

REPROBATION

INTRODUCTION

- As we have seen over the last couple of weeks, the Bible clearly teaches the doctrine of election...that God chose which individuals he would save before the foundation of time
- We have seen that election has no basis in any good foreseen in those who are saved
- God's choice is entirely due to his mercy and not to any good that could be imagined to reside in us
- But in discussions concerning election, the question often comes up: Does God also predestine people to hell?
- To put it another way: Is reprobation like election in every way except the destination?
- Or: If God chooses some for heaven before they are born, then does he also choose the rest for damnation before they are born?
- To put it simply: Is there an equal causation between election and reprobation? Are they equally symmetrical? Is there such a thing as double predestination?
- Does God determine the destinies of individuals in exactly the same way so that, without any consideration of what they do or might do, he assigns one to heaven and the other to hell?
- Did God, before time, contemplate human beings as yet unfallen and morally neutral creatures and decide to infuse evil into some of them in order to justly punish them and infuse righteousness in others in order to save them?
- Is God as active in working unrighteousness into the reprobate as he is in working righteousness into the elect?
- Does God predestine some people to heaven and some people to hell?
- Does God elect some unto salvation and some unto damnation?
- "Some have viewed double predestination as a matter of equal causation, where God is equally responsible for causing the reprobate not to believe as He is for causing the elect to believe."¹
- "Reprobation is often wrongfully conflated with the doctrine of equal ultimacy. Equal ultimacy teaches that God's actions in election and reprobation are perfectly symmetrical, so that God is just as active in working unbelief in the heart of the reprobate as he is in working faith in the heart of the elect. It pictures God in eternity past contemplating all humanity as yet unfallen and morally neutral and arbitrarily deciding to work sin and unbelief in the reprobate in order to be justified in consigning them to eternal punishment. Though this is what many think of when they hear the terms reprobation or double predestination, it is a gross caricature of the biblical doctrine of reprobation that is utterly foreign to Scripture, repugnant to the love and justice of God, and an aberration of historic Calvinism that has been rejected throughout Reformed orthodoxy."²
- We would reject an understanding of God's decrees whereby he actively chooses people for damnation, namely double predestination
- But Scripture does clearly teach the doctrine of reprobation in which God sovereignly decides to pass over sinners and not to save them
- This is a perhaps a more difficult doctrine to accept than even that of unconditional election

¹ R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, 165.

² John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, 505.

- The thought of people made in the image of God, many whom we know and love, suffering eternally in conscious torment in hell is a difficult one
- Because of the love that God shows his people and the love that he commands us to have toward our neighbor, we tend to recoil at the thought that God consigning sinners to unending suffering in judgment
- As such, this doctrine easily offends our sensibilities and it is rejected altogether by many
- “It is something that we would not want to believe, and would not believe, unless Scripture clearly taught it.”³
- This is largely because the doctrine of reprobation is so easily and so often misunderstood
- Therefore, it is necessary to state what precisely we do/do not believe concerning the doctrine of reprobation

DEFINITION AND EXPLANATION

- Reprobation is defined as God’s eternal purpose to pass by certain specific individuals in the bestowment of special grace, ordaining them to everlasting punishment for their sins
- Reprobation teaches that God is sovereign not only over those who will come to eternal life, but also over those that will resurrect to eternal death
- “The decree of reprobation is the free and sovereign choice of God, made in eternity past, to pass over certain individuals, choosing not to set his saving love on them but instead determining to punish them for their sins unto the magnification of his justice.”⁴
- “Reprobation is the sovereign decision of God before creation to pass over some persons, in sorrow deciding not to save them, and to punish them for their sins, and thereby to manifest his justice.”⁵
- There are two views related to this doctrine that must be considered:
 - 1. Positive-positive**
 - God positively and sovereignly works in the lives of the elect to bring them to salvation
 - Likewise, he also positively and sovereignly works in the lives of the non-elect to prevent them from coming to faith
 - 2. Positive-negative**
 - God positively and sovereignly works in the lives of the elect to bring them to salvation
 - In the case of the non-elect, he does not actively prevent them from coming to faith, but simply passes over them, leaving them to their own sinful devices
- When determining which view is correct, we must understand the following:
 - 1. Election is limited**
 - God does choose those whom he will save before the foundation of the world
 - He does not choose every individual...but rather only chooses some “according to his kind intention which He purposed in Christ” (Eph 1:9)
 - Thus unlike reprobation, election is limited in that it does not apply to everyone by its nature; rather, only the chosen are called the elect
 - 2. Election is positive**

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 685.

⁴ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 504.

⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 685.

- Election is a positive act of God in which he actively rescues believers from their spiritual death and draws them to himself in such a way that it secures their redemption
- The terms “election” and “predestination” are used in Scripture with positive connotations, not negative ones

