think about this: regardless of God's choices in election and reprobation, regardless of that, all men and women who have ever lived and who will ever will live as the progeny of Adam are sinners by nature and by

choice. People sin because they want to sin and for that, God rightly judges them. Yet as Creator and Judge, God has the privilege to extend mercy to some if he wishes. If it pleases him to accept the sacrifice and the righteousness of Christ for the punishment that you deserved, that's God's prerogative. If God chose to work in your heart and to save you, that's his prerogative. That does not obligate him to do it for everyone. And when men who are sinners by nature and choice pursue sin and reject Christ when he is presented to them and they revel in the glory of their sin, the shame of their sin better stated, then isn't it only right for God to judge them? Who would deny God a right to judge a rebel against his supreme rule? They are deserving of judgment quite apart from any thought about divine decrees. So, beloved, God is God. He blesses whom he wishes and he judges whom he wishes and we step back and we respect his authority and prerogative to do just that. It humbles us. It puts us in our place and it silences our objections against the supposed injustice of God.

Now, we're not done answering the tough questions. Let me come to a second difficult question kind of related to the first: does reprobation make God arbitrary? Does it make God arbitrary? And oh, this is so very important. Again, this will revolutionize your thinking about God if you have not thought about it this way. To be arbitrary is to do something without any reason. It's to do it on a whim. If you make an arbitrary decision to give somebody \$20 and say, "I'm going to close my eyes and the next person that comes to me down the street, I'm going to give him \$20." That's arbitrary. There is no reason to it. Well, is God arbitrary in reprobation and in election when Scripture says that it does not depend upon man for the basis of God's choice? Does this mean that it's just arbitrary?

Well, let's deal with that question carefully. It is true, beloved, that God did not choose men or individuals based on anything in them. That would base salvation upon works and allow boasting. That's why we said so definitively last time that it is not true that God looked down the corridors of time with a pair of spiritual binoculars to see who would have faith and then on the basis of what he found when he looked into time, chose them on that basis. That would rest the distinction between men who were saved and who were not in man and Scripture has already said, Paul has already said in verse 9, it does not depend on man. It doesn't depend on the will of man. It doesn't depend on what the man does. So God did not choose based on anything that he saw in any individual and so the humanistic reasoning would say, "Then it must be arbitrary. If there is nothing in man that distinguishes it, then this must be an arbitrary choice by God," and you resurrect the accusation of unfairness based on that. Well, beloved, let us not think that way. Here's a really crucial point: the fact that it is not based in man, the reason for God's choice is not based in man, in anything that man does or says or would ever say or do, does not mean that it is without reason. True, God chose us in this room who are in Christ, he chose us not based on anything that he found worthy in us and others he has passed over that are outside elsewhere. So it's not about anything in us but that doesn't mean God didn't have reasons for it. Not at all.

Look at verse 19 of Romans 9.

19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"

How can God judge anyone if he has made the choice and it's not based on anything in man? In verse 20, Paul answers the pride of the question and he's assuming a contentious kind of question here. He says,

20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?

Paul says, "Who are you to question God?" speaking to this hypothetical objector. "Who are you to question God? Let's remember the order of the universe here. God is the Creator and you are a creature. God is holy and you are a sinner. God is infinite, you are bound in time. God is omniscient and you are finite. On what basis, O man, do you bring accusation against God for what he does?" There is no answer to that. Scripture silences the pride of man at this point completely.

Then Paul goes on and adds an illustration that is extraordinarily helpful in verse 21. He says,

21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

Here's the question, a common simple illustration. Picture a potter in a shop and he's got different vessels that he needs to make. A really expensive beautiful vessel and one that is just going to be used for common purposes, used as a dumping pot, and he's got a lump of clay in front of him. Isn't it the potter's prerogative to say, "I'll take this portion of the clay and make the honorable vessel and I'll use this portion of the clay and make the common vessel"? Isn't it the potter's prerogative to do that? Would the clay, and this is what he's saying in verse 20, is the clay going to tell the potter, "Hey, you can't do that"? It's just absurd. Do you know what's more absurd than personifying clay and making it make accusations against its potter, do you know what's more absurd than that is having man make questions and accusations against God. That's absurd. If the potter can choose his clay, cannot God choose what he's going to do with his creatures? Can't he determine in advance what he's going to do?

Now, mark it, God was not arbitrary but his reasons were not man-centered. You see, we just want ourselves to be at the center of everything. God doesn't look at it that way. His reasons were not man-centered. Look at verse 22, Paul says,

22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even

us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

There's a mouthful in those three verses but notice this: why does God elect some and not others? Why does he determine that some will receive salvation, why did he determine that and that others would not? It's right here in the text: to show his wrath; to make known his power; to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy. God did this not for an arbitrary reason but not for a man-centered reason, God did it for the highest, loftiest purposes possible, he did it to display his glory. When the redeemed are with God forever and judgment has taken place, we are going to see a manifestation of the glory of God that surpasses anything that eye could see or ear could hear or tongue could declare. We are going to see with certainty that God is a wrath who hates sin and that sent has its consequences and rebellion against God is always dealt with in the end. That's worthy of glory. We are going to see that God had mercy on us and that this was no minor mercy; that this wasn't something incidental, that the grace that saved you in contrast with the judgment upon the wicked, was vast, it was unspeakably great, it was an act of incomprehensible goodness from God to you. And that is going to be more clearly seen and known because there will be something to contrast it with and the contrast also from your own sin and guilt and the fact that God did not give you the judgment you deserved but rather gave you grace and salvation forever and ever and ever amen, that's going to make him glorious in your eyes. And beloved, whether people on the street think that's a good reason or not, that's the greatest reason of all. This is a high and lofty reason why God would deal with some in election and some in reprobation.

Now, so what can we say about that? God chose – we're answering the question was he arbitrary? No, he was not. God chose according to his will to display his glory so that it would please him. That's the highest reason that could ever exist, a reason sufficient within God himself. And the basis upon which he chooses one individual and not another individual is not revealed to us but that doesn't diminish the purpose of God in it. Beloved, God is God, he does not owe us an explanation and so we step back just as we would, far more than we would from a police officer making an arrest, we step back and say, "That's not my jurisdiction. God, thank you for revealing it. Thank you for choosing me. Thank you for your grace on me. I will leave to you the rest and not probe any deeper."

Question 3: does reprobation make God the author of sin? You know, Paul says that God hardens whom he wishes and he alludes to the account of Pharaoh in Exodus. You remember that account where Moses once is telling Pharaoh, "Let my people go," and Scripture says alternately God hardened Pharaoh's heart, Pharaoh hardened his own heart, that aspect of it. How can we understand this? Oh, this is really really important. This is where we need to distinguish the way that God saves a man from the way that he hardens a man and this is so very important and I'll try to keep this brief. As I said earlier, when God saves someone, he does an active work in their heart. He does a work that only he can do. He shines light into the darkness. He causes someone to be born again. He opens their blind spiritual eyes and opens their deaf spiritual ears and he works on them and circumcise as their heart, so to speak, so that they are able to believe. God has to do that

because man cannot do that for himself and in John 6:44 Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." So election means that God has determined that he would do a work in that heart, an active, positive, proactive work on his part to actively work faith into their heart and give them new life in order that they may believe. You could say it this way: God draws men out of sin to Christ when he saves them. Okay? It's simple, plain. Watch this because this makes everything so clear: he does not need to draw men to sin and rebellion. They're already there. They are already in sin. They are already loving sin and so God doesn't have to do anything to them in order to carry out his decree of reprobation. In reprobation, God – watch this, this is so very important – God does not push men into sin that they do not want. He does not actively push them into unbelief or into any manner of rebellion that they would not otherwise have already pursued. Rather what God does is he lets them go their own way. You can think about Romans 1. We should turn there but we won't simply for the sake of time. God handed them over to their sin, Romans 1:24, 26, 28. God handed them over. He let them go their own way. And beloved, what happens when men pursue the unbelief in their own heart? They end up far from God.

Beloved, mark this, mark and connect it with what we have said earlier about their sin: God leaves them, God leaves the reprobate, he leaves them to their sin and unbelief which they prefer anyway. That is what they want, God says, "You can have what you wish." And in that way, election is different from reprobation. There is not symmetry. There is not equal ultimacy, to use the term that theologians sometimes banter about. God actively works in the elect, he hardens men by letting them go, not by creating fresh evil in their hearts. So God works in the elect, he passes over the reprobate, he made that decree in eternity past but the judgment for the sin takes place in time after men have had their full of sin.

Now one last hard question and it's a good thing I kept going: does reprobation keep men from coming to Christ? That's a key question. Does reprobation keep men from coming to Christ? And the answer to that is: no, it does not. It does not keep them from coming to Christ at all. First of all, remember that God has not published rosters of the elect and the non-elect. We don't know whose names are written in the book of life and who aren't and so that's not revealed to us. But understand this, there are two aspects to this as well. Men reject Christ. Why does a man reject the Gospel? Why does a man refuse to come to Christ? It's not because of the decree of God. Scripture is definitive, men refuse to come to Christ because they are not willing to come to Christ.

In John 3, turn to John 3 very quickly. In John 3:19 and 20 Jesus said,

19 This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

They don't come because they don't want to surrender their sin. That's why they have no knowledge of the decree of God, they have no revelation of the decree of God. They don't

come because they don't want to. Jesus said by contrast so that there would never be any question about who is culpable in damnation, Jesus said in John 6:37, "the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." The Gospel call goes to all men freely and sincerely. We preach to every man everywhere what is absolutely true. Jesus Christ will save you from your sin if you come to him in humble faith. And that should always be said whenever this doctrine is taught, that the Gospel message is that everyone who believes in Christ will be saved, and when men reject that, they do so out of their own hostility to God. Sinners everywhere can know that Jesus Christ saves without speculating on the nature of God's decrees. That is grace.

What can we close on tonight for those of us that are the redeemed? We will give R. C. Sproul the final word tonight. "Christ came to seek and to save people who were really lost. God sent him into the world not only to make our salvation possible but to make it sure. Christ has not died in vain. His sheep are saved through his sinless life and his atoning death and there is nothing arbitrary in that." We proclaim a Gospel that says everyone who believes in Christ may be saved. Men reject that out of their own rebellion. Think about it this way: Judas betrayed Christ not because he was preordained, the motivation for Judas to betray Christ was that he wanted 30 pieces of silver, not because he was forced to do that by God. It was what he wanted to do.

So we realize with fear and trembling that the destinies of men are in the hand of God and we realize that God has appointed the preaching of the Gospel that men could be saved from their sin and God makes the promise to you here tonight if you believe in Christ you will most certainly be saved. That's all you need to know. That's all a sinner needs to respond to.

Let's pray together.

Father, we bow before you in these difficult matters. We acknowledge that these are hard things to understand, but at the bottom root of it all, Father, is the reality that you are God, that salvation belongs to you, it is your gift to give. We who are in Christ rejoice and thank you for undeserved grace. We thank you that you purposed to do that in our hearts before time began. For those who are here and not in Christ, Father, guard them from speculating on the nature of your decrees and rather hear the call of Christ, "The one who comes to me, I will certainly not cast out." Let the promise of grace motivate them to come to Christ for salvation and for that, Father, we will give you glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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