

The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination - Lesson # 1

I. Boettner's reasoning for writing this book

"The doctrine of Predestination receives comparatively little attention in our day and it is very imperfectly understood even by those who are supposed to hold it most loyally."

II. History of doctrine of predestination

"The great majority of the creeds of historic Christendom have set forth the doctrines of Election, Predestination, and final Perseverance, as will readily be seen by anyone who will make even a cursory study of the subject. On the other hand Arminianism existed for centuries only as a heresy on the outskirts of true religion, and in fact it was not championed by an organized Christian church until the year 1784, at which time it was incorporated into the system of doctrine of the Methodist Church in England."

- Doctrines such as election, predestination, and the perseverance of the saints existed in the church as far back as the early church fathers (A.D. 70 - A.D. 400) [*see back page*](#)
- Doctrine of "Arminianism's" place in the church for most of church history was as a heresy

Did the doctrines of grace, five points of Calvinism, or the reformed doctrine of predestination, originate with John Calvin?

"We call this system of doctrine "Calvinism," and accept the term "Calvinist" as our badge of honor; yet names are mere conveniences. "We might," says Warburton, "quite as appropriately, and with equally as much reason, call gravitation 'Newtonism,' because the principles of gravitation were first dearly demonstrated by the great philosopher Newton. Men had been fully conversant with the facts of gravitation for long ages before Newton was born. These facts had indeed been visible from the first days of creation, inasmuch as gravitation was one of the laws which God ordained for the governing of the universe. But the principles of gravitation were not fully known, and the far-reaching effects of its power and influence were not understood until they were discovered by Sir Isaac Newton. So, too, was it with what men call Calvinism. The inherent principles of it had been in existence for long ages before Calvin was born. They had indeed been visible as patent factors in the world's history from the time of man's creation. But inasmuch as it was Calvin who first formulated these principles into a more or less complete system, that system, or creed, if you will, and likewise those principles which are embodied in it, came to bear his name."

Calvin merely formulated principles/doctrines that already existed into a system, or creed.

III. Opposition to doctrine of predestination

"This doctrine of Predestination has perhaps raised a greater storm of opposition, and has doubtless been more misrepresented and caricatured, than any other doctrine in the Scriptures. "To mention it before some," says Warburton, "is like shaking the proverbial red flag before an enraged bull. It arouses the fiercest passions of their nature, and brings forth a torrent of abuse and calumny. But, because men have fought against it, or because they hate it, or perhaps misunderstand it, is no reasonable or logical cause why we should turn the doctrine adrift, or cast it behind our backs. The real question, the all-important question, is not: How do men receive it? but Is it true?"

Reasons people reject the doctrine of Predestination:

- 1) ignorance *"almost complete lack of bible training in our day"* (cited by Boettner)
- 2) sinful defiance - if doctrines of predestination, election, etc are true, then God really is sovereign. Sinful hearts prefer to be in control.
- 3) Confusion/misunderstanding - common protest: "I don't believe a good God would send people to hell."

IV. Doctrine of predestination as an element of Calvinism

In the minds of most people the doctrine of Predestination and Calvinism are practically synonymous terms. This, however, should not be the case... While Predestination and the Five Points (T.U.L.I.P.) are all essential elements of Calvinism, they by no means constitute its whole.

Boettner seems to use the term "Calvinism" as a synonym for "Reformed"

Elements of "Calvinism" or being "Reformed"

- 1) 5 points of Calvinism/doctrines of grace/doctrine of predestination
- 2) Confession of faith

- 3) Covenant Theology, including paedobaptism
- 4) Regulative principle of worship
- 5) Others: Presbyterian form of church government, emphasis on means of grace, emphasis on church discipline.

The question which faces us then, is, "Has God from all eternity foreordained all things which come to pass? If so, what evidence do we have to that effect and how is the fact consistent with the free agency of rational creatures and with His own perfections?"

Calvinism in the Early Church

- **TOTAL DEPRAVITY**

Ignatius (A.D. 110): "They that are carnal cannot do the things that are spiritual...Nor can the unbelievers do the things of belief."

Justin Martyr (A.D. 150): "Mankind by Adam fell under death, and the deception of the serpent; we are born sinners...No good thing dwells in us...For neither by nature, nor by human understanding is it possible for me to acquire the knowledge of things so great and so divine, but by the energy of the Divine Spirit...Of ourselves it is impossible to enter the kingdom of God...He has convicted us of the impossibility of our nature to obtain life...Free will has destroyed us; we who were free are become slaves and for our sin are sold...Being pressed down by our sins, we cannot move upward toward God; we are like birds who have wings, but are unable to fly."

Eusebius (A.D. 330): "The liberty of our will in choosing things that are good is destroyed."

Augustine (A.D. 370): "If, therefore, they are servants of sin (2 Cor 3:17) why do they boast of free will?...O, man! Learn from the precept what you ought to do; learn from correction, that it is your own fault you have not the power...Let human effort, which perished by Adam, here be silent, and let the grace of God reign by Jesus Christ...What God promises, we ourselves do not through free will of human nature, but He Himself does by grace within us...Men labor to find in our own will something that is our own, and not God's; how can they find it, I know not."

- **UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION**

Ignatius: "To the predestined ones before all ages, that is, before the world began, united and elect in a true passion, by the eternal will of the Father..."

Irenaeus (A.D. 198): "God hath completed the number which He before determined with Himself, all those who are written, or ordained unto eternal life...Being predestined indeed according to the love of the Father that we would belong to Him forever."

Cyprian (A.D. 250): "This is therefore the predestination which we faithfully and humbly preach."

- **LIMITED ATONEMENT**

Justin Martyr (A.D. 150): "He endured the sufferings for those men whose souls are [actually] purified from all iniquity...As Jacob served Laban for the cattle that were spotted, and of various forms, so Christ served even to the cross for men of every kind, of many and various shapes, procuring them by His blood and the mystery of the cross."

Tertullian (A.D. 200): "Christ died for the salvation of His people...for the church."

Jerome (A.D. 390): "Christ is sacrificed for the salvation of believers...Not all are redeemed, for not all shall be saved, but the remnant...All those who are redeemed and delivered by Thy blood return to Zion, which Thou hast prepared for Thyself by Thine own blood...Christ came to redeem Zion with His blood. But lest we should think that all are Zion or every one is Zion is truly redeemed of the Lord, who are redeemed by the blood of Christ from the Church...He did not give His life for every man, but for many, that is, for those who would believe."

- **IRRESISTIBLE GRACE**

Lactantius (A.D. 320): "The victory lies in the will of God, not in thine own. To overcome is not in our power."

Athanasius (A.D. 350): "To believe is not ours, or in our power, but the Spirit's who is in us, and abides in us."

Augustine (A.D. 370): "Faith itself is to be attributed to God...Faith is made a gift. These men, however, attribute faith to free will, so grace is rendered to faith not as a gratuitous gift, but as a debt...They must cease from saying this."

- **PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS**

Clement Of Alexandria (A.D. 190): "Such a soul [of a Christian] shall never at any time be separated from God...Faith, I say, is something divine, which cannot be pulled asunder by any other worldly friendship,

Augustine (A.D. 370): "Of these believers no one perishes, because they were all elected. And they were elected because they were called according to the purpose-the purpose, however, not their own, but God's...Obedience then is God's gift...To this, indeed, we are not able to deny, that perseverance in good, progressing even to the end, is also a great gift of God."

<http://www.apuritansmind.com/arminianism/calvinism-in-the-early-church-the-doctrines-of-grace-taught-by-the-early-church-fathers/>