

LESSONS ON PREDESTINATION #88
"Election of Dying Infants - A Theological Testimony"
(Scriptures from NKJV)

Matthew 18:14 -

Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

INTRODUCTION: This is the ninth in the sub-series entitled "The Election of Dying Infants." It is entitled "A Theological Testimony." In it we will provide quotes from a number of great preachers and theologians who also believe that all infants who die go to heaven. In doing so, they reject the view of "Infant Damnation," along with the position that the "Bible is Silent" on the matter and "We Don't Know" the destiny of dying infants. We have examined a large amount of data relating to the topic.

In the last four lessons, we have presented four instances in which the Bible leads to the conclusion that the people and the statements which were involved required the belief that all infants dying in infancy went to heaven. This leads to the conclusion that the people in the Bible held to a common belief that all infants dying in infancy are elect and go directly to heaven upon their death. They would have had no basis for believing otherwise. They certainly did not believe in the "We Don't Know" view.

We will now call to the witness stand the theological testimony to speak to the issue.

A. Theology Defined.

1. The word "theology" is a compound word containing a suffix. "*Theos*" referring to God, and the suffix, "*ology*" referring to the "study of." It is a science or knowledge. Theology has been called the "queen of the Sciences."

2. A theologian is one well versed in theology. How well versed one is in his theology depends upon how diligent he has been in applying himself to the study of the topic. While, in one sense, it can be said that all men are theologians, in that all men have views on the nature of God and His works, nevertheless, in another sense, it is understood that to be considered a theologian requires that a person manifest he has acquired a vast amount of information on the subject, and possess the ability to articulate it to others in a clear and comprehensive manner.

A theologian is a person who has not only become proficient in his views, but has acquainted himself with opposing views on the topics involved. This allows him to be able to see how others reach the conclusions which they do. Many who teach the Bible only acquaint themselves with the position to which they hold. Then they only read the writings which support their positions. This prevents them from ever becoming theologians even though they can present their arguments in a most dogmatic fashion.

Meanwhile, other Bible teachers confine themselves to teaching certain Bible precepts, which may be true in themselves, but are detached from the rest of the Bible as a whole. This prevents them and their hearers from ever getting the main purpose or purposes to which God would have us to know. This method handles the Bible as a whole like the book of Proverbs is written. Proverbs contains short concise statements of truth which are true, but are able to stand alone, disconnected from companion truths. But the Bible is not a book of Aphorisms (short unconnected sentences) with each verse having a message independent of all others. The Bible's message is meant to establish a coherent belief system. Thus, any application of a passage to an issue should be in harmony with other relevant passages. This produces what is known as "Systematic Theology."

The men I have chosen to speak to the issue of Infant Election unto salvation all belong, for the most part, to the position known as Reformed or Calvinistic. They represent those whose ministries have been respected even by those who belong to other viewpoints. Let us now begin.

B. Testimonies Given by Those Theologians Who Hold to the Universal Salvation of all Infants Who Die in Infancy.

1. Charles Spurgeon:

Dr. Gill, who has been looked upon in late times as being a very standard of Calvinism, not to say of ultra-Calvinism, himself never hints for a moment the supposition that any infant has perished, but affirms of it that it is a dark and mysterious subject, but that it is his belief, and he thinks he has Scripture to warrant it, that they who have fallen asleep in infancy have not perished, but have been numbered with the chosen of God, and so have entered into eternal rest. We have never taught the contrary, and when the charge is brought, I repudiate it and say, "You may have said so, we never did, and you know we never did. If you dare to repeat the slander again, let the lie stand in scarlet on your very cheek if you be capable of a blush." We have never dreamed of such a thing. With very few and rare exceptions, so rare that I never heard of them except from the lips of slanderers, we have never imagined that infants dying as infants have perished, but we have believed that they enter into the paradise of God.

On what ground, then, do we believe the child to be saved? We believe it to be as lost as the rest of mankind, and as truly condemned by the sentence which said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." It is saved because it is *elect*. In the compass of election, in the Lamb's Book of Life, we believe there shall be found written millions of souls who are only shown on earth, and then stretch their wings for heaven. They are saved, too, because they were *redeemed* by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. He who shed his blood for all his people, bought them with the same price with which he redeemed their parents, and therefore are they saved because Christ was sponsor for them, and suffered in their room and stead. They are saved,

again not without *regeneration*, for, "except a man"—the text does not mean an adult man but a person, a being of human race—"except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." No doubt, in some mysterious manner the Spirit of God regenerates the infant soul, and it enters into glory made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. That this is possible is proved from Scripture instances. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb. We read of Jeremiah also, that the same had occurred to him; and of Samuel we find that while yet a babe the Lord called him. We believe, therefore, that even before the intellect can work, God, who worketh not by the will of man, nor by blood, but by the mysterious agency of his Holy Spirit, creates the infant soul a new creature in Christ Jesus, and then it enters into the "rest which remaineth for the people of God." By election, by redemption, by regeneration, the child enters into glory, by the selfsame door by which every believer in Christ Jesus hopes to enter, and in no other way. If we could not suppose that children could be saved in the same way as adults, if it would be necessary to suppose that God's justice must be infringed, or that his plan of salvation must be altered to suit their cases, then we should be in doubt; but we can see that with the same appliances, by the same plan, on precisely the same grounds, and through the same agencies, the infant soul can behold the Savior a face in glory everlasting, and therefore we are at ease upon the matter. (Spurgeon, *Infant Salvation*, No. 411)

2. Martyn Lloyd Jones:

The other argument is that about children, especially about infants. Now we all believe, do we not, that there are infants and children who have gone and who will go to heaven and spend their eternity in the presence of God. Now how can a child be saved? Obviously every infant needs to be saved. If you believe in the doctrine of the fall and in the doctrine of original sin, you must believe that every child is born in sin and 'shapen in iniquity' (Ps. 51:5); every child is dead in trespasses and in sins (Eph. 2:21). They all inherit original sin and original guilt from Adam, every child that is born. How, then, can any child be saved? How can any child ever go to heaven?

Now, if you want to insist upon the fact that regeneration always follows upon hearing the word and believing it and accepting it – how can an infant be saved? The infant cannot receive truth, it does not have the ability; it does not have understanding, it has not awakened to these things. So is there no hope for any infant? We do not believe that, we obviously reject such a suggestion. And the answer is, of course, that a child is regenerated in exactly the same way as anybody else, because it is the action of this almighty being, of God Himself through the Holy Spirit. He can implant the seed of spiritual life, in an unconscious infant with the same ease as He can do it in an adult person. Therefore you see why it is important for us to consider whether regeneration is something that happens indirectly through the word or whether it is indeed the direct operation of God upon us. And I am teaching again, as I did in the last lecture, that it is immediate, direct, it is God creating anew as He created the world out of nothing at the beginning. (From *Great Doctrines of the Bible, Effectual Calling and Election*).

3. Benjamin Warfield:

After giving a long dissertation on the history and teachings on infant salvation, Warfield concludes with this statement:

If all infants dying in infancy are saved, it is certain that they are not saved by or through the ordinances of the visible Church (for they have not received them), nor through their own improvement of a grace common to all men (for they are incapable of activity); it can only be through the almighty operation of the Holy Spirit who worketh when and where and how He pleaseth, through whose ineffable grace the Father gathers these little ones to the home He has prepared for them. But if it stand, it can stand on no other theological basis than the Reformed. (Warfield, *Studies In Theology*, p. 444, Banner Edition).

4. Charles Hodge:

All who die in infancy are saved. This is inferred from what the Bible teaches of the analogy between Adam and Christ. "As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." (Rom. v. 18, 19.) We have no right to put any limit on these general terms, except what the Bible itself places upon them. The Scriptures nowhere exclude any class of infants, baptized or unbaptized, born in Christian or in heathen lands, of believing or unbelieving parents, from the benefits of the redemption of Christ. (Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 26 Eerdman's).

5. R. A. Webb: Former professor of Systematic Theology, Southwestern Presbyterian University.

Webb's book entitled "The Theology of Infant Salvation" is by far the best work on the topic. It is full and complete and addresses all the major questions and provides the answers. In his introduction, he states his position in advance and then labors to prove it. He thus states:

To insure against any possible misunderstanding of me—to protect me against any infelicities of expression I may make in this discussion—I here explicitly set it down that I consciously, intelligently, firmly, and devoutly believe that all infants, idiots, and incapables, living and dying in moral incompetency, are finally saved and glorified in heaven. (Webb, *Theology of Infant Salvation*, p. 9, Sprinkle Publications)

6. John Calvin: Calvin has been widely charged with believing in "Infant Damnation." This is not true. He believed infants were born as sinners and needed to be saved, but he did not believe in the damnation of infants. In the Amsterdam edition of his work, 8:552 we read:

I do not doubt that the infants whom the Lord gathers together from this life are regenerated by a secret operation of the Holy Spirit."

Furthermore, In his Institutes book 4, ch. 16, he speaks of the idea of infants being excluded from the grace of salvation. "An idea not free from execrable blasphemy." Also, The Presbyterian and Reformed Review of October, 1890: 631-651 quoted Calvin as follows:

I everywhere teach that no one can be justly condemned and perish except on account of actual sin; and to say that the countless mortals taken from life while yet infants are precipitated from their mother's arms into eternal death is a blasphemy to be universally detested.

