

Sermon of December 21, 1958

Why Predestination Should Be Openly Preached

Good morning, this is Fred Phelps. Last week I said that some believe in election, predestination, and so forth, yet oppose the open preaching of these doctrines. They say that the doctrines are too high, and mysterious, and theoretical to have a practical worth. They fear that the broad scale preaching of predestination will lead to abuse, on the one hand, and despair on the other. Allow me again today, to show that the scripture doctrine of predestination should be openly preached, and insisted on and for what reasons. He alone, in the first place, is entitled to the name of true God, who governs all things, and without whose will, either efficient or permissive, nothing is, or can be done. And such is the God of the scriptures, against whose will not a sparrow can die, nor an hair fall from our heads. Matthew 10. Now, what is predestination, but the determining will of God. I defy the subtlest semi-Armenian in the world, to form or convey a just and worthy notion of the supreme being, without admitting him to be the great cause of all causes else. Himself dependent on none, who willed from eternity how he would act in time, and settled a regular determinate scheme, of what he would do, and permit to be done, from the beginning to the consummation of the world.

A contrary view of the deity is as inconsistent with reason itself, and with the very religion of nature, as it is with the decisions of revelation. Nor can we rationally conceive of an independent all perfect first cause, without allowing him to be unchangeable in his purposes. His decrees and his essence coincide. Consequently a change in those would infer an alteration in this. Nor can that being be the true God, whose will is variable, fluctuating and indeterminate, for his will is simply himself, willing. A deity without decrees, and decrees without immutability, are of all inventions that ever entered the heart of man, the most absurd. Without predestination to plan, and without providence to put that plan in execution, what becomes of God's omnipotence? It vanishes into air. It becomes a mere non entity. A word that has no meaning, for what sort of omnipotence is that which may be baffled and defeated by the very creatures it has made. Very different is the idea of this attribute suggested by the psalmist. Whatsoever the Lord willed, that did he. in heaven and in earth. In the sea and in all deep places. Psalms 113. That is, he not only made them when he would, but he orders them when made. He alone is the true God according to scripture representation, who saves by his mere mercy and voluntary grace, those whom he hath chosen, and righteously condemns for their sins those whom he sought fit to pass by. But without predestination there could be no such thing, either as sovereign mercy or voluntary grace. For after all, what is predestination but his decree to save some of his mere goodness, and to condemn others in his just judgement.

Now it is most evident that the scriptured doctrine of predetermination is the clearest mirror wherein to see and contemplate these essential attributes of God. Here they all shine forth in

their fullness of harmony and luster. Deny predestination, then you deny, though perhaps not intentionally, yet by necessary consequence, the adorable perfections of the Godhead. In concealing that, you throw a veil over these, and in preaching that, you hold up these to the comfort and establishment in the admiration of all believers. Predestination is to be preached, because the grace of God, which stands opposed to all human worthiness cannot be maintained without it. the excellent Augustine makes use of this very argument. *“if,”* says he, *“these two privileges, namely faith itself, and final perseverance in faith, are the gifts of God, and if God foreknew on whom he would bestow these gifts, and who can doubt of so evident a truth, it is necessary for predestination to be preached as the sure and invincible bulwark of that true grace of God which is given to men without any consideration of merit.”* Thus argued Augustine against the Palagens, that thought that grace is offered to all men alike. That God, for his part, equally wills the salvation of all, and that it is in the power of man’s free will, to accept or reject the grace and salvation so offered. Which string of errors do as Augustine justly observes, centering this grand point that God’s grace is not free, but the fruit of man’s deserving. Now the doctrine of predestination batters down this delusive babble of free will and merit. It teaches us that, if we do indeed will and desire, to lay hold on Christ, and salvation by him, this very will and desire are the effect of Gods secret purpose and effectual operation. For he it is, who worketh in us, both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. That he that glorieth, shall glory in the Lord. There neither is, nor can be, any medium between predestinating grace, and salvation by human merit. We must believe and preach one or the other, for they can never stand together, no attempts to mingle and reconcile these two incompatible opposite can never succeed. The apostle himself being judge. *“If,”* says he, *“it,”* that is election, **“be by grace, then it is no more of works. Otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace. Otherwise, work is no more work.”** Romans 11:6.

Exactly agreeable to which is that of Augustine. Either predestination is to be preached as expressly as the scriptures deliver it, namely, that with regard to those whom he hath chosen, the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. Or we must roundly declare as the Palagens do, that grace is given according to merit. Most certain it is that the doctrine of gratuitous justification, through Christ, can only be supported upon that of our gratuitous predestination in Christ, since the latter and cause foundation of the former. By the preaching of predestination, man is duly humbled and God alone is exalted. Human pride is leveled, and the divine glory shines untarnished, because unrivaled. This the sacred writers positively declare, let Paul be spokesman for the rest. **“Having predestinated us,”** said he, **“to the praise of the glory of his grace.”** Ephesians 1:5-6.

But how is it possible for us to render unto God the praises due to the glory of his grace, without laying this threefold foundation? First, that whosoever are, or shall be saved, are saved by his alone grace in Christ, in consequence of his eternal purpose, passed before they had done any one good thing. And two, that what good thing, so ever, has begun to do whatsoever wrought in our souls, whether it be illumination of the understanding, rectitude of will, or

purity of affections, was begun altogether by God alone. By whose invincible agency grace is at first conferred, afterwards maintained, and finally crowned. And three, that the work of eternal salvation, the sweet and certain prelude to eternal glory, was not only begun in us, of his mere grace alone, but that its continuance, its progress, and increase, are no less free and totally unmerited, than its first original donation. Grace alone makes the elect gracious. Grace alone keeps them gracious, and the same grace alone will render them everlastingly glorious in the heaven of heavens. Conversion and salvation friend, must, in the very nature of things, be wrought and effected, either by ourselves alone, or by ourselves and God together, or solely by God himself.

The Palagens were for the first. The Armenians are for the second. True believers are for the last, because the last hypothesis, and that only, is built on the strongest evidence of scripture, reason, and experience. It most effectually hides pride from man, and sets the crown of undivided praise upon the head, or rather casts it at the feet, of that glorious triune God, who worketh all in all. But this is a crown which no sinners ever yet cast before the throne of God, who were not first led into the transporting views of his gracious decree to save. Freely and of his own will. The people of his eternal love. Exclude therefore, oh Christian friend, the article of sovereign predestination, from thy ministry or from thy faith, and acquit thyself if thou art able, from the charge of robbing God. When God does, by the omnipotent exertion of his spirit, effectually call any of mankind in time, to the actual knowledge of himself in Christ, when he likewise goes on to sanctify the sinners he has called, making them to excel in all good works, and to persevere in the love and resemble of God in their lives end.

The observing part of the unawakened world may be apt to conclude that these converted persons might receive such measures of grace from God, because of some previous qualifications, good dispositions, or piased desires, and internal preparations, discovered in them by the all-seeing eye. Which, if true, would indeed transfer the praise from the creator and consign it to the creature. But the doctrine of predestination, absolute, free, unconditional predestination here steps in and gives God his own. It lays the axe to the root of human boasting, and cuts down, for which reason the natural man hates it, every legal, every independent, every self-righteous imagination that would exalt itself against the grace of God and the glory of Christ. It tells us that God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in his Son, and for what reason. Namely, according as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, in order to our being afterwards made holy and blameless before him in love. That's in Ephesians 1. Of course, whatever truly and spiritually good thing is found in any person, it is the especial work and gift of God. All praise to him. Given and wrought in consequence of eternal, unmerited election to grace and glory. Whence the greatest saint cannot triumph over the most abandoned sinner, but is lead to infer the entire praise of his salvation, both from sin and hell, to the mere good will and sovereign purpose of God, who hath graciously made him to differ from that world, which layeth in wickedness.

Such being the tendency of this blessed doctrine, how injurious both to God and man, would the suppression of it be. “well,” does Augustine argue, *“as the duties of piety ought to be preached up, that he that hath ears to hear may be instructed how worship God aright, and, as chastity should be publicly recommended, and enforced, that he who hath ears to hear, may know how to possess himself in sanctification, and as charity, moreover, should be inculcated from the pulpit, that he who hath ears to hear, may be excited to the ardent love of God, and his neighbor, in like manner should Gods predestination of his favors be openly preached, that he who hath ears to hear, may learn to glory, not in himself, but in the Lord.”* Predestination, my friend, should be publicly taught and insisted upon, in order to confirm and strengthen true believers, in the certainty and confidence of their salvation. For when regenerate persons are told and are unable to believe, that the glorification of the elect, is so assuredly fixed in Gods eternal purpose, that it is impossible for any of them to perish. And when the regenerate are led to consider themselves as actually belonging to this elect body of Christ, what can establish, strengthen and settle their faith like this? Nor is such a faith presumptuous. For every converted man may and ought to conclude himself elected, since God the spirit renews those only who were chosen by God the Father, and redeemed by God the Son.

This is a hope, which maketh not ashamed, nor can possibly issue an disappointment, if entertained by those into whose hearts the love of God is poured forth by the holy spirit given unto them. My friends, this doctrine of justification or predestination, is a most precious one. It enables the saint upon earth to say, *“why was I made to hear his voice, and enter while there’s room, when thousands make wretched choice, and rather stave then come? T’was the same love that spread the feast, that sweetly forced us in, else we had still refused to taste, and perish in our sin.”* This is Fred Phelps, pastor of Westboro Baptist Church. Next week, the Lord willing, more of the same. And now, peace be to the brethren, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus in sincerity. Amen.