Ephesians 1:5 ~ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

Ephesians 1:11 ~ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

Romans 8:30 ~ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

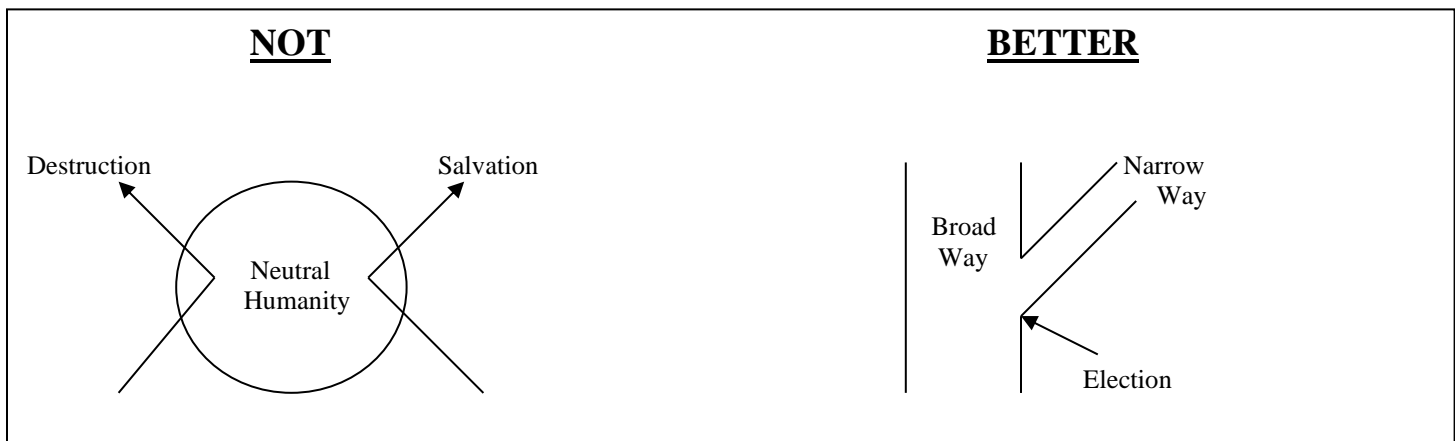
- In reprobation, God doesn't need to do anything to actively consign sinners to hell; it is their eternal destiny as a result of their wickedness, love of darkness, and rejection of Christ
- “So, it is wrong to see election as dual, as in ‘some are elected to life, and others are elected to death.’ In fact, we don't even use the word ‘election’ that way in English. You would say ‘President Trump was elected to office,’ but you wouldn't say ‘Secretary Clinton was elected to defeat.’ That's not what the word means. Thus, it is not appropriate to say, ‘God elects people to hell.’”⁶
- “Thus we wouldn't say that “God predestined people to hell” at the very least because the Bible doesn't say it that way. The Bible says that God predestines people to heaven, and elects them for salvation, but it never turns those phrases on their heads. The reason those terms are one-way streets is because they highlight God's grace, as opposed to man's effort. Salvation comes from grace, and it is not of works lest any man should boast. So for anyone to be saved, it must be because of God's electing purpose. In contrast, hell is not described as the result of God's electing purposes, but always as the result of our works. People go to heaven because of grace, and they go to hell because of their sin. Thus election is in light of God's predestined plan, but reprobation is in light of our works. To use an analogy, if you go into a grocery store at 9:59 pm, and you choose one apple to buy, and the store will throw the rest away at 10 pm, you know that those apples which you do not choose will be thrown away. Nevertheless, your act of not choosing them is not causal—you chose one for salvation, but it is not right to say that you chose the others for destruction. They are destroyed because they are expired, not because of your choice.”⁷
- Furthermore, it is necessary to remember the state in which all unbelievers exist...they are spiritually dead as a result of their sin nature
- Paul makes it clear in his spiritual autopsy report that our body, head, throat, tongue, mouth, lips, feet, ears, heart and mind have all been destroyed by sin

Romans 3:10-18 ~ as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; 11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; 12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.” 13 “THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,” “THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”; 14 “WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”; 15 “THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, 16 DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, 17 AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.” 18 “THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”

⁶ <https://thecripplegate.com/reprobation-does-god-elect-people-to-hell/>

⁷ Ibid.

- As a result, every person is naturally on the road to destruction, destined for hell
- “The defense of the doctrine of Reprobation rests upon the preceding doctrine of Original Sin or Total Inability. This decree finds the whole race fallen. None have any claim on God's grace. But instead of leaving all to their just punishment, God gratuitously confers undeserved happiness upon one portion of mankind, an act of pure mercy and grace to which no one can object, while the other portion is simply passed by. No undeserved misery is inflicted upon this latter group. Hence no one has any right to object to this part of the decree. If the decree dealt simply with innocent men, it would be unjust to assign one portion to condemnation; but since it deals with men in a particular state, which is a state of guilt and sin, it is not unjust.”⁸
- Conclusion: A positive-positive view cannot be accepted biblically...a positive-negative is biblically correct



BIBLICAL SUPPORT

Romans 9:19-23 ~ You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” 20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? 21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? 22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory”

- In v. 19, Paul is answering the objection: How can God find fault?
- Drawing an analogy between the sovereign Creator and a potter, Paul clearly shows that the pot has no right to question its maker
- The point is clear: It would be absurd for a piece of pottery to question the purposes of the potter...the clay has no right to complain!
- In v. 21, Paul argues that just as a potter may fashion his clay as he pleases, so God has perfect liberty to make what he wills of the humanity he has created and man has right to answer back
- A potter can make out of the clay vessels for “honorable” use and other for “common” use...he can make what he wants
- From the same pile of clay, a potter forms a finely shaped vase AND he forms a chamber pot
- In the same way, Paul insists that God has the right to do whatever he will with his own creation

⁸ Loraine Boettner, https://www.gracegems.org/31/doctrine_of_reprobation.htm

- He had the right to make Moses a vessel of mercy for his use and Pharaoh a vessel for wrath
- Now, many at this point assume that Paul is saying that God creates some for heaven and others for hell
- But notice a very slight but important distinction in vv. