

LESSONS ON PREDESTINATION #8
"Searching the Scriptures"
(Scriptures from NKJV)

NOTE: Much of the text herein is quoted directly or paraphrased from the book, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* by Lorraine Boettner.

This will be the eighth lesson in the series on Predestination, and the title of this lesson is "Searching the Scriptures." Last week we gave you an outline of the three basic systems of theology. To set the setting for today's lesson, I want us to go over that outline again and refresh our thinking as to what each system basically teaches. All Christians can be placed into one of these systems, although a number of Christians who do not like to defend their positions, do not want to be placed in any of them. That rather gives them a ground upon which they will not have to argue and discuss their differences.

The first system that is held by advocates of the Christian faith is the Pelagian or the Socinian system. In that system we saw that **"Man saves himself."** That system denies the depravity of man, that Adam's sin had no effect on Adam's offspring, so that man has full ability to do whatever God tells him to do.

The second system is a Semi-Pelagian or a modification of Pelagianism. It is also known as Arminianism. This system holds to total depravity, but it denies total inability in that it holds that when the infant is born, God places a common grace upon all men to offset their depravity, so they are enabled to do whatever God commands them to do. Therefore, they deny that they are Calvinists, but also deny that they are Pelagian. Under this system, it is believed that **"Man saves himself with God's help."**

The third system is that of the Calvinistic or the Augustinian system, that God must save sinners all by Himself, because of their total depravity and their total inability. Therefore, this system believes that **"God saves sinners."** Now, let us repeat these systems out loud:

The 1st system known as Pelagianism believes that "Man saves himself."

The 2nd system known as Semi-Pelagianism believes that "Man saves himself with God's help."

The 3rd system known as Calvinism believes that "God saves sinners."

Now lets pursue how these different systems fit into Scripture, because we hold that the Scriptures are the final authority by which these systems are to be judged. Each one of these systems should bring their belief systems to the Bible. In all matters of controversy between Christians, the Scriptures are accepted as the highest or supreme court of appeal, and historically they have been the common authority of Christendom. Sadly, that is no longer true, as many other ideas and systems have replaced the Bible as the sole authority.

However, we believe that the Bible contains one harmonious and sufficiently complete system of doctrine or teaching; that all of the parts of the Bible are consistent with each other; and that it is our duty to trace out this consistency and harmony by a careful investigation of the meaning of individual or particular passages. That is, the Scriptures must interpret Scripture, so that we are not at liberty to take just one passage of Scripture and then say, "this is what I believe about the Bible and what it says." That particular passage of Scripture must fit in with the totality of all other Scripture so that we come up with an understanding that there are no contradictions contained in God's word. The Word of God is the great and final tribunal before which all beliefs must be brought, and by which they must be tried. The truthfulness or the falsity of our belief is measured by the corresponding agreement or the diversity from that form of doctrine which is set forth in the unerring revelation that God has given to us in His inspired Word. We will never come to a full understanding of the doctrine of Predestination if we do not begin with a high view of Scripture. If we do not hold to the verbal, plenary written full revelation of God in the Word, then we will never have correct ideas about our doctrine. So it is by this authority that Calvinism as a system must be tried and tested. It is by the authority of the Bible that the Pelagian system must be tried and tested. It is by the authority of the Bible that the Arminian or the Semi-Pelagian system must be tried and tested. If one professes to be a Christian, then that person professes to believe something, and their beliefs are open to be tested by the Bible. You cannot say, "I believe something," and refuse to be corrected or have to defend that position system by the Bible itself.

Now there are two texts of Scripture that I would like for us to examine. First turn to Acts 17 beginning with verse 10. I am reading from the King James Version this morning. There are a couple of words in this text that I prefer over even the New King James Version and some of the other newer translations. ***"And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These (that is, in this synagogue) were more noble (other translations have "fair minded") than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few."*** Do you see the significance that Luke places upon the Bible, and that it is a duty for those who profess to love God and to follow His teachings, that they search the Scriptures to find out and test all belief systems? So when Paul went into this particular synagogue, he expected that what he was going to teach had to fit in with the Bible, the Old Testament Scriptures. He was not offended, in fact, he would have been offended if someone believed whatever he said if he was not able to show it in the Scriptures. So may God give us that sense of nobility that "fair-mindedness" that we open our minds to what the Scriptures have to say.

Secondly, turn to II Timothy chapter 3, beginning in verse 14: ***"You must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them."*** Paul is explaining to Timothy that he has learned something and that he should continue in what he has learned. What has Timothy learned, and where did he learn it? Verse 15: ***"And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."***

Timothy had been taught as a child the faith of God. He had been taught by his mother and grandmother, and he had become a believer. Now Paul tells him that he is to continue in what he has learned in the Scriptures. Why? Verse 16: ***"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine."*** In other words, there are no sections of Scripture that a Christian has liberty to reject or ignore. ***"All Scripture is profitable for doctrine."*** And yet we hear today from every angle, "I don't want doctrine, I just want Jesus." That is an oxymoron - a contradiction in terms. Because doctrine means "teaching." So in making that statement, you are saying "I don't want any teaching, I just want Jesus." Can you see the ignorance that this displays, and that it is not commendable to the advancement of the Christian faith? The Bible is to be trusted. All of it, the whole counsel of God, is to be taught. Then, in addition to doctrine, what is the Bible profitable for? Verses 16-17: ***"for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."***

These are a couple of passages of Scripture to show us that if we are going to discuss anything, and particular our topic of the doctrine of election, we must appeal to the Scriptures as the final authority. So it is by this standard and this standard alone that every form of belief, be it religious, or be it scientific, must be tried by the Scriptures; and if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them. We must hold to the full, verbal inspiration of the Word of God. It is the only authority in all matters, and we assert that no doctrine can be true, or essential, if it does not find a place in this Word of God.

This being the introduction to our lesson, it is obvious that the truth or the falsehood of the profound doctrine of Predestination can be decided only by divine revelation. It is not to be decided by my emotions or my feelings. It is not to be decided by my family and how I react to them. Whatever I believe about the doctrine of Predestination must be decided by the Bible and the Bible alone. Therefore all systems should be willing to expose themselves to the Bible. No person, acting merely on his own observations and judgments, can know and understand the basic principles of the plan which God is following. Philosophical speculation and all abstract reasoning should be held in abeyance until we have first heard the testimony of Scripture, or "thus saith the Lord." We can let our minds delve out into philosophy and various other speculations and abstract reasonings, but those must be guarded until we first of all have established the belief system of what the Bible has to say

about it, not what Aristotle or Plato thought about the issues. When we have heard the testimony of the Scriptures, then we should humbly submit to its authority. Would that we had more people with that noble character of the Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily to see whether or not these things were so.

I happened to be talking to Sister Rhonda after the services last Sunday, and we were discussing the lesson. She brought up that many of her friends and family were so opposed to the doctrine of Predestination that they won't even discuss it with her. They view her as somewhat of an oddity when they have family gatherings, and that she is sort of the one who doesn't fit it. Of course, you are made to feel like an oddball if you are the only one in a congregation or a group of people that believes in this manner. Now what I have said already, and I will say it this time to Rhonda and to all of us, because all of us can relate to this. If our family and friends refuse to discuss the doctrine of Predestination, we need to understand that election is found in the Bible, and you must believe something about it. Our friends and family members are setting themselves up as an authority above the Bible and in essence saying, "we will discuss this part of the Bible, but we will not discuss this other part." Rather than the Bible becoming THE authority, they have made themselves the authority over the Bible, the same way in which the Roman church has made itself the authority over the Bible. That must be rejected. Rhonda raised the question, "what do I do when they won't even talk about the issue?" If after a certain time individuals make it clear that they do not want to discuss the matter, then don't discuss it any further. Wait until they bring up the issue again.

In connection with each of the doctrines that we have discussed thus far in the previous lessons, we have presented a large mass of Scriptural evidence – evidence that is both direct and inferential – evidence which cannot be answered or explained away – evidence greatly superior in strength and clarity to any that can be provided from the other side; that is, the other systems of theology, the Pelagian and the Semi-Pelagian. It is far easier to defend the Calvinistic belief system from the Bible than it is the Pelagian and the Semi-Pelagian. In most cases, those who hold to those two systems basically end up just settling down with certain sections of the Bible, and refusing to discuss the totality of the authority of the Bible. In a similar manner, this is what the Jehovah Witnesses do with their understanding of the Bible. I am told by those who supposedly are in the know that the Jehovah Witnesses actually make use of only about 4% of the Bible. They have certain favorite texts such as "the 144,000 in the Book of Revelation," and that is their gospel, so to speak. But what is the difference between someone who only uses 4% of the Bible and someone who uses 98-99% of the Bible, but rejects 1% of it? They are still setting themselves up as an authority over the Bible.

