

PREDESTINATION AND REPROBATION

Every coin has a flip side. There is also a flip side to the doctrine of election. Election refers to only one aspect of the broader question of predestination. The other side of the coin is the question of reprobation. God declared that He loved Jacob but hated Esau. How are we to understand this reference to divine hatred?

Predestination is double. The only way to avoid the doctrine of double predestination is to either affirm that God predestinates everybody to election or that He predestinates no one to either election or reprobation. Since the Bible clearly teaches predestination to election and denies universal salvation, we must conclude that predestination is double. It includes both election and reprobation. Double predestination is unavoidable if we take Scripture seriously. What is crucial, however, is how double predestination is understood.

Some have viewed double predestination as a matter of equal causation, where God is equally responsible for causing the reprobate not to believe as He is for causing the elect to believe. We call this a positive-positive view of predestination.

The positive-positive view of predestination teaches that God positively and actively intervenes in the lives of the elect to work grace in their hearts and bring them to faith. Likewise, in the case of the reprobates, He works evil in the hearts of the reprobate and actively prevents them from coming to faith. This view has often been called “hyper-Calvinism” because it goes beyond the view of Calvin, Luther, and the other Reformers.

The Reformed view of double predestination follows a positive-negative schema. In the case of the elect, God intervenes to positively and actively work grace in their souls and bring them to saving faith. He unilaterally regenerates the elect and insures their salvation. In the case of the reprobate He does not work evil in them or prevent them from coming to faith. Rather, He passes over them, leaving them to their own sinful devices. In this view there is no symmetry of divine action. God’s activity is asymmetrical between the elect and the reprobate. There is, however, a kind of equal ultimacy. The reprobate, who are passed over by God, are ultimately doomed, and their damnation is as certain and sure as the ultimate salvation of the elect.

The problem is linked to biblical statements such as those regarding God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. That the Bible says God hardened Pharaoh’s heart is beyond dispute. The question remains, how did God harden Pharaoh? Luther argued for a passive rather than an active hardening. That is, God did not create fresh evil in Pharaoh’s heart. There was already enough evil present in Pharaoh’s heart to incline him to resist the will of God at every turn. All God ever has to do to harden anybody is to remove His restraining grace from them and give them over to their own evil impulses. This is precisely what God does to the damned in hell. He abandons them to their own wickedness.

In what sense did God “hate” Esau? Two different explanations are offered to solve this problem. The first explains it by defining hate not as a negative passion directed toward Esau but as simply the absence of redemptive love. That God “loved” Jacob simply means that He made Jacob the recipient of His unmerited grace. He gave Jacob a benefit that Jacob did not deserve. Esau did not receive the same benefit and in that sense was hated by God.

The first explanation sounds a bit like special pleading to get God off the hook for hating somebody. The second explanation gives more strength to the word hate. It says simply that God did in fact hate Esau. Esau was odious in the sight of God. There was nothing in Esau for God to love. Esau was a vessel fit for destruction and altogether worthy of God’s wrath and holy hatred. Let the reader decide.