

Election and Reprobation

[Christ is] a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation. 1 Peter 2:8-9a

Archbishop Leighton, in his commentary on 1 Peter, declines to expound this particular section. He says that it would be easier for him to lead us into the depths than to bring us back out again. The warning is very timely. This is not a passage for mere vain speculation. And yet I feel that to omit consideration of this particular part of the chapter in a series of messages like the one we are conducting would be wrong and could do harm to humble believers. If believers come to such a difficult passage as this and cannot find help in its exposition and understanding in a church like a Free Presbyterian church when we are systematically studying the book, where could they hope to obtain light upon it and gain guidance in the deep things of God? So this morning, humbly and reverently, we are going to examine this text.

Verse 8 speaks very clearly of an appointment to destruction, commonly known as reprobation. Verse 9 speaks equally clearly of an election to eternal life. These are surely deep subjects that require the utmost humility, spirituality, and reverence from us as we handle them from the Word of God. As we do so, let me lay down certain ground rules upon which we as Bible-believing Protestants always proceed when we come to the Word of God.

First of all, we believe *all* the Bible, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, from the first *In* in Genesis to the last *Amen* in the Revelation. We believe all the Bible. In saying that, we do not make any trite statement. We do not put it forth as a mere point of orthodoxy and then in practice depart from it. With all our heart, we accept the entirety of Scripture. Thus, when the Scripture runs contrary to our notions, it is time to change our notions, not to tamper with the Word of God. That is the first thing.

The second thing: we hold that the Bible presents one God and one way of salvation and that in doing so it never contradicts itself. Nor does it speak in paradoxes and riddles that render it impossible to be interpreted and to have its meaning understood. What I am saying is that there is no conflict between the two parts of my text. It is the same God who says, "Whereunto also they were appointed," who also says, "But ye are a chosen generation."

There is no conflict between the parts of the text. They do not need to be reconciled to each other or to any other part of Scripture. Mr. Spurgeon had a young man come to him with a great text of Scripture on God's sovereign predestination and another on the free offer of the gospel, with the promise of life to "whosoever will" come to Christ. He asked Mr. Spurgeon, "Can you reconcile these two things?" Spurgeon's answer was, "I never need to reconcile friends." There is no contradiction in the Word of God. I am not going to give you a lecture on hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, but I will say this, that any interpretation of a passage such as our text which makes it appear to be at variance with other parts of the Word of God, requiring twisting to reconcile them or leaving them hanging as an uninterpretable paradox, is demonstrably the wrong interpretation. The Scripture is never at odds with itself. It presents one God and one salvation without any contradiction.

Third, we believe not only that all Scripture is to be received by Christians but that all Scripture is *profitable* to Christians. Paul makes this clear in 2 Tim. 3:16-17: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The Word of God *in all its parts* is given by God by direct inspiration to render a Christian a fully furnished servant of Christ. It profits a Christian to obtain a comprehensive grasp of the great doctrinal scheme of the Word of God. That doctrine will correct deviations from the truth and instruct the believer in righteousness. All

Scripture is profitable.

Finally, as to ground rules, let me say that we believe in God as He is revealed in Scripture. We worship God as He is revealed in Scripture. We do not approach the Scriptures with any sickly human prejudice and then trim the Word of God and its revelation of God to accord with our preconceived notions. We come to the Scripture, not as lords over it, not as its judges, but as its humble servants. Apostates mock this approach and say we are guilty of bibliolatry. Well, my friend, I would rather be open to the charge of worshipping the Bible than to be an apostate who rejects the Word of God and then seeks to deceive himself that he does not reject the God of the Word. Of course, we are not guilty of bibliolatry. It is not the paper and the ink that we worship, but the God revealed in the written Word. And we worship Him as He has revealed Himself to be. What I am appealing for this morning from every member of this congregation is that we come to be judged by the Scriptures, not to judge them; that we come to accept God as He has revealed Himself not to tell God from our lofty pedestals of human ignorance what He ought to be.

Having said all this, we will now approach the text. The groundwork is very necessary, for we have a very solemn text. It is a far-reaching text, whose subject is more easily summed up than expounded. It is the subject of reprobation and election. I want to make four points in dealing with the text.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

First, we need to be clear on the definition of the terms *reprobation* and *election*. Our text contrasts the appointment of some to destruction (v. 8) with the election of others to eternal life (v. 9). Evidently one is the antithesis of the other.

