

## REPROBATION CONSIDERED

Not sure if you have given the subject matter of reprobation more than a fleeting glimpse, so I thought that I would share a few thoughts with you. I'm currently working on another book by Vavasor Powell, entitled "Christ & Moses." It was first published in 1650, and regarding the topic of reprobation, he had this to say. Question: If God covenanted with Christ to give salvation to some, and not to all, did he not then leave the rest in a state of impossibility to be saved, and in a state of certainty to be damned? Answer: God is not accountable to man for his actions, and this is sufficient that the will of God is the supreme reason of all his actions, and it should satisfy us that God doth what he will, and wills himself, and his own glory chiefly, so that if man's misery tends to God's glory, it is man's duty to be silent, and subject thereunto. MPJ = indeed! Objection: But the absolute electing of some, doth argue the absolute reprobating of others. Answer: God in the act of election, and in the act of preterition, looked upon men as fallen {and not as innocent and unfallen} and thereby his grace doth more eminently appear in the one, and his justice is more apparently justifiable {as toward men} in the other. In no moment of nature did the purpose of condemnation go before the foresight of sin, as saith Dr. Twisse. MPJ = If this were indeed the case, then those of a free-will/conditional persuasion {aka, Arminians} have a decisive argument, in stating the obvious parallel, that in no moment of nature did the purpose of election go before the foresight of faith and works, which is an abominable assertion, {as it conditions salvation on a conversion experience, as opposed to the finished work of Christ of Christ,} and contrary to the analogy of Gospel Truth!

Throughout the sacred Scriptures we find the doctrine of Divine Reprobation either clearly set forth, or implied in many instances, {a basic consideration of God's immutability, Malachi 3:6, alone establishes this truth,} and wheresoever its stated it plainly asserts that the Decree of Reprobation is absolute and independent as to all distinctive conditions or causes in man. Augustine affirmed, "it is a great injury to God, when men search for causes of things superior to His sovereign will; for His will is such a supreme Rule of Justice, as that whatsoever He wills is for that very reason, because He wills it, to be accounted just." Interestingly, though not surprisingly, it's rather difficult to find anything written upon this topic which even remotely parallels with the Scriptures of Truth. Even the Reformers had little to say, though I did find these two paragraphs by Calvin & Luther that I personally thought were quite good. Calvin, "what of those, then, whom He {God} created for dishonour in life and destruction in death, to become the instruments of His wrath and examples of His severity? That they may come to their end, He sometimes deprives them of the capacity to hear the word; at other times He rather blinds and stuns them by the preaching of it. – He directs His voice to them but in order that they might become even more deaf; He kindles a light but that they may be made more blind; He sets forth a doctrine but that they may grow even more stupid; He employs a remedy but so that they may not be healed. And John, applying this prophecy, states that the Jews could not believe Christ's teaching, John 12:39, for this curse of God hung over them. We cannot gainsay the fact that to those whom He pleases not to illumine, He

transmits His doctrine wrapped in enigmas in order that they may not profit by it, except to be cast into greater stupidity." {Institutes of the Christian Religion.} Luther, "what do I hear! Are we now inquiring whether or not God loves and hates, and not rather why He loves and hates? Our inquiry is, from what merit it is in us that He loves or hates. We know well enough, that God does not love or hate as we do; because, we love and hate mutably, but He loves and hates from an eternal and immutable nature; and hence it is, that accidents and passions do not pertain unto Him. And it is this very state of the truth, that of necessity proves "free-will" to be nothing at all; seeing that, the love and hatred of God towards men is immutable and eternal; existing, not only before there was any merit or work of "free-will," but before the worlds were made; and that, all things take place in us from necessity, accordingly as He loved or loved not from all eternity. So that, not the love of God only, but even the manner of His love imposes on us necessity." {Bondage of the Will.} Bradwardine, {Thomas Bradwardine 1290-1349,} whose writings are about as obscure as the Michigan sun in Winter, made this useful comment, "that albeit God punisheth no man eternally without sin committed in time; yet He doth not eternally reprobate any for sin as a cause antecedently moving His Divine Will." Overall, I personally cannot deviate from the conclusion that there can be no other cause assigned to Reprobation, {which is not merely negative, but positive and efficacious,} than the absolute sovereign good pleasure of God.

