

PREDESTINATION

REVEALED

NOT HIDDEN NOR CONFUSED

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Foreword

The Reformed Witness Hour, in conjunction with the Mission Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches, takes pleasure in herewith presenting the first four lectures of a radio series by our Pastor, the Reverend Herman Hoeksema, on the general theme “God’s Sovereign Predestination.” A second booklet will follow, the Lord willing, in due time.

It is our hope and prayer that the King of His Church may use also this means to develop, preserve, and propagate this all-important, central truth of Scripture, and to purify and gather His Church.

THE RADIO COMMITTEE OF THE FIRST
PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCH.

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Our Approach to the Doctrine of Predestination

We believe, as Reformed churches, and emphatically, as Protestant Reformed Churches, in the truth of sovereign predestination, which, briefly, means to us that God sovereignly determines the salvation of the elect and the damnation of the reprobate. In short, that God is always the Lord of man. I say, emphatically, not because, as many allege that we do and accuse us of doing, we preach the doctrine of predestination exclusively; still less because we are hard and cruel and have no natural sympathy for mankind in general; but because, in many churches that sail under the Reformed flag, this most important and fundamental truth is forgotten and ignored, or camouflaged and corrupted. They have a copy of the Reformed confessions in the back of their psalter, but that confession, the very heart of which is the truth of predestination, is scarcely known and certainly does not live in their hearts. Many a preacher carefully avoids in his sermons that truth; and, if he preaches it at all, usually concludes his sermon by contradicting it in the end, presenting the grace of God as a well-meaning offer on the part of God to all, and leaving the impression that salvation is, after all, up to him that willeth and to him that runneth. This we decline to do, first of all, because it concerns the Word of God, which may, and dare not be corrupted. And secondly, because the truth of predestination is a basic and central truth, with which the Church of Christ stands or falls, as is plain from II Tim. 2:19: "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." And therefore, we repeat, we teach the truth of predestination emphatically.

In our radio lectures we propose, the Lord willing, for a few weeks to call special attention to this truth on the basis of Romans 9; and in our present lecture we speak to you on the proper spiritual approach to this doctrine, on the basis of Romans 9:1-3: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

In this ninth chapter the Word of God introduces, evidently, a new subject: The great question of the rejection of the Jewish nation, involving the exclusion from the Kingdom of God of many individual Israelites

according to the flesh, and of the calling of the Gentiles. And the transition from the preceding to the present chapter appears rather abrupt. The connection with the preceding, however, must probably be found in the soul of the apostle Paul. In the eighth chapter of this epistle to the Romans he had been inspired to write a glorious song of triumph on the theme of the security of believers in Christ with respect to their final salvation and the great glory of that salvation which they possess in hope. And especially in the closing verses of that chapter he had ascended the heights of faith, whence he challenged life and death, angels and principalities and powers, heights and depths, things present and things to come, yea, all created things to separate the elect from the love of God in Christ Jesus their Lord. And the very blessedness of believers of the new dispensation leads him to turn his attention to his kinsmen according to the flesh, the Jews, and causes him to contemplate their sorrowful plight. And thus he is led to write on this new subject of the rejection of the Jews and the calling of the Gentiles in the light of God's absolutely sovereign dealings with both.

The first five verses of chapter nine are introductory. In them the apostle approaches the new problem; and the approach is evidently spiritual and psychological. The apostle reveals what is the attitude of his own soul, his personal sentiment; now he is about to write about the stupendous truth of the rejection and reprobation of his kinsmen according to the flesh. Solemnly he emphasizes that he speaks the truth in Christ, that he lies not, that his conscience in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit, bears him witness that he really speaks the truth, when he declares that in the approach of this new theme he is reminded of a great heaviness of soul and of a continual sorrow in his heart. So great is this heaviness and so profound this sorrow, that he does not hesitate to say that he could wish himself to be accursed from Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh.

What is the meaning of this astounding expression?

Various interpretations have been offered of this last expression, that weaken the true sense of the apostle's words. It has been suggested that a thing accursed is, after all, only a thing devoted to death, so that the apostle probably means nothing more than that he could wish to die for the sake of his brethren. Others have ventured the conjecture that the apostle uses the word *accursed* in an ecclesiastical sense, and that he only intended to declare that he could wish to be excommunicated from the church. Still others translate: "I did wish," and would explain the apostle's words as referring to

the time before he was converted, when he persecuted the Church of Christ. However, all these interpretations are not the result of honest dealing with the exegesis of the text but rather of the objection that the apostle certainly could not wish to be accursed from Christ. Yet, this is exactly what he declares, and the words will have to remain as they stand here, in all their force. What the apostle means is: were I placed before the alternative that my brethren according to the flesh be saved, or I; were I permitted to choose between their salvation and my own, could I effect their salvation by my being accursed, I could indeed wish to be accursed from Christ in their behalf.

We must not, however, misunderstand this strong expression of Paul's. He cannot mean, of course, that as a *Christian* he could wish for any man's sake that he had no part with Christ, that he were still in his sin, that he were still a natural and wicked man, that he belonged to the enemies of Christ. That would be spiritually impossible. And that would imply a wicked desire. But, in the first place, he speaks according to the flesh to his brethren, who are his kinsmen according to the flesh. He is related to them, and his natural love and pity of them is expressed in these words. And secondly, the apostle is not considering the ethical and spiritual side of the matter, but is rather thinking of the joy of salvation and strongly desiring that all his brethren might share in that joy. He says that he could wish to lose it, to forfeit salvation from that viewpoint for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh.

And looking at it in this light, this passage is very important for us.

First of all, let us note that the apostle's attitude in approaching the tremendous subject of God's absolute sovereignty in election and reprobation is intended by the Word of God as an example for us. When, as children of God, we approach this subject, and speak of God's sovereign predestination, it is but proper that our attitude should be deeply spiritual. It may not be, it could not possibly be the attitude of pride and self-exaltation; for if it pleased God to ordain us unto salvation in distinction from others, it certainly is no cause for us to boast in self. One who really understands the truth of this point will humble himself deeply before God. Let no flesh glory in His Presence. And this also implies that one cannot very well speak of the subject of God's sovereign rejection of the reprobate, who in time are our fellow men, our kinsmen according to the flesh, without feeling to an extent the same heaviness, the same continual sorrow for them

which the apostle here so emphatically declares to feel in his hearts. No cold-blooded rejoicing in the damnation of our fellow men may characterize our contemplation of God's sovereign dealings with the children of men. The fact that God's predestinating purpose divides our race, makes separation between men of the same flesh and blood, always remains a matter of suffering as long as we are in this present time. And this leads me to another remark. From the viewpoint of our flesh, of our earthly, natural life and relationships, it is not so strange,—barring some theological objections,—to hear the apostle declare that he could wish to be accursed from Christ for his kinsmen according to the flesh. Without wishing to place ourselves on a par with the apostle, we may safely say that, in a degree, we can often repeat these words after him. Just imagine a parent who experiences the grief of seeing one or more of his children walk the way of sin and destruction. Just imagine a pastor, who, in the course of years, becomes attached to his flock and earnestly desires their salvation, but who beholds many of them that are not the objects of God's electing love. And what is true of our own flesh and blood in the narrowest sense of the word and of the Church of Christ in the world in general can be applied to mankind as a whole. Out of one blood God has made the whole of the human race, and they are, according to the flesh, all our brethren. And we can understand a little, at least, of the attitude of the apostle when he speaks of the great heaviness that burdens his soul and says that he could wish to be accursed from Christ for his kinsmen according to the flesh. And in as far as we could wish in our present flesh and blood, we could indeed desire all men to be saved.

What then? Shall we hide and corrupt the truth of God's sovereign predestination from purely carnal and humanistic considerations? God forbid! We believe the Word of God according to the Scriptures, and in them we trust. And that Word teaches us plainly that God is the Lord, even in regard to the salvation of His own and the damnation of the rest. Even though for a time this antithesis means suffering according to the flesh, by faith we are of the party of the living God, consecrated to Him and to His glory, and are confident that when all the suffering of this present time is past, God will justify Himself, and all flesh shall confess His everlasting righteousness in the damnation of the reprobate as well as in the salvation of the elect.

Soli Deo gloria!

Spiritual and Carnal Children

As has been said, Romans 9 deals with the tremendous question of the rejection of the Jewish nation, involving the exclusion from the kingdom of God of many individual Israelites. And this fact the apostle explains in the light of God's sovereign dealings with men. God chooses and He rejects; and His counsel of predestination sovereignly cuts right through the church visible on earth, making distinction between spiritual and carnal children, children of the promise and children of the flesh. This is taught first of all in Romans 9:6-8: "Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."

The apostle introduces these words by the statement that the Word of God has not taken none effect, has not "fallen out." This statement is of fundamental importance. The fact that so many of the Jews of the old dispensation and many baptized children of the Church are forever lost is no proof that the promise of God has failed. Frequently Scripture speaks of the promise. Sometimes it uses the singular, "the promise"; and in other passages it uses the plural, "the promises." Essentially the expression always refers to the same truth. The promise is God's revealed and pledged, yea, sworn purpose of salvation for His people through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is the promise of redemption and deliverance from sin and the inheritance of eternal glory in the kingdom of heaven. It is the promise of the Spirit, the promise of eternal salvation, the promise of life. Now, superficially considered, it would seem that this promise concerns all the children of the Church, both in the old and in the new dispensation. Was not the Word of God to Abraham quite without limitation: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee?" And does not the apostle Peter sound forth the same general promise when, standing at the very entrance of the new dispensation on the day of Pentecost, he proclaims: "For unto you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call?" But, what then? Is it not a fact, the very fact that looms large before the apostle's mind and that causes him to be filled with heaviness and great sorrow, that many, that the very

large majority of the descendants of Abraham, never received the promise; that thousands upon thousands of the seed of Abraham in the old dispensation perished; that at the very moment when the promise of God entered upon its realization the nation of Israel was definitely rejected, and that the hearts of many individual Jews were so hardened that they were closed to the influence of the gospel? And must not the same be said of the children of believers in the new dispensation? How many of them receive the seal of God's covenant in infancy, are instructed in the way of God's covenant from their youth, in order to spurn and despise the promises of God and choose the way of destruction even unto the bitter end? How, then, shall we explain this glaring fact in the light of the promise of God concerning Abraham and his seed, concerning believers and their children?

Many there are who, as they face this question, take refuge in the explanation that the promise of God is contingent upon the consent and acceptance of the promise by the seed of Abraham, by the children of believers. The promise, they say, is for all the natural seed of Abraham and for all the children of believers. They are all, without exception, comprehended in the covenant of God. From God's side the covenant is established with them; on God's part the promise to them is "Yea and amen." This, they claim, is the privilege of all that are born of believers in the Church of Christ, that God sincerely holds out His promise to them and promises them the blessings of salvation without distinction. Only, when they come to years of discretion, they must accept their covenant obligations. Upon this the promise is contingent. And if the promise is not accepted, they simply cannot receive it. Thus it was in the old dispensation: the promise to Abraham and his seed includes, indeed, all the natural seed of Abraham; but thousands for whom the promise was intended failed to accept God's offer of salvation. Hence, many of the children of the promise were lost. And the same failure to accept the promise explains why so many children of believers in the new dispensation, for whom the promise is intended, are cast out and rejected.

Let us not fail to note, however, that this explanation is quite contrary to the Word of God in our text. For the apostle writes that the Word of God has not become of none effect. Yet, according to the explanation just mentioned, this is exactly what happened. God's promise was for all; yet, in the case of thousands upon thousands this promise failed of its realization. O, I know, and fully understand, and admit, that in the way of their unbelief

and iniquity they were lost. But I deny that this can serve as an explanation of the fact that God did not fulfil His promise in them. Are not all the children of Abraham by nature alike? Are not all the children of the covenant by nature dead in trespasses and sin, as they are born? Is any one of them by nature able to enter into the covenant of God, to believe and hope in the promise, unless God takes the initiative and realizes His promise? If, then, God's promise is for all the seed of Abraham, and if by nature all the children of Abraham according to the flesh are alike unable to render themselves worthy or receptive for the promise of God, it follows that the Word of God has fallen out, has become of none effect, has utterly failed in the case of those children of Abraham that never receive the promise.

But, as has been stated, this is contrary to the Word of God in our text. "Not as if the word of God has taken none effect," the apostle writes. The Word of God is the Word of *God*. It is never contingent upon man. It is never dependent upon the creature for its realization. Its realization depends on God alone, and He is the Amen; He is the Rock; whatever may fail, His Word faileth never. And also in this case it did not fall out, not even in the case of them that were lost. All to whomsoever the promise was given and pertained were surely saved. Not one of them perished. But from this it follows that the Word of God in question was limited in its scope, and that the promise did not pertain to all the carnal seed of Abraham. That is the explanation of the Word of God here. They are not all Israel that are *of* Israel, that are descendants of Jacob; neither are they all children, true children of God, because they are the seed of Abraham. The children of the flesh are not children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. The truth of this explanation is demonstrated by the example of Isaac. Abraham had more sons. At the time of Isaac's birth he was already father of the son of Hagar, the bond-woman. And after his marriage with Keturah he gained several more children. It cannot be denied that all these children of Abraham were included in the "seed" of Abraham in the natural sense of the term. Yet, God plainly limits His promise to Isaac. "In Isaac shall they seed be called."

What is the meaning of the expression "the children of the promise"? Does the term simply mean the same as if the apostle had written, "the promised children"? Thus some interpret the phrase. Or, is the meaning, as others would interpret, children to whom the promise pertains, that are heirs

of the blessed promise of God? To be sure, the children of the promise were also promised children, and the promised blessing was for them. But the expression “children of the promise” has a deeper significance. Frequently Scripture speaks of the promise. And children of the promise are those that were brought forth by the power of the promise. The promise is, as it were, their mother. God brings them forth by realizing His word of promise in them. Hence, they are those in whom the promise of redemption has been realized in principle: spiritual children, born not of the flesh but of the Spirit. That is the real meaning of the expression “children of promise.” This may be gathered not only from the expression itself, but also from a comparison with the expression as it occurs in Galatians 4:23, 28: “But he who was of the bond-woman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.” The phrase “by promise” in verse 23 literally reads in the original “through the promise.” Isaac was born through the means of, by the power of the promise. So we are also “children of the promise as Isaac was.” And that this refers indeed to their spiritual birth is evident if we compare verse 29 of the same chapter of Galatians: “But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.” By nature, apart from the power of the promise of God, we are born after the flesh. That which is born of the Spirit and after the Spirit. For that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. And therefore, children of the promise are spiritual children in whom God wrought and realized the power of His promise of salvation.

Hence, only the children of the promise are children of God, according to the text. They are those whom God adopted as His children in Christ before the foundation of the world, for whom Christ died and rose again that they might have the right of sonship, and in whom God realizes this adoption by the Spirit of grace. And only the children of the promise, who are the real children of God, are also the real Israel: “For they are not all Israel which are of Israel.” And again, only “the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” The rest, even though they are born of Abraham, even though they are born in the Church, of believers, and are baptized, are not included in the promise of God. Even though they are *under* the covenant, they are not *in* the covenant. They are carnal, sinful, and remain carnal. And their very close proximity to the covenant of God, their living, as it were, as carnal children in the house of God, simply brings to manifestation all the more clearly their wicked and carnal nature. But the promise of God never

fails, but runs in the line of election: "For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them the end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath." Heb. 6:17. God's counsel of election and reprobation cuts right through the Church, and within the Church makes separation and distinction between carnal and spiritual children.

Now, what is the relation between these two kinds of seed in the same line of the generation of the people of God; and what is the significance of the carnal seed within the Church?

Outwardly and for a time, they are one people. In the stricter sense this was the case in the old dispensation, when the line of the covenant was confined within the limits of the nation of Israel. Nor it is different in the new dispensation. The Church in the world is the gathering of confessing believers and their children. And they form one people, even though the course of God's covenant is no longer confined to one nation. And to this one people God reveals His covenant. They are called after His name, and outwardly all that belong to them are subject to the same dealing. We are all baptized in the name of God Triune. To all the Word is preached. All celebrate the Lord's Supper. All, young and old, are instructed in the knowledge of God and our Savior Jesus Christ. Yet also to the Church of the new dispensation, also to us as the Church of Christ in the world, the Word of God applies: "All is not Israel that is of Israel." Always there are the children of the promise, the true, spiritual seed; and again there also develops always again the carnal seed, that live in close proximity and outward fellowship with the spiritual seed, dwell in the same house with the latter, are subject to the same influences as these but are not children of the promise and receive not the grace of God in their hearts.

And the presence of the carnal children is of great significance to the Church of Christ.

First of all, it may be remarked that they are a cause of continual sorrow, of the great sorrow of which the apostle speaks in the beginning of this chapter. They are of our own flesh and blood, and we greatly and earnestly desire the salvation of them that are dear to us. What is there that parents would more earnestly desire for their children than that they all may walk in the fear of the Lord and be saved? And what is true of parents in relation to their children applies to a pastor, to the office-bearers in general, to the whole congregation with respect to all the individual sheep of the flock to

which they belong. They rejoice when the children of God's covenant grow up as children of the promise and serve the Lord. Such is their constant prayer. To this end they labor, preach, instruct, admonish, rebuke, encourage, comfort, publicly and privately, in the midst of the gatherings of the Church and in individual contact. Yet, not all become manifest as children of the promise. Many despise the birthright, as Esau. You labor with them, you pay special attention to them; when they become wayward and indifferent, more labor is bestowed on them than upon those that constantly walk in the ways of the covenant. You admonish them; you pray with them; but it is of no avail: they despise the spiritual blessings of the kingdom of God; they trample under foot God's covenant; and finally, they forsake the fellowship of God or are excommunicated from the Church, to seek their delight in the pleasures of sin. This is a great sorrow and a grievous burden to bear, as long as we are in the earthly house of this tabernacle. Our flesh cries out when God's sovereign mercy cuts right through the midst of the seed of Abraham to separate the children of the promise from the carnal seed.

But there is more.

It is because of the presence of the carnal seed, especially, that the Church on earth is always in danger of apostatizing from the truth. How clearly this is illustrated in the history of the people of Israel in the old dispensation. How the carnal element abounded in their midst! How they always led Israel astray to serve other Gods, to seek the pleasures of sin, to bring the terrible wrath of Jehovah upon the nation! The same is still true: the carnal element in the Church on earth always trends to corrupt the truth, to expose the Church to every wind of doctrine. It is they that find the way of the kingdom too narrow, that would broaden it out to make room for them that follow after their fleshly lusts, that would amalgamate the Church and the world, and for that reason desire to draw the world into the Church.

And thus, finally, it is by this carnal element that the measure of iniquity is filled, and from the carnal seed the antichristian power is constantly developing until the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, the culmination of all the forces of iniquity. It is in the carnal seed that sin becomes manifest in all its horror. With them the children of the promise are engaged in continual spiritual warfare, until the days come in which there shall be great tribulation, days in which the very elect would be deceived if they were not shortened for their sake.

Watch, therefore! Let us not say: “We have Abraham to our Father.” All are not Israel that are Israel; neither are they all children of God because they are of Abraham’s natural seed. Nor ever say that the Word of God has fallen out. For God realizes His promises in all His people. His word never fails. But walk as spiritual children of God in Christ, watching and praying individually and as a church, that no one take our crown!

Separation Between Twin Brothers

We now approach what has often been considered a *locus classicus*, one of the main passages that prove the truth of predestination. I refer, of course, to Romans 9:10-13: "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." And because of the extreme importance of this passage for the truth we are now considering, as well as because the opponents of this truth have attempted to distort the plain meaning of these words, we will proceed somewhat slowly and deliver more than one lecture on the same passage.

Let us note, first of all, that this passage, in which the apostle adduces the example of Jacob and Esau, is in more than one respect an advance over the preceding part of this chapter: first of all, because he refers to the deepest cause and ground of the distinction between Jacob and Esau. This ground is to be found in God's free and sovereign predestination. This was not mentioned in the preceding verses. There the apostle had merely stated that not all the children of the flesh are also children of the promise, without pointing to the determining cause of the distinction between the two-fold seed. In our text, however, the apostle traces this distinction to its ultimate cause: God's purpose according to election must stand and must become plainly manifest. Secondly, it brings out more sharply than the preceding verses the fact that not the natural birth from Abraham determines who shall be children of the promise. Jacob and Esau were children of the same parents, which was not true with respect to Isaac, on the one hand, and Ishmael and the children of Keturah, on the other. The latter were, indeed, children of Abraham; but Sarah, the mother of the promise, was not their mother; and therefore, it might be argued that the promise pertained to Isaac in distinction from his half-brothers because he, after all, was the only true, natural seed of Abraham. But this argument would not apply to the example of Jacob and Esau: they were children of the same parents. In the third place, the example is still more forcible because Jacob and Esau were twin brothers. As far as their origin was concerned, there was no natural

difference between the two. In the fourth place, all the more striking this illustration proves to be when we consider that from a natural point of view Esau certainly should have the pre-eminence over Jacob: for the former was the firstborn, and therefore, possessed the birthright. This is emphasized in the text when it recalls the Word of God to Rebecca that the elder shall serve the younger. In the fifth place, note that it is also emphasized in the text that the distinction between the two brothers was not based upon any work on their part, for they had done neither good or evil. Finally, the text states that the cause of the distinction between the two brothers is in the purpose of God, for the purpose according to election must stand. And all this is emphasized by the quotation which the apostle makes from Malachi 1:2-4: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

Now, let us consider the text a little more in detail.

The Word of God, "The elder shall serve the younger," was spoken to Rebecca. She had gone to inquire of Jehovah, for she was pregnant, and she perceived that her condition was strange and extraordinary. For the children struggled within her. Feeling, perhaps, that this strange phenomenon might be a sign from the Lord, she was persuaded to seek the light of divine revelation. And the Lord answered her inquiry as follows: "Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." Gen. 25:23. The last clause only is quoted by the apostle Paul in our text. And the meaning of this is plainly that the blessing of the covenant, that usually was bestowed on the first-born, in this case should be for the younger son; not Esau, the first-born, but Jacob would inherit the promise.

In passing let me remark that the name Jacob is indeed a very good name. You could never call your child Esau, but to call him Jacob would be perfectly proper. The name does not mean, as many explain, "deceiver," but means literally, "heel-holder," and refers to the fact that Jacob laid his hand upon the heel of his twin brother Esau in the womb. It is true that there is a carnal element in the name, because Jacob before his conversion at Peniel, where "by his strength he had power with God" and conquered by weeping and supplication, Hos. 12:3-4, thought that he had to help God along by his deceit. Yet, fundamentally, his holding of the heel of Esau in the womb was a sign, in fact, maybe more than a sign;—maybe it was an unconscious urge to conquer his profane brother and be the first-born, heir of the

promise and of the covenant of God. The name Jacob, therefore, fundamentally refers to the zeal for God's covenant and kingdom. Principally, Jacob may be compared to the "the violent," that take the kingdom of heaven by force, of which Jesus speaks in distinction from the weak and miserable generation of His time, according to Matt. 11:12-19.

You remember the passage. The men of His generation the Savior compares to "children sitting in the markets and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not wept." John the Baptist preached the kingdom of heaven neither eating nor drinking, and before him they piped; and when John would not dance, they said that he had a devil. Before Jesus, however, who came eating and drinking, they mourned, and when He would not weep, they accused Him of being a glutton and winebibber. Always, whether John or Jesus preached, they found an excuse not to enter the kingdom of heaven. In sharp distinction from these stand the "violent," who take the kingdom of heaven by force. Whether John or Jesus preaches it, they want to enter in. To these "violent," or spiritually strong, Jacob belonged. That is the significance of his having his brother by the heel in the womb. Jacob, therefore, is a good name.

But this by way of a digression.

Now let us return to the text.

What was God's purpose in revealing to Rebecca before the children were born that not both of her sons, neither the elder of the two, but only the younger should inherit the promise? The answer is found in the words of our text: "... that the purpose of God according to election might stand." Now, God's purpose is that which He eternally determines from before the foundation of the world according to His sovereign good pleasure. In this case, the purpose of God concerns the realization of the promise, the bestowal of the covenant blessing. This purpose is realized *according to election*, that is, it is not on all, not even on all the natural seed of Abraham, that God purposes to bestow the blessing of the promise. On the contrary, His predestinating purpose distinguishes and makes separation even between the natural descendants of the father of believers. Only on His own elect, whom He has sovereignly known from before the foundation of the world, He purposes to bestow the covenant blessing. What this purpose of God according to election with respect to Jacob and Esau signifies is also

expressed in Malachi 1:2-4. The apostle quotes from this passage when he writes: "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

Curious are the attempts that have been made by those who shrink from the truth of God's sovereign predestination to distort this significant expression. Not only are there some who would fain weaken the sense and read: "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I loved less"; but the words are even changed into their very opposite, and interpreted as if the apostle had written: "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I loved also." How far either of these interpretations is from the truth is evident, when we read these words in their context as they occur in Malachi 1:2-4. There we read: "I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness. Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the Lord of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the Lord hath indignation forever." Surely, in the light of these words it cannot be maintained that the quotation from them which occurs in the words of our text signifies that God loves Esau, too, or merely that He loved him less than Jacob. The text as it occurs in Romans 9 can only have reference to the love and hatred of God's sovereign and eternal good pleasure; and it may be paraphrased as follows: Jacob have I eternally accepted in love; Esau have I eternally rejected as the object of my sovereign hatred.

But it has also been objected that this election is not personal but national. Also this objection, however, is quite void of force. In the first place, we may reply that even if this were the case, and the expression "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," were to be applied to the nations of Edom and Israel, this application would not alter the case in the least. Is not a nation composed of the sum total of its individual members? And is it not true, therefore, that what is applicable to the nation, in this case, is no less to be applied to the individuals that constitute the nation? Even if we could adopt this interpretation, the fact would remain that the persons of Edom and the Edomites, as they are included in the nation of Edom, are the objects of God's sovereign displeasure, and are excluded from the promise of the covenant by the determining purpose of God. Secondly, is it not quite evident that even this interpretation would not at all exclude, but include

the persons of Jacob and Esau? And what is applicable to the nations that sprang from them is of equal force with reference to their persons. But, besides, how contrary to the entire context is such an interpretation of this passage. The apostle refers to Jacob and Esau as an illustration of the fact that not all the descendants of Abraham are children of the promise. He is not writing of nations and national distinctions, but of individual children of Abraham and of the evident truth that not all the natural seed, not all the individual descendants of the father of believers, are included in the promise. The entire context shows plainly that the apostle is speaking of the distinction God's sovereign purpose according to election makes between persons of the same origin.

Still more curious is the explanation of Barth. Predestination according to him does not refer to any quantitative distinction between persons, but merely to a qualitative difference. Esau and Jacob are types of the church. Esau is the church visible on earth, as it is known to us. As such the church is reprobate, carnal, under the judgment and under the wrath of God. Jacob, however, is the church from God's viewpoint, elect and hidden in God's counsel, and the object of the love of God. Jacob is Esau from the point of view of this present time. Esau is Jacob from the point of view of election. It is only by faith and through the revelation of God in what Barth calls the "eternal moment" that Esau apprehends that God loves him in His eternal counsel as Jacob.

All these objections and interpretations cannot stand for one moment in the light of the clear statement of the text that it refers not to nations, to the nations of Israel and Edom, or to certain typical persons, but to the concrete, historical persons of Jacob and Esau. And, therefore, there can be no dispute about the fact that the words, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," refer to the twin brothers personally.

Hence, we must come to the conclusion that the Word of God in our text, just as in numerous other places, teaches the doctrine of personal election and reprobation. This doctrine of personal election does not merely mean that God chose and ordained an arbitrary number of persons unto salvation and eternal life, so that it would have made no difference had He chosen a greater or smaller number. There never is anything arbitrary in the work of God. All His work is characterized by infinite wisdom and intelligent purpose. God chose not an arbitrary number, but He ordained a Church, an organic whole, the body of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in

order that the riches of glory, of His Son, might shine forth in that Church as a whole, each individual member in his own way and in his own place serving that one purpose, and that so the glory of God might become manifest in the vessels of mercy afore prepared unto glory. Nor is there any arbitrariness in the counsel of reprobation or in the number of the reprobate: for even as the chaff must serve the wheat, so the reprobate must be subservient to the realization and the glorification of the elect Church of Christ. But the truth of personal election does signify that God sovereignly determined just how many and who were to have a place in that glorified Church, as well as the very place each of them should occupy in glory, and with equal sovereignty determined how many and who should have no place in that Church, but be vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction. For salvation is not of man; it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. And no flesh must ever glory in His presence.

Founded in God's Good Pleasure Alone

We were discussing the passage from Rom. 9:10-13, and I will not take time now to quote it again. Only, in the present lecture I must call special attention to the words of verse 11: "(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.)" These words state very plainly that predestination is not based upon works or upon foreseen faith, but rests only in the good pleasure of the Most High.

We must bear in mind that the doctrine of God's sovereignty and of His free determination with respect to the salvation of men is not according to man. Many there are, and always have been, that object to this truth and all its implications. There were not many periods in the history of the Church of Christ in the new dispensation in which she was strong enough to maintain and to confess the truth of God's sovereign predestination in all its purity according to the Scriptures. And ours is certainly not a time in which we expect that the faithful professors of this truth abound. Even those who officially profess to believe this truth usually prefer to keep silent about it; and when they are required to give an account of this strange, ambiguous attitude, they answer that the doctrine of sovereign predestination is a mystery, belongs to the hidden things of God with which we have nothing to do. The revealed things, thus they argue, are for us and our children. And this revealed will, which in the minds of those who assume this ambiguous position usually implies that God is willing to save all and that the gospel is a general offer of salvation on the part of God, must have all the emphasis in the ministry of the Word and the preaching of the gospel of Christ. The doctrine of a general will of God unto salvation is maintained alongside of the truth of sovereign election and particular grace; and the former is emphasized to the exclusion of the latter. And when it is objected that such a position is absurd and untenable, the defenders of this position usually seek a haven of refuge in the well-known excuse that this is an insoluble mystery and that we must maintain both sides of this dilemma without curiously inquiring into the deep things of God. This false and ambiguous position has proved more dangerous to the maintenance of the pure truth of Scripture concerning God's sovereign predestination than professed free-

willism. For under the Reformed flag the entire cargo of Arminian heresy is smuggled into the Church.

However, in this present lecture we are more concerned with the theory of the Arminians. They also pretend to believe in the doctrine of election and, of course, of reprobation. But they explain it in such a way that it is really contingent upon the works and the faith and the free will of man. Granted, they say, that Scripture teaches personal election and reprobation and that this sovereign predestination determines the eternal state of the predestinated, this cannot possibly imply that God in predestinating has no regard for the character and works of those that are so predestinated. The ultimate ground upon which, and the reason why one is elected unto eternal life while another is rejected unto eternal desolation cannot be the mere sovereign good pleasure of the Most High. This, they claim, would be arbitrary; it would present God as a cruel tyrant. Predestination, therefore, rests on the part of God in His foreknowledge of the character and works of man, and on the part of man is based on his foreseen works and, therefore, ultimately on the free will of man. God elected, according to the doctrine of the Arminians, those whom He foreknew would be willing to believe in Christ and to persevere in that faith; and He reprobated them that were by Him foreknown as unwilling thus to believe and persevere. Only thus, they claim, can man's freedom be explained and maintained in the light of God's predestinating purpose; and only on the basis of this presentation of the truth of election and reprobation can the gospel be preached that whosoever will may come and drink of the water of life freely.

We like to emphasize in this connection that the doctrine of predestination is not at all in conflict with the gospel promise that whosoever will may come and drink of the water of life. This we also preach without any distortion or limitation of the words. Surely, whoever *will* may come. And what is more, they may have the assurance that they will be received, seeing that their will to come is already the fruit of God's grace. The Lord Himself gives them the assurance that they that come unto Him He will in no wise cast out. And the promise of rest is for all that are labouring and heavy laden and will come unto Christ. No one will ever be able to say that on his part he was willing to come to Christ and to receive salvation, while God rejected him. But this is the difference between the pure scriptural truth of predestination and its Arminian corruption, that according to the latter the will to believe is the ground of God's election,

while according to the former the will to come is the fruit and outcome of God's predestinating grace.

But suppose we adopt for a moment for the sake of argument the Arminian conception. God has foreknown from all eternity those who would belief in Christ and those who would reject Him; and He unchangeably predestinated the former unto eternal life and the latter unto everlasting damnation. Would this really gain for man the so eagerly desired freedom to determine upon the matter of his own eternal state? Is even then not the eternal state of the elect and of the reprobate immutably fixed and determined? Can even God's foreknowledge be changed? To return to the words of our text, does not God unchangeably know that Eau will be wicked; that he will prove to be a fornicator, profane; that he will despise his birthright if it is placed with his reach; that he will stumble at that stone, and that it were better for him had he never possessed the birthright, yea, that he never had been born? And yet does not God sovereignly place him in the position of the first-born and put the stone of stumbling in his way? Furthermore, can it be said that while God eternally and unchangeably foreknew that Esau would be lost forever, according the divine intention, Christ died for him? Speaking in general, is it conceivable that God seriously gave His only-begotten Son unto the death of the cross for the salvation of them who in His foreknowledge are unchangeably predestined unto damnation? It will be evident that the Arminian cannot be permitted to retain the semblance of the truth for God's sovereign predestination. If one desires to present the salvation of man as contingent upon his own will, he must deny predestination in any form. One must choose between the sovereignty of man and the sovereignty of God. There is no alternative.

However, this Arminian presentation of the doctrine of predestination is contrary both to the context and the text itself. Especially if we view the text in the light of what follows in the chapter, it ought to be very evident that the apostle had in mind no such view as that of the Arminians. For why should he in that case conceive of the objection which he himself expresses in the question, "Is there then unrighteousness with God?" Or why again should he consider the other objection often raised by sinful men, "Why does he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will?" It is evident that, considered in the light of the Arminian view, these objections are simply meaningless and have no sense of force whatsoever. But also in conflict with the text is the view that God's predestination rests upon His foreknowledge

of the works of men. For the apostle emphatically states that the Word of God, which was the revelation of the purpose of God according to election, came to Rebecca before the children were born, neither had done good or evil. Had the Word of God come to Rebecca after the children had grown up and after it had become manifest that Esau was a wicked fornicator while Jacob was the true child of the covenant, she might have drawn the conclusion that God distinguished the brothers on the basis of their own works. But now the purpose of God according to election must stand. Hence, this purpose is revealed to her before the children were born, neither had distinguished themselves by their works, whether good or evil. From this it is evident that it was God's purpose to show unto Rebecca that His counsel of election and reprobation with regard to Jacob and Esau was entirely independent of their works and rested solely in His own sovereign good pleasure.

The text, therefore, makes it very plain that God's predestination is absolutely sovereign and has nothing to do with the works or even the faith of man as a ground of His predestinating counsel. The only ground of His love of the elect and His sovereign hatred of the reprobate is in Himself. He chose to life and He rejected to death according to His sovereign will. He alone determined from before the foundation of the world who would and who would not have a place in that Church in which forever the glory of His grace will be manifest and shine forth.

We conclude, therefore, that the predestination of Jacob and Esau is a personal election and reprobation, that it is an election and reprobation unto eternal salvation and eternal desolation respectively, and that it rests in God's sovereign good pleasure alone. And this truth is taught not only in this passage, but is corroborated by all of Scripture. Jacob and Esau are types of the elect and reprobate, for God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places with Christ, according as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world. Eph. 1: 3, 4. And in Christ we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. Eph. 1:11. To the unbelieving Jews the Lord says openly that they believe not because they are not of His sheep. John 10:26. His sheep are those whom the Father gave Him. John 10:29. And they hear His voice and follow Him, and He knows them and gives unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish. In Mark 4:11, 12, we read that Jesus explains the purpose of His teaching in parables

as follows: "And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them." In John 12:37-41 we read: "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him." And, to quote no more, in I Peter 2:7-9 we read: "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And 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, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness unto his marvellous light."

It has often been objected to this doctrine that it offers no comfort to the wicked or to the sinner. But in reply we may ask: is there then any form of presentation of the gospel that could possibly comfort the wicked and the reprobate? As long as a man walks in the way of iniquity, there is no comfort for him in the whole of Scripture. And the pure, unadulterated truth of predestination maintains even over against him, yea, over against all the workers of iniquity, and even over against the devil and his host, that God is God and that He executes His counsel and realizes His sovereign purpose even in them. Not even in their wickedness and in their deliberate walking in the way of destruction and of everlasting damnation are they able to boast that in doing so they frustrate the will of God concerning them, or are effectively opposing the Most High. Even in hell they will have to confess on the one hand that God is righteous and that their condemnation is just, but also that their eternal desolation has its ultimate cause in God's sovereign predestinating purpose. Hell will confess that God is good and that He is the sovereign God indeed.

But for the godly this doctrine is the ground of his assurance and the source of all his comfort. And comfort it is for him at every stage of his spiritual development and in all circumstances of his life. Are you seeking? Know, then, that you shall surely find: or the fact of your seeking is the indubitable evidence that God has sought you first. Are you knocking? It surely shall be opened unto you: for the fact of your knocking is already the fruit of His grace. Are you weak and wavering? His counsel shall surely stand, and you shall never perish. Are you a confirmed believer? You will know, then, that no one shall pluck you out of His hand: for He will perfect the work which He began and surely preserve His own even unto the very end, so that they can never be lost.

But not only is the truth of God's predestination a source of rich consolation and a ground of firm assurance to the godly; it is also a reason for profound humiliation before God and men. After all, the Arminian doctrine is a proud error: for it teaches after all that salvation is based upon the works and free will of man. But the truth of sovereign predestination emphasizes that God is all and man is nothing. There is absolutely no reason to boast. And the end of the matter is: "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

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www.limerickreformed.com

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