The evidence that we have presented thus far in the Bible shows that it unfolds a scheme of redemption which is Calvinistic from beginning to end, and that these doctrines are taught with such inescapable clearness that the question should be settled for all of those who accept the Bible as the Word of God. These doctrines are set forth in a most impressive way. The simplicity in which they are given makes them all the more impressive. Should anyone ask us the question, "are there any stars in the heavens?" Our answer would be, "the heavens are full of stars." (Psalm 8:3,4). If someone should ask, "are there any fishes in the sea?" Our answer would be, "the sea is full of fishes." (Psalm 104:25-27). If anyone ever asks, "are there any trees in the forest?" We reply, "the forest is full of trees." And in like manner, if anyone asks the question, "is the doctrine of Predestination in the Bible?" Our answer should be, "it is full of it." Our doctrine shows that the Bible is full of Predestination from Genesis to Revelation. It is not just a little isolated text in a certain section of Scripture, but it is found in the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation.

There are people who believe that the Bible teaches the doctrines of the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the personality of the Holy Spirit, the sinfulness of man, and the reality of future punishment such as Hell, but they refuse to accept these doctrines as true. These individuals are called "higher critics" or "rationalists." In other words, they believe that Jesus claimed to be God, the Bible teaches the sinfulness of man, that God is three in One, and the doctrine of eternal punishment, but they just don't believe these doctrines. It is a common thing to find in their writings that they admit the Apostles believed and taught the evangelical and Calvinistic doctrines of Predestination. The higher critics, the rationalists say, "Yes, that is what the Bible teaches." They go on to say that, with a strict application of the rules of exegesis or interpretation of Scripture, their statements cannot admit of any other interpretation; they admit this, but of course they do not consider themselves bound to accept the authority of any apostle. They just don't believe it. For example, they say such things that the Apostles' belief in these doctrines were "the erroneous notions of a crude and uncivilized age." Do you see the weight of their argument? The higher critics and the rationalists acknowledge that the Apostles taught the divine doctrine of Predestination.¹ Let this powerful argument sink into our minds. If an unbelieving rationalist acknowledges that the Bible teaches Predestination, but that the Bible is just wrong, that carries a great weight, because there are Christians who say they believe the Bible, but they don't believe in Predestination. At least I have the critics on my side. Let me illustrate. Suppose Bro. Jim is a higher critic, who doesn't believe in the final authority of the Bible. He says, "I acknowledge that I find the doctrine of Predestination in

¹ Incidentally, the Apostles are the final authority, in that the interpretation of the Bible, which had been given to the leaders of the Jews, was taken from them and transferred to the Apostles. We don't have time to show that in the gospels, but we believe and hold to the authority of Apostolic Christianity.

the Bible.” Then Bro. Asa, an Arminian, says he believes in the Bible, but he doesn’t believe in the doctrine of Predestination. Do you see that I have more in common with Bro. Jim than I have with Bro. Asa?

Asa says he believes the Bible, but he doesn’t believe the Bible teaches Predestination.

Jim says he doesn’t believe the Bible, but he believes the Bible teaches Predestination.

I believe in the authority of the Bible and I believe the Bible teaches Predestination. I have more agreement with a rationalistic unbeliever than I do with an Arminian. The rationalists ascribed the Apostles’ beliefs to these doctrines. So regardless of the fact that they don’t believe the Bible, this does not distract from the value of their testimony; that these passages critically interpreted, can have no other meaning than what they say. Furthermore, as I stated, we would prefer to have more fellowship with a rationalist than we would with someone who says they believe the Bible, but they don’t believe that the Bible teaches Predestination.

In this study, we will show that there is no great difficulty – no undue violence or straining of interpretation required, to interpret consistently with our doctrine the passages that we have already covered, which are brought forth in contrast by Arminians. That is, the Arminians have a selected group of Scriptures they believe cannot be harmonized with Calvinistic teachings. As the class progresses, we shall see that Calvinists do not have problems with what are called the “Arminian passages” of Scripture, such as, “Whosoever will, let him come.” We have no problem with that. “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord.” We have no problem with that. But the Arminians and the Pelagians have extreme difficulty trying to coincide the Calvinistic texts with their passages. That is why they don’t want to talk about them. When you start bringing up these issues, they become so uncomfortable that they refuse to discuss the matters. So basically what we are producing is a whole generation of individuals who want to call themselves Christians, but who reject the final authority of God’s Word. That is quite a statement.

I have no fear that the Calvinistic passages of Scripture can be overthrown by merely bringing other passages which would appear to contradict them, because there are no contradictions in the Bible. One system of theology does not have the liberty to collect its favorite passages and to reject the others. In other words, the Pelagians can’t pick out a little selected group of passages, the Semi-Pelagians cannot pick out their texts, and the Calvinists cannot pick out their texts. The Bible must be interpreted in such a way that the totality of Scripture is in perfect agreement with each other, not contradicting each other. So it does no good for these variant systems of theology to select their certain groups of Scriptures, and for them to meet and throw those texts at each other like throwing stones.

You get nowhere with that, because that is not the right way to interpret the Bible.

In the light of modern scientific exegesis, it is quite evident that the objections which are raised against the Calvinistic System are rather emotional and philosophical rather than exegetical. I must confess it is difficult, however, to get in touch with somebody's reality when they are ruled by emotions. People would rather "emote" than they would rather "interpret." If men had been content to interpret the language of Scripture according to the acknowledged principles of interpretation, the faith of Christians might have been far more harmonious. The opponents of Calvinism argue with some plausibility only when they are dealing with single passages, or particular classes of passages, but keeping out of view, or throwing into the background, the general mass of Scripture evidence bearing upon the whole subject. I will repeat that again. They love to pick out selected passages, but keep the rest of the Scripture out of sight.

Of course, in our culture in which we live, what is the favorite passage used by the Arminian or Free Will group? Is it not, John 3:16, "**For God so loved the world,** (meaning everybody) **that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.**" According to the contemporary Baptist, that verse settles it. So they live by that, and they refuse to fit in all of the other passages that are found elsewhere in the Scriptures. I love John 3:16 and have no problem with that verse. I don't try to avoid that text or any of the Bible, because it is all given by God.

As long as we hold to the Reformed and Calvinistic principle that the Scriptures alone are to be accepted as the sole authority in matters of doctrine, then the Calvinistic system will stand as the only one which adequately treats the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, and the doctrine of redemption through Christ Jesus, the Lord. The other two systems will have shortcomings.

As we begin to summarize the lesson this morning, let us bear in mind that to desire any more knowledge of Predestination than that which is found in the Word of God, indicates as great a folly as to try to see in the dark. Nor let us be ashamed to be ignorant of some things relative to a subject in which there is a kind of learned ignorance. In other words, we must start and stop where the Bible does in teaching about Predestination. We are not at liberty to delve into speculations which cannot be rooted in the revelation of that. I am not under obligation to explain these truths regarding how man can be a free agent and God can be sovereign? I am not under obligation to explain that. I am only under obligation to follow the truth of Scripture as far as it is presented. However, I am under obligation to state what God has revealed in His Word, and to vindicate these statements as far as possible from misconception and objections. In the nature of the case, what we can know concerning such profound truths is what the Spirit has seen fit to reveal concerning them.

We must stop there. Being confident that whatever God has revealed is undoubtedly true, and is to be believed, although we may not be able to sound its depths with our line of reasoning, we are not qualified to be God's counselors in these matters. It is His Word and we are His servants and must abide therein. God's judgments are a great deep. **"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord.**" (Isaiah 55:8). As well as I might attempt to swim the ocean is as well as I am able to fathom the judgments of God. Man knows far too little about God to justify Him in attempting to explain the mysteries of God's rule.

You may say, "Wait a minute. If you believe in Predestination, then tell me why God chose one person and not another." No, I do not have an obligation to tell you that. Why? Because the Bible doesn't give us an answer. It leaves the whole thing into the mystery of God's good pleasure. When I try to delve in and go beyond the Scripture, then I am violating the principle of the authority of the Bible and the Bible alone.

I close with a quote from Dr. Boettner in his book on Predestination. He makes this observation.

The importance of the subject discussed should lead us to proceed only with profoundest reverence and caution. While it is true that mysteries are to be handled with care, and while unwarranted and presumptuous speculations concerning divine things are to be avoided, yet if we would declare the Gospel in its purity and fullness we must be careful not to withhold from believers what is declared in the Scriptures concerning Predestination. That some of these truths will be perverted and abused by the ungodly is to be expected. No matter how plainly it is taught in Scripture, the unenlightened mind considers it as absurd, for instance, that one God should exist in three persons, or that God should foreknow the entire course of world events, so that His plan should include the destiny of every person.

That seems absurd to an unenlightened mind. An unenlightened mind is someone who has not been exposed to the Scriptures. While we can know only as much about Predestination as God has seen fit to reveal, it is important that we shall know that much; otherwise it would not have been revealed. Where Scriptures leads, we may safely follow. I am going to repeat that last sentence again: **While we can know only as much about Predestination as God has seen fit to reveal, it is important that we shall know that much; otherwise it would not have been revealed.** That is a simple, but profound statement. If it is not in the Bible, then it should be rejected. But if it is in the Bible, God has seen some purpose in putting it there, for we just read at the opening of our lesson, that **"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable."** (II Timothy 3:16). God wants His people to know something about the doctrine of Predestination. I ask, "Why is it kept so secret in so many churches and from so many people who profess Christianity?" I don't know of the number of pastors who have said, "Yes, Jim, I believe

these things are in the Bible, but I can't teach them." When I ask, "why," they say, "because it would cause too much of a fuss in our church, and people would start leaving." Does God not have a right to ask a minister, who says he believes in Calvinistic doctrine, but he can't preach Calvinistic doctrine, "why are you ashamed of Me?"

Jim Gunn: The Word says, "Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, I will be ashamed of them." (Cf. Luke 9:26).

That is a good answer. I was going to put it like this, "If you are ashamed of teaching this, why did I put it in My word?" How would I answer that if I were in that position? I would have to drop my head in shame and say there are some things in the Bible, Lord, which are just not profitable. Peter said, **"Master, this is a hard saying."** (John 6:60). Do you not realize that people are going away over this saying? What did Jesus reply to Peter? **"Does this offend you?"** (Verse 61) and later, **"Will you also go away?"** (Verse 67). In my former denomination, I had friends and acquaintances that loved me, and when I announced that I was going to embrace the doctrine of Calvinism, with tears in their eyes and arms hugging my neck, they pleaded with me not to do so. They were humble men who loved me. They said, "Jim, if you do that, you will ruin your ministry." Now, fifty-one years later, I can say from one perspective, they were right, because far more people have left my ministry than have followed my ministry. From another perspective though, they were wrong. For it is not MY ministry if it is not built upon the Word of God. **"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"** (Joshua 24:15). I grieve over every friend and family member who has parted ways with us over these teachings, because they are not merely based upon isolated fragments of the Bible, they are found throughout the entirety of the Word of God.

Asa: Do you think those pastors who you are speaking of, that their ministries are THEIR ministries, and not GOD'S ministries? Psalm 127:1 says, **"Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it."**

It is interesting that you bring that up, Bro. Asa, because they quote and believe that same passage of Scripture, **"Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it."** That is a complex question which cannot be given a simple answer, because it would be a misrepresentation of the whole body. There are men in the ministry who are hirelings, who are in it to promote themselves. I recall a young man, who I preached his ordination council, and in that setting there were maybe a dozen Baptist ministers there, along with the Director of Missions of that Association. Before I preached, the Director of Missions got up and encouraged the church with this statement: "This is a gifted young man that God has given you. Now I want you to know folks, he is going to go places." In my message I

stopped and looked over at the twelve or so Baptist pastors and the Director of Missions, and then I said to the young man to whom I was giving the charge, "Don't you dare use this church as a stepping stone to build a bigger church." The Director of Missions' eye didn't hold my gaze. His head dropped, because he knew that you should never use a small church as a stepping stone to get a bigger congregation. That means that you are in it for your own promotion and not God's glory. So that is true, but there are others who have not given enough credence to the study of the Scriptures to try to see the harmony with all of these things. That was my position. This could be the testimony of nearly everybody in this church, unless you were raised in a reformed and Calvinistic church. In one of the previous lessons I brought out how the Vice President of the school where I attended, said he was grieved over the fact that young men could come there in the Freshman class and hold to the beliefs of the Bible, and by the time that they were Seniors, a large number of them had come to imbibe the Calvinistic view of the Bible. Then he said, "What grieves me the most is that it is our most gifted and brighter students who are doing so." What was taking place between the Freshman class and the Senior class? They were being exposed to more and more of the Bible. Spurgeon was asked if he believed it was possible for an Arminian to be saved. He said, "I have hope that they have a better heart than their head, and that they have a love for the Lord, even though they do not have a full understanding of how to harmonize the Bible." Where Scripture leads, we may safely follow.