Election is God's sovereign choice of some of Adam's race to be His people. This choice predates time. It is not based on any merit in the people chosen. Jesus spoke of this divine choice in His high priestly prayer in John 17. He repeatedly prayed for "those that thou gavest me" (see w. 2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 24) in distinction from "the world." Thus election denotes God's purpose to make these particular people His children. "He hath chosen us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself" (Eph. 1:4-5).

This was Paul's constant testimony: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). He told the Thessalonians, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). Again, he told Timothy, "[God] 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" (2 Tim. 1:9). This last verse stresses a fundamental truth: election is not conditional on any act of those chosen. Peter also stresses this: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:2). The reference to foreknowledge is important. Many take it to mean that God chose those He foresaw would believe the gospel. As we shall see a little later, that is the opposite of the meaning of Peter's word. Foreknowledge is not mere foresight. It is the action of God's sovereign will. It means His predetermined purpose. This is clear from Acts 2:23: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." The construction of the words in the Greek text yields one meaning: *determinate counsel* and *foreknowledge* are synonymous terms. Thus Peter's great statement is that God's people are "elect according to the determinate counsel of God the Father," not on the basis of any good deed or decision by those chosen.

Reprobation is clearly in two parts, and our text refers to both. Its first part consists in nonelection. Its second part consists in condemnation of sin. Peter is careful to refer to both: "[Christ is] a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed."

Thus while election is entirely sovereign and unconditional, reprobation is partly sovereign and partly judicial--i.e., while nonelection depends on God's good pleasure, His judgment of sinners is conditional upon their sin. We will deal a little further with this later.

So much for definition. This is what we mean by reprobation and election.

CLEAR TEACHING OF TEXT

Second, our text clearly teaches both reprobation and election. Some people tend to make too much of the words of this text and try to use them to show that sinners are sinners because God decreed that they would be sinners, and that the only thing that ever made them sinners was God's eternal predestination. That is not what the text says, as I will prove a little later.

However, while some people try to make too much of the words of the text, a far greater number try to make too little of them and seek to evacuate them of all their meaning on the assumption that God may not treat one person differently from another. I was reading three eminent scholars on this text. They gave the meaning of the Greek, and they had to admit that it taught the doctrines of reprobation and election. Then for the next page they went on to say, "But this cannot be what it means." Why? Because they conceived that such a theological statement was impossible for them to accept. That is a common position. People make too little of the text on the assumption that God does not have the right to treat one person differently from another. There is no more widely accepted assumption than that, even among professing Christians. This is the starting point, the prejudice, from which men commence their interpretation of the subjects Peter raises in our text.

You would imagine that the Lord Jesus Christ had destroyed that assumption in His parable of the householder who employed some men for a penny a day to come in and do some work in his vineyard. He went out later in the day and brought in others, and then at the eleventh hour he brought in yet more workers. At the end of the day he gave to those who had served one hour a penny. To those who had served the whole day, he gave a penny, and they complained, "Why have you not paid us more? We have labored all day, while they have labored for only one hour." The Lord Jesus quotes the householder, if I may paraphrase, "Are you going to judge my goodness by your sinfulness? You agreed with me for a penny. I gave you what you agreed. I gave you what you deserved. May I not do then what I wish with what is mine?" You would think that that sentiment from the Lord Jesus would be enough to scotch forever the idea that God has no right to treat men as He sees fit.

Obviously there is a stark contrast in the words of our text. "Whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation." Verse 8 speaks of "they," men appointed to destruction. Verse 9 speaks of "ye," men chosen to salvation. The distinction is real. There is no universalism here, absolutely none. By universalism I mean all the various schemes which teach either that God must save everybody no matter what way they live on earth, or that He must provide for everybody the same atonement and the same opportunity to respond to it. Of course, there is not a man in his right senses who believes that, when millions in the world today have never once heard the gospel. Still, most people hold on to some form of universalism.

However, the Word of God uniformly teaches that there is a distinction in God's dealings among men. I will mention three Scriptures: Romans 9, I Corinthians 4, and Exodus 8. I am not going to read the

whole of Romans chapter 9, but I am going to refer you to it. Start at verse 10: "And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." In verse 18 we read: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." Now let us understand something.

This has never been a popular doctrine. I hear some people speak as if there had been a time back in history when everybody loved the doctrine of God's Word, and somehow or other it was easy to preach the sovereignty of God; it was popular to present a God who really controls the affairs of men. But there has never been a time when man liked to have the balloon of his egotistical pride punctured. Paul

preached God's sovereignty and there were objections to it. What was the chief objection? He said, "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" This is exactly the same objection we hear today. Paul sharply disposed of it: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" I want you to notice this clearly. God never says *why* He purposes one thing or another. The Almighty never sets out to justify Himself or His procedures to poor, puny, finite, fallen man. He wants you to know your place. He says, "Who are you that you would arrogate to yourself the position of judging your Creator? Who do you think you are, that you would dare to reply against your Maker? Who do you conceive yourself to be when you ascend even higher than Satan ever aspired to ascend? He would be *like* God; you would *replace* God. Who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?" My friends, I want to say this to you today. If there is one thing that this old world needs, it is a good dose of the doctrine of the utter sovereignty of God. Never think that you have reached the stage where you can question the absolute rightness of His all-wise purpose and actions. "Who art thou that repliest against God?"

In 1 Cor. 4:7 Paul asks a couple of far-reaching questions: "Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Clearly, the apostle's message is that the distinctive graces of God's people are His gift to them. He is the one who makes them to differ both from those who lack all saving grace and even from other Christians who have different gifts to be used for the Saviour.

Moses taught the same great doctrine. In Exod. 8:23 he carried the Lord's message to Pharaoh: "I will put a division between my people and thy people." The word division is literally "a redemption." The Lord put a redemption between His people and condemned sinners. Clearly there is no universalism here. So the Word of God uniformly teaches the real distinction which Peter is teaching in the passage we are considering.

Peter lays down the truth of the total sovereignty of God. I want you to notice how he does it. He says in verse 6, "Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone." Underline the word *lay*. Then in verse 8 he says, "Whereunto also they were appointed." Underline the word *appointed*. In the Greek text they are both the same verb. "Behold, I appoint the chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ." Here is the thought of God's eternal covenant purpose: He appoints the Stone. Notice that He appoints the stumblers, too. The destinies of men are in the hand of God. The Word of God presents a God who is in control. Disobedient sinners do not frustrate the purpose of God. The Lord says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa. 46:10). The second thing in our text, then, is that it clearly teaches

both reprobation and election.

GOD'S TREATMENT OF GUILTY SINNERS

The third thing I want you to notice is something too many people overlook in their treatment of our subject: reprobation and election are both ways in which God sovereignly determined to treat guilty sinners. Now notice what I am saying. Men speak as if it were unjust of God to reprobate some, because (they argue) they may wish to come to Christ. Wouldn't it be a tragedy for a soul desiring to come to Christ to have an implacable God saying, "I will not permit you to come"? However, just stop and think for a moment, and you will find that this argument is based on a fallacy. Peter is speaking about disobedient sinners. He is speaking about people who are dead and depraved in sin, people who are determined to remain in sin, people who have no time for God, whose hearts are inveterately opposed to Him. Those are the people of whom Peter is speaking. The guilty sons of Adam's race, left to themselves, will hate God, will object to everything God says, will repudiate everything that God has revealed, and will fight everything that God sends their way. They are rebels by nature and rebels by practice. They are disobedient sinners.

Here is something we should mark very carefully: the condemnation of the wicked proceeds upon the basis of their sin. Notice the wording of the text. They "stumble at the word, being disobedient." The construction of the sentence indicates that *they stumble at the word because they are disobedient*. Here is a very, very solemn thing. God appointed them to stumble over Jesus Christ into hell because of their sin.

Take the case of Pharaoh, of whom the Lord said, "Even for this purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth" (Rom. 9:17; see Exod. 9:16). We read that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exod. 7:13). At first this appears to be something imposed on Pharaoh, something to direct his will in a way it would not otherwise have turned. But that is a total misconception. In Exod. 8:15 we read that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Put the two texts together and you will get the entire picture. Pharaoh's natural bias was to reject the Lord's command to let Israel go. Even under repeated judgments he steeled himself against the very idea of giving them their freedom. **God's hardening of his heart was really His sovereign decision to give Pharaoh up to his own wickedness and not to introduce any saving change into it.** That decision was entirely sovereign, but it did not *cause* Pharaoh's hardness. That was entirely natural to him. And when God condemned him He was entirely just in doing so, for He punished him for his own willful disobedience.

