

Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, Lesson # 34
Objections to the Doctrine of Predestination - It Discourages Motives To Exertion

I. Predestination Discourages All Motives to Exertion

The objection that the doctrine of Predestination discourages all motives to exertion is based on the fallacy that the ends are determined without reference to the means. It is not merely a few isolated events here and there that have been foreordained, but the whole chain of events, with all of their inter-relations and connections. All of parts form a unit in the Divine plan. If the means should fail, so would the ends. If God has purposed that a man shall reap, He has also purposed that he shall sow. If God has ordained a man to be saved, He has also ordained that he shall hear the Gospel, and that he shall believe and repent. As well might the farmer refuse to till the soil according to the laws disclosed by the light of nature and experience until he had first learned what was the secret purpose of God to be executed in His providence in regard to the fruitfulness of the coming season, as for anyone to refuse to work in the moral and spiritual realms because he does not know what fruitage God may bring from his labor. We find, however, that the fruitage is commonly bestowed where the preliminary work has been faithfully performed. If we engage in the Lord's service and make diligent use of the means which He has prescribed, we have the great encouragement of knowing that it is by these very means that He has determined to accomplish His great work.

Even those who accept the Scripture statements that God "worketh all things after the counsel of His will," and similar declarations to the effect that God's providential control extends to all the events of their lives, know that this does not interfere in the slightest with their freedom. Do those who make this objection allow their belief in the Divine sovereignty to determine their conduct in temporal affairs? Do they decline food when hungry, or medicine when sick, because God has appointed the time and manner of their death? Do they neglect the recognized means of acquiring wealth or distinction because God gives riches and honor to whom He pleases? When in matters outside of religion one recognizes God's sovereignty, yet works in the exercise of conscious freedom, is it not sinful and foolish to offer as an excuse for neglecting his spiritual and eternal welfare the contention that he is not free and responsible?

Since the future events are hidden and unknown to us we should be as industrious in our work and as earnest in the performance of our duty as if nothing had been decreed concerning it...Luther's observation here was: "We are commanded to work the more for this very reason, because all things future are to us uncertain; as saith Ecclesiastes, 'In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or weather they both shall be alike good,' Eccl. 11: 6. All things future, I say are to us uncertain in knowledge, but necessary in event. The necessity strikes into us fear of God that we presume not, or become secure, while the uncertainty works in us a trusting that we sink not into despair."

Some may be inclined to say, If nothing but the creative power of God can enable us to repent and believe, then all we can do is to wait passively until that power is exerted. Or it may be asked, If we cannot effect our salvation, why work for it?

II. The Means as Well as the Ends are Foreordained

The objection is sometimes made that this system encourages men to be careless and indifferent about their moral conduct and their growth in grace, on the ground that their eternal welfare has already been secured. This objection is primarily directed against the doctrines of Election, and the Perseverance of the Saints.

This objection, however,...is completely answered by the great principle which we hold and teach, namely, that the means as well as the ends are foreordained...the election of some to the eternal enjoyment of heaven includes their election to holiness here. It is not the individual as such, but the individual as holy and virtuous that is predestinated to eternal life.

In the plainest of language Paul taught that the very purpose of election is, "That we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love," Eph. 1:4; that we are "foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son," Rom. 8:29; and that "God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth," II Thess. 2:13. "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed," Acts 13:48. The predestinated, called, justified, glorified ones are the same, Rom. 8:29,30. Therefore the purpose of God according to election must stand, Rom. 9:11.

WCF 3.6 As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

The Scriptures know of no perseverance which is not a perseverance in holiness, and they give no encouragement to any sense of security which is not connected with a present and ever increasing holiness. Virtue and piety, therefore, are the effect and not the cause of election, for which no cause is to be assigned except God's sovereign good pleasure. It is true that some become much more advanced in holiness here and continue in that state over a much longer period of time than do others; yet it is vain for any who do not partake in some degree of holiness in this world to hope to enjoy happiness in the next. All those whom God has designed to render perfectly happy in eternity, He has designed to make in part happy in this world; and as holiness is essential to the happiness of an intelligent creature, so there is begun in them in this world that holiness without which no one shall see the Lord.

III. Practical Results

The genuine tendency of these truths...is not to make men indolent and careless, nor to lull them to sleep on the lap of presumption and carnal security, but to energize and to inspire confidence. Both reason and experience teach us that the greater one's hope of success, the stronger becomes the motive to exertion. The person who is sure of success in the use of appropriate means has the strongest of incentives to work, while on the other hand, where there is but little hope there will be but little disposition for one to exert himself; and where there is no hope, there will be no exertion. The Christian, then, who has before him the definite commands of God, and the promise that the work of those who obediently and reverently avail themselves of the appointed means shall be blessed, has the highest possible motives for exertion. Furthermore, he is elevated and inspired by the firm conviction that he himself is marked out for a heavenly crown.