7. Lorraine Boettner:

All of these dying in infancy are among the elect. The doctrine of infant salvation finds a logical place in the Calvinistic system; for the redemption of the soul is thus infallibly determined irrespective of any faith, repentance, or good works, whether actual or foreseen. It does not, however, find a logical place in Arminianism or any other system. Furthermore, it would seem that a system such as Arminianism, which suspends salvation on a personal act of rational choice, would logically demand that those dying in infancy must either be given another period of probation after death, in order that their destiny may be fixed, or that they must be annihilated. (Boettner, *Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, pp. 144-148).

8. Al Mohler:

I am convinced that those who die in infancy and early childhood—along with the severely cognitively impaired—go to Heaven when they die. That is quite a claim, but it stands within the main steam of orthodox Christian theology throughout the centuries, and I believe it is biblically and theologically sustainable. (Mohler's article "*In the Shadows of Death – The Little Ones are Safe With Jesus*").

9. John Piper:

The point for us is that even though we human beings are under the penalty of everlasting judgment and death because of the fall of our race into sin and the sinful nature that we all have, nevertheless God only executes this judgment on those who have the natural capacity to see his glory and understand his will, and refuse to embrace it as their treasure. Infants, I believe, do not yet have that capacity; and therefore, in God's inscrutable way, he brings them under the forgiving blood of his Son. (Piper, "What Happens to Infants Who Die?" p. 2/3).

10. John MacArthur:

However, when Adam and Eve sinned, death came on all, and death comes to all, and it comes to many in infancy and childhood. I suppose it would be an educated guess to say that perhaps half of the people ever conceived die before they reach any level of maturity. And again I ask the question, "How does God deal with them?" Is the answer comforting? Is the answer encouraging? Is the answer hopeful? Or is it discouraging? Do they go instantly to heaven? Why did I say that? I'm not the first one to try to deal with this, but there are a lot of people who aren't dealing with it today.

I was on a panel at a conference, a large conference, with three other pastors and it was a question and answer panel and I was sitting up there with these other very fine pastors whom I love and respect. And one of the questions

came from the audience was, "What happens to babies that die?" They went down the first three and the answer in each case was "I don't know," which isn't very comforting. It puts me in a terrible spot because when they came to me, I said, "They go to heaven. They go to heaven." And I tried to give a brief explanation of why I believe that's true. (MacArthur, *"The Salvation of Babies Who Die"*)

11. Curt Daniel:

There is, however, one other major problem, "How are dying infants actually saved?" Our answer is as follows. First the Golden Chain still applies to dying infants. They are saved by the same links as adults; election by the Father, atonement by the Son, and regeneration by the Spirit. If all dying infants are saved, as we have shown, then it is sure that they were elected to this salvation. This election is totally by sovereign grace, not on the basis of foreseen faith (for there was no faith to foresee). Among other things, the election and salvation of dying infants proves that election was of free grace and not according to anything we ourselves do.

It follows that all dying infants were elected as a class. God could have elected all, elected some or elected none. All were damnable and "reprobable." But He sovereignly chose to choose them all, just as He sovereignly chose to elect all unfallen angels as a class and reprobate all fallen angels as a class. That God does not elect all adult humans as a class does not mean that He could not elect all dying infants as a class. And that is exactly what He did. (Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism*, "How are Dying Infants Saved?" A. & B., p. 340).

12. Augustus Strong:

Strong gives six reasons as to why he believes in the universal salvation of all infants dying in infancy. The sixth reason is stated in this manner:

At the final judgment, personal conduct is made the test of character. But infants are incapable of personal transgression. We have reason, therefore, to believe that they will be among the saved, since this rule of decision will not apply to them. (Strong, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, p. 662, Revell Edition).

13. Al Mohler:

Mohler defends the "Elect Infant" clause as found in the Presbyterian Confession known as the *Westminster Confession* along with the *Baptist Confession of 1689*. The clause has been used by the opponents to say that the confessions teach that there are some non-elect infants who die in infancy and go to Hell. Mohler correctly states:

Even the *Westminster Confession*, the most authoritative Reformed confession, states the matter only in the positive sense, affirming that all elect infants are received into Heaven. It does not require belief in the existence of any non-elect infants. Those who insist that all we can say is that elect infants are saved while non-elect infants are not, confuse the issue by assuming or presuming the existence of non-elect infants and leaving the

matter there.

C. Summary.

The men whom I have chosen are representatives of the vast majority of Reformed and Calvinistic men who hold to the same view which I am espousing. Many more could have been called upon to affirm the topic as addressed but space does not permit it. I hope this will give young pastors courage to speak out on the issue and give parents, who have lost an infant, comfort and hope they will be united with their child if they are believers themselves.