Thus the doctrine of reprobation does not present a picture of people who want to be rid of sin, or to repent of sin, or to be saved from sin, if it were not for an intransigent God saying, "No, I have decreed not to allow you to do so." That is not the picture. The picture here is of intransigence on the part of man. It is of sinners who will not do anything but sin, and because of their guilty wickedness, on the basis of their sin, God reprobates them entirely. Therefore these sinners receive nothing more than they deserve and go no other way than the way they desire.

It is a solemn message. Reprobated sinners receive what they deserve. *Reprobation, then, is God's eternal purpose to treat some sinners exactly as they deserve.* There will not be a man in hell simply because he was not elect. There will not be a sinner in hell who will be able to say, "Lord, the only reason I am here is that You purposed I would be here. Every sinner in hell will have to say, "Lord, I am here because of my sin." **God sovereignly determining to treat some men as they deserve -- that is reprobation.**

But listen: *the elect of God deserve no more.* They also are sinners and disobedient. Paul says, "We

ourselves also were sometimes ... disobedient" (Tit. 3:3). The elect are not chosen by God because they obey Him, or because God foresaw they would one day obey Him. From 1 Peter 1:2 we learn that they obey God because they are elect, not vice versa: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." **Obedience is the result, not the cause, of election.** Here is grace at its height. God, from all eternity, loved a people, chose them in Christ, and gave them to Him as a covenant people. In time, God sent His Son at the greatest personal cost to pay for the sins of those people and gave Him up to be their substitute, to endure the wrath of God for them. Then God raised Christ from the dead and brought Him back to glory to intercede for them on the ground of His shed blood, pleading that His atonement would be perfectly applied to all for whom He made it (Isa. 53:12). Further, God sent His Spirit effectually to call those people, and, to use the language of the earlier part of 1 Peter chapter 2, to bring babes into God's family and to put living stones into His temple. God, in His sovereign grace and love, is bringing His people home. That is grace, amazing grace, incomprehensible grace. I can understand verse 8 perfectly well. I have no difficulty with that. That is where I differ from most Christians. They are amazed at the wrong part of the text. They ask, "How could God reprobate sinners?" I have no difficulty understanding how a holy God could send a guilty, vile, wretched, hell-deserving sinner such as I to the depths of hell. If God were to step into the world and look at every sinner and say, "I condemn you to hell," I would have to say, "Holy and righteous art Thou." That is perfectly understandable. I will tell you that what I cannot begin to comprehend is that God did not give every sinner exactly what he deserved. That God should say to some guilty sinners, "Ye are a chosen generation," is something I do not understand. I cannot understand how God ever loved any sinner. I am not about to find fault with God because in justice He gives some sinners what they deserve and what they want. Rather, I fall before Him in utter amazement at His mercy. "*Ye are chosen.*" What a dignity! What a certainty! What an assurance! The everlasting God, the Lord who changes not, says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." There are many who tell you that this doctrine of election will make you proud. On the contrary, there is nothing that will cause greater humility than to see yourself as a poor sinful little worm on the edge of hell with no merit or power to escape its everlasting fires. To see God stretch down His hand and lift that worm from the very jaws of destruction and transform it into a shining saint of God to inhabit everlasting glory, surely cannot possibly breed pride. You are made to realize that all you are and have is by pure and unadulterated grace. Election is not something we deserve. It is God's sovereign way of treating guilty sinners to save them from what they deserve.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

There is one final point: God's sovereign purpose does not destroy or conflict with the responsibility of every hearer of the gospel. This is made very clear. Verse 8 says that they were appointed to stumble. But look at the verse again. It says, they "stumble..., being [or, because they are] disobedient.' Note the conjunction of the two themes of God's sovereign appointment and man's responsibility. This is the same truth Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. Note again Acts 2:23: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." God's eternal purpose clearly does not destroy man's responsibility.

In the light of that I want you to grasp the truth of something I have already noted in passing. No man can ever say, "I desired Christ, but because of God's decree I was kept away." No, my friend. The reason people reject Jesus Christ--and if you are not saved I want you honestly to face the issue, for I defy any man honestly to disagree with what I am about to say--the reason men reject Jesus Christ is their own wicked nature. They love sin. The gospel message is plain and its promises sincere. Jesus says, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). *If any man will come to Christ, let him come. If any man will hearken to the gospel, let*

him come. If any man thirsts for Christ, let him come. That is the gospel invitation (John 7:37; Rev. 22:17).

That is how God's people enter into salvation. 1 Pet. 2:4 makes it clear that they come to Christ--"to whom coming." That is how a man is saved, by coming to Jesus Christ and receiving Him as Saviour, or as Peter puts it, by believing on Him: "He that believeth on him shall not be confounded" (v. 6). If you are still unsaved, it is not lack of gospel opportunity, but sin, that keeps you from Christ. At the end of the day, God's sovereign purpose will stand and every saint will say, "I am saved by free grace on the merits of Christ," and every lost soul will have to confess, "I am damned because of my sin."

As I close this message, I think it is time to expose and to destroy every excuse of every sinner. I want to be very honest with you, for both of us are soon going to stand before God. I want you to listen carefully. If you are without Christ, you do not reject Christ because of any fatalistic fear of God's decree. That is not what keeps you from Christ. You do not reject Christ because of the hypocrites you claim to see in the church. You may say that is why you reject Him, but you know it is a deception. Nor do you reject Christ because of any intellectual doubts you may have. You reject Jesus Christ because of your sin, because you are disobedient, because you love your wickedness, and because your heart is bound to your idols. That is why you reject Jesus Christ, your love of sin. The Lord Jesus said, "Men love darkness rather than light." Why? Because they have intellectual difficulties with the light? Because they see hypocrites professing to walk in the light? Because they have some fatalistic notions of God's predestination? No, sir! Strip the cloak of hypocrisy away from you today, and listen to what Jesus said. "Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil"--and for that reason only. It is sin that keeps you from Christ. If you were willing to repent of sin, would you not come to Christ? Yes, sir! You would flee to Jesus, if you were willing to repent of sin. It is sin that keeps you from Christ, and it is sin that leads you to a lost eternity. You know you should repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15). God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). Every sinner has the responsibility to obey the Lord in this matter. He cannot shirk his duty by hiding behind God's eternal purpose. According to that purpose God will treat some men in sovereign justice and others in sovereign grace. Far from destroying your responsibility to flee to Christ, this truth emphasizes it. As God said to Cain, "If thou doest well [i.e., in accepting the sacrifice of the lamb for your salvation], shalt thou not be accepted?" (Gen. 4:7). God accepts and saves all who come to Him by Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:25). The only reason sinners refuse to come is because of their love of sin. The only reason God's elect do come to Christ is His electing grace. Grace makes them willing (Psa. 110:3), and they freely come to Christ. Clearly, in the case of neither the reprobate nor the elect does God's purpose conflict with or remove their responsibility to receive the gospel. If you come to Christ, you have His assurance you will be saved. When you are saved, you can rejoice that you are elect of God. You are not commanded to wait until you know that you are elect before you come to Christ. That is utterly unscriptural. Rather, come to Him on the basis of His Word. Having received Him, you will know you are one of His chosen people. Bishop Hugh Latimer, the great English Reformer, put it this way:

If thou art desirous to know whether thou art chosen to everlasting life, thou mayest not begin with God, for God is too high, thou canst not comprehend Him; but begin with Christ, and learn to know Christ, and wherefore He came, namely, that He might save sinners.

That is good advice. Do not postpone coming to Christ until you understand the secret purpose of God. Look unto the Lord Jesus, who came to seek and to save the lost and who promises to receive all who come to Him (John 6:37). If you come to Christ, He will receive you and you will then know you are chosen to eternal life. If you stumble at the word, you will be lost. God has appointed you to destruction. If you are a disobedient sinner, if you persist in sin, you will perish in your sin. And it is God who guarantees it. What a statement that is: "Whereunto also they were appointed." By the

authority and power of God, your soul is placed among the damned. The responsibility for your sin is yours. The responsibility of what you do with Jesus Christ is yours. I leave you with this thought. Hearken carefully.

By God's grace, may you flee to Christ and be saved, for every sinner who flees to Him in repentance and faith is instantaneously and eternally saved by sovereign grace. They get what Christ deserved by His life and death. Every sinner who is disobedient to the call of Christ will receive eternally exactly what he deserved. One part of our text applies to you. Which one?