Consider the sheer fact that if reprobation depended on the sinfulness of the reprobate, or upon our own sin and unbelief, we would all be equally reprobated, for we are all equally fallen far beyond any futile attempts to remedy our own condition or to improve our state! {"Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." Isaiah 1:9.} "The wages of sin is death," Romans 6:23, and men indeed perish on account of their sin, and reprobation is carried out along the way of sin, yet sin itself is never the cause of reprobation. This is evident by the words of our Lord, when he says to the unbelieving Jews in John 10:26, "but ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep." Their not being Christ's sheep; or, in other words, their being reprobate, had nothing to do with their not believing, but everything to do with them not belonging to Christ. In direct contrast, those believing, had nothing to do with some intrinsic worth which somehow made them of greater value than those whom the Lord will toss into the dung heap, Jeremiah 25:33, but everything to do with the fact that Christ purchased them, when he propitiated on their behalf, because the Father had given them unto him before the foundation of the world. {"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37.} These were chosen by God the Father before the foundation of the world, given and put into the hands of Christ, as his seed, his spouse, his sheep, his portion, and inheritance, and to be saved by him with an everlasting salvation. In other words, the unbelief of those who reject Christ does not produce their reprobation, but their reprobation gives rise to their unbelief. Conversely, the fruit of God's regenerating grace, {as faith, love, repentance, &c.,} in no wise causes their

election, as their election is settled in Christ, and gives rise to those actions which ascribe all greatness to him alone. Psalm 29:2.

In Jude 4, we read, "for there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." These {ungodly & unbelieving} men are said to be ordained/designed, and {as it were} before written in the book of God's Predetermination, to be ordained to this condemnation. So to me it seems evident, that God foreordained and decreed, not only their destruction, but to leave them to those sins, which should cause the same. Did the LORD not make all things; and therefore may he not assume the prerogative of ordering all things to the ends for which they were made? {"The LORD hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." Proverbs 16:4.} It seems like a thing altogether impossible to defend an absolute decree of election, and yet to make the decree of reprobation conditional and respective; for if the absolute good pleasure of God is the only cause why some are elected, must it not also be the only cause why others are rejected? Does not the Election of the one necessarily imply the Reprobation of the other? As the LORD gives to every man, {in fact, the entire creation,} those peculiarities which shape and form their individualities, so cannot he likewise appoint them to whatever end he so pleases, and direct them infallibly to that end? What is God's Sovereign Dominion, but an absolute right to dispose of what essentially & absolutely belongs to him? "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." Psalms 24:1.

In harmony with His eternal purpose, God {consistent with the perfections of his nature} carries out His decree of sovereign reprobation and unconditional election in the annals of history; and in accordance to that decree He hides from the reprobate the things of the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 11:25; hardens their hearts, Exodus 7:13; gives them over to a reprobate mind, Romans 1:28; causes them to stumble over the Word of the Gospel, I Peter 2:8; fits them for destruction, Romans 9:22; ordains them unto condemnation, Jude 1:4; confuses their understanding, makes their hearts fat and their ears heavy, shuts their eyes, Isaiah 6:10; chooses their delusions, Isaiah 66:4; and sends them a lying spirit, I Kings 22:23, so that they might believe that lie and perish. {"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." II Thessalonians 2:11-13.} And so deep is the wisdom and knowledge of God, Romans 11:33, that in so doing he gives them exactly what they want, giving them over to a reprobate mindset, Romans 1:28, and delivering them up into the hands of Satan, and to their own lusts, which they themselves delight in; and by giving them over to judicial blindness and hardness of heart, as a just punishment for their impieties, thus making their reprobation evident, by living a life in rejection of Jesus Christ, following the antichrist system, and eventually dying in unbelief. "I

said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins, for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." John 8:24.

Correspondingly, those who belong to Christ, being in and of themselves destitute and impotent in every spiritual sense whatsoever, John 15:5; who can neither do or say anything which might commend them unto the Lord, and made agonizingly sensible of the same, to such God reveals the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 13:11; the everlasting covenant of his grace, II Samuel 23:5; in essence, Christ, and all the spiritual blessings of grace in him, as spiritual life and light is given unto them to consider only him, Hebrews 12:3, his person, blood, and righteousness, in the matter of salvation. {"Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12} These heavenly things, John 3:12, are set before them; they see a glory and suitableness in them, and their desires are raised after them; their affections are set upon them; their hearts are impressed with them; and they are enabled to view their interest in them. A heavenly favour which the disciples of Christ, as a chosen people, receive from the Lord, and which is denied to all others. "And the disciples came, and said unto him, why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." Matthew 13:10-11.

Let's remind ourselves that God's primary purpose and end in his meticulous formation of all things, and of mankind in particular, is the sheer manifestation and display of his own glorious attributes; and that the end or conclusion of all things was fully in his sight from the beginning, as "in him we live, and move, and have our being," Acts 17:28, and by him all things consist; and that salvation in Christ is God's ultimate purpose in setting forth the unsearchable riches of his love, wisdom and mercy; and that reprobation, {though inseparably linked to election,} outside of Christ is God's subservient purpose in contrast to election unto life in Christ, with both purposes bringing immeasurable glory to Himself, and that both God's unconditional election to life and reprobation to death are completely and absolutely without any pre-conditions, for if either were conditional, then God would not be sovereign.

And as we consider these things, shall we not ascribe that same authority & dominion unto him whose kingdom, power, and glory, is forever and ever, Matthew 6:13, and who holds in his hands the keys of hell and of death, Revelation 1:18, which the potter has over the clay? {"Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" Romans 9:21.} Clearly contrary to this Scriptural mandate, some would seem to assert that the potter somehow has relinquished his right to do whatsoever he pleases with his own, {"is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" Matthew 20:15,} to somehow merely "allow" the clay to make itself into a vessel of honour or to "allow" the clay to make itself into a vessel of dishonour; or that the potter makes some of the clay into a vessel of honour, and allows the rest of the clay to make itself into a vessel of dishonour? This has to do with God's supreme authority, and man's adamant refusal to bow his heart in submission to that authority; in essence to enthrone

himself as god, II Thessalonians 2:4, which is the very spirit of anti-christ. Thus, when the Scriptures declare that people were fitted for destruction, {in Romans 9:22, the vessels of wrath 'were fitted' for destruction,} and were appointed and ordained to stumble, {in I Peter 2:7,8, the disobedient and unbelieving were appointed to perish,} at the Word, they affirm most emphatically that God can do whatever He wants with His creation, including making some people vessels of his rich blessings in Christ, and making other people vessels of his unmitigated wrath & indignation. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." John 3:36.

Another thought that can be injected here is the brief consideration that there are those that would assert that the wrath of God is an unfortunate consequence of the sin of man, which to me, seems like just another theory diminishing the perfections and attributes of our Creator. The scripture tells us that an unjust balance is an abomination in the sight of the Lord, Proverbs 11:1, yet how often do we attempt to define God's holy attributes by placing them upon the scales of our own carnal conceptions, derived from comparing the Lord's ways, thoughts, actions, {so to speak,} with those of our own, as if the Lord somehow had emotions compatible to man. Scripture tells us that it is not wise to compare ourselves with others, II Cor.10:12, and if so, how much more brutish is it to deregulate in our minds the perfections of the LORD, who in the pure excellency of his nature is so far outside the scope of our reasoning capacities; so far beyond those things that are perceived by our natural senses, and so does utterly confound all our lofty attempts to pry into the mysteries of his ways, beyond the revelation he has made of himself in the Scriptures. "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God," Deut.29:29, who in his profound mercy has veiled so much of his glorious & incomprehensible ways; and if his ways, how much more so his immeasurable BEING, veiled and hidden, lest we be consumed in the flames of our own kindling, Isa.50:11, knowing just enough to realize that "our GOD is a consuming FIRE," Heb.12:29, and we do well to draw no closer, {"for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground," Exod.3:5,} than he hath warranted in his word. "And the LORD said unto Moses, go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish." Exod.19:21. God is the Invisible, who dwelleth in a light no man can approach unto, who is and will always be altogether incomprehensible and unsearchable in his ways! "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9. Thus, along these thoughts it's sad that most people think that God's grace, mercy and compassion are an emotion, or a consequence of our own goodly actions or pious dispositions. The sheer love of God is not an emotion, but a perfection of God, but so is his wrath and his indignation. The scriptures seem to indicate that God was a God of wrath before man ever existed. God is a complete whole, who was, is, and will forever be, anything else. "For I am the LORD, I change not." Mal.3:6.

Another consideration is the basic fact that to a large extent Reprobation is sub-servient to Election, {and most especially in the minds of believers, as being

brought to the conscious realization that the love of God transcends everything they are by nature,} as one small heavenly glimpse of what we all are by nature, {depraved, lost, hopelessly alienated...} and the sheer thought of how each of us, considered in and of ourselves deserve to be instantly destroyed, yet, here we breathe another breath, and if illuminated by the life and light of Christ, stand in utter astonishment at the free & sovereign grace that has captivated our minds, {almost now incapable of such a vast consideration of heavenly grace and truth, for the joy and thankfulness that fills our hearts, Luke 24:41,} as we contemplate the sheer magnitude of that gracious and eternal decree of loving Jacob in spite of himself, and irrespective of any works that he could or would have performed, seeing that even his best efforts, {to in some delusional way recommend himself unto the Lord,} are altogether blasted by the absolute fact that only unto the Lord belongeth righteousness, and "unto us confusion of faces," Daniel 9:7, and thus we forever sink in our own estimation, and desire nothing more than to "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:11.

For those who have sheltered under the merits of Christ, boasting is so very excluded, as all is reduced to God's sovereign discriminating grace, as they survey their own salvation in humble and broken realization, that the only reason that they believe the glad tidings of the Gospel of God's Free & Sovereign Grace, {in all its assimilating truths and indispensable doctrines as a pure and simple proclamation of an accomplished redemption through the sole merit, righteousness, and death of the Lord Jesus Christ,} whilst others understand not, perceive not, have hearts that have been fattened for the slaughter, whose ears are made heavy, whose eyes have been sealed shut, and are never converted or cleansed from their sin, Isaiah 6:9-10; I say, these so know that the only reason that their hearts were opened is because the Lord alone did open it, Acts 16:14, and that the only reason they believe is because they were ordained to eternal life in Christ Jesus. {"And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord, and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Acts 13:48.} God Himself is the sole author and efficient cause of all which he does, and his ultimate glory the supreme end to which they lead and in which everything terminates, which truth in and of itself is a self-emptying and Christ enthroning consideration.

So, in like manner, these so sheltered under the merits of Christ, and arrayed in the spotless robe of his justifying righteousness, have been given repentance unto the acknowledgment of the truth, II Timothy 2:25, and brought into submission to the ultimate authority of the written word, and therefore the question of Divine Sovereignty is already forever settled in their mind, from which they cannot deviate. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed," II Peter 1:19, and by sheer grace alone, such have indeed taken heed to the undeniable truth that the sovereignty of God is absolute; that God has decreed within himself, from all eternity, freely and unchangeably, all things whatsoever come to pass, and that if men are saved, they are saved with an everlasting salvation, Isaiah 45:17, according to God's purpose and nothing else. {"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose

and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began." II Timothy 1:9.} To acknowledge this truth is at once to acknowledge that God, who reigns in absolute righteousness, Isaiah 32:1, {and not tied to some blasphemous standard of justice that man imposes upon him,} has in a most meticulous and precise manner foreordained and predestinated whatsoever comes to pass, and that nothing else can come to pass; and that this foreordination is all-comprehensive, completely unrestricted and never passive, nor reactionary, whereby all things are controlled, maintained and preserved in such a way that all, without exception, lead to the end he hath determined within Himself, "declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." Isaiah 46:10.

Though free-will conditionalists will continue to twist and mutilate the sacred scriptures beyond recognition unto their own destruction, II Peter 3:16, God's counsel shall stand, and only those who have been given ears to hear, Matthew 13:16, and hearts to realize that simple, yet profound truth that "except the LORD of hosts" had "left," reserved, distinguished and secured by the grace of election, in the hands of Christ, {to whom the elect were given and in whom they are preserved,} a very small remnant, "we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah," Isaiah 1:9, and this definite number, and no more, {who were written in the book of life from the foundation of the world,} Revelation 13:8, are those for whom Christ died and rose again, and who now, along with all the saints, are singing the song of the redeemed, in humble acknowledgement that Christ alone is worthy, and that if we are redeemed it is by sheer grace alone, {as no part of man's salvation is of himself, either in origin or execution,} ascribing infinite greatness, Psalm 105:3, unto him who hath redeemed us to God, by his blood, "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Revelation 5:9.

The hymn-writer Joseph Hart perhaps summed it up best when he wrote, {in defense of absolute sovereignty,} "the cause of the enmity and opposition in man to the aforementioned truth, is this, it utterly debases, or rather destroys all human strength and skill, overthrows all towering conceits of man's wisdom, batters down all the engines of pride and vain glory, exalts none but the Creator, and lays the creature low, debasing it even to hell by declaring that it has not the least share or part in the work of salvation; no, not so much as to accept it when offered, or forward it when it began, but that it is entirely indebted for the beginning, carrying on, and accomplishing of the whole work in him, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will! This the natural man cannot bear." {Unreasonableness of Religion.}

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