

Predestination - St. John's Downshire Hill - 15.3.17

Introduction

Comfort and Praise - the subjective response

Article 17 - “*Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour...the godly consideration of predestination, and our election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons...*”

Ephesians 1:3 - “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Distinction - ‘election’ and ‘predestination’

Key principle - “*When God determines who shall and who shall not enjoy his blessings, be they earthly or heavenly; he does so according to his sovereign good pleasure and not according to anything in humanity.*”¹

Or, to paraphrase Deut. 7 - God loves you because he loves you

Simple Creator and Sovereign Sustainer - Revelation 4:11

Psalm 139:16; Isaiah 45:7; Ephesians 1:11

A different action pie altogether

God is identical with his goodness, love, and justice

Sin and Salvation

Ephesians 2:1-3 - the corpse on the seabed, not the floundering swimmer

Free will...?

Ephesians 2:4-10

John 6:37-40, 44, 65

God’s call achieves what he intends - he does not work against the Christian’s will, but through it,

Unconditional Mercy

Ephesians 1:3-14

- before time
- for God’s glory (we don’t boast) - and therefore truly GRACE (also - personal holiness is goal, not cause, of choice)
- fulfilling God’s purpose and plan (see also 2 Timothy 1:9)
- salvation is the inseparable work of the triune God

John 6:37; 17:2, 6, 9

- a Trinitarian arrangement and gift

Romans 9:1-23

¹ Sam Storms, *Chosen For Life: The Case for Divine Election* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 121.

- Israel's enormous privileges cause Paul's sadness at their lost-ness (vv1-5)
- But God's word has not failed (vv6-13):
 - it has always been the case that Israel is a mixed group
 - the reason for the mix is God's electing choice, not any performance or self-generated faith on the part of the blessed (see also Acts 13:48)
 - individuals chosen precisely so that God's purpose is seen to stand, and that salvation is according to grace
- God's justice is not undermined (vv14-18):
 - 'mercy' and 'compassion' assume guilt - it would be just for God to choose none for salvation
 - Exodus 33:19 - what it means for God to be God, namely to act freely without things outside his own will and good pleasure deciding how to apply mercy and grace
 - v16 - accounting for the difference between believer and unbeliever is not found by looking at them
 - Hardening of Pharaoh's heart - different action pies - fully guilty king, and fully sovereign God
- And God's fairness is not up for question (vv19-23 - a stunning and humbling rebuke):
 - NB - the lump of clay is fallen - the real wonder is that God chooses any at all!
 - Unconditional mercy only causes complaint when we forget what we deserve - how can it be unfair to withhold what is not owed?
 - Will we let God be God?

Doesn't God will all to be saved?

1 Timothy 2:4

God decrees and God commands - God is sometimes pleased to decree what displeases him - e.g. Acts 4:27-28

Unless all are saved (which they aren't), then God wills something *more* than that all are saved. Either, the absolute freedom of human will; or, his own freedom to manifest his glory. Whose freedom is the higher value? Let God be God, and don't presume to be 'more' merciful.

Benefits - not true because helpful, but helpful because true

Praise - a God-centred, God glorifying reality

Comfort

- Luke 12:32; 2 Timothy 1:8-10
 - Face persecution and suffering knowing that God's plans don't fail
- Romans 8:31ff - this is the kind of God we have, he loves sinners like us when we did nothing to deserve it

Motivation

- Holy living (e.g. Colossians 3:12-13)
- Evangelism - the results are God's, so my feeble efforts can be carried out with boldness (e.g. see Jonah 3)²

A final word - "Let us, I say, allow the Christian to unlock his mind and ears to all the words of God which are addressed to him, provided he do it with this moderation, i.e., that whenever the Lord shuts his sacred mouth, he also desists from inquiry."³

² "Were it not for the sovereign grace of God, evangelism would be the most futile and useless enterprise that the world has ever seen, and there would be no more complete waste of time under the sun than to preach the Christian gospel." J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1961), 106).

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), III.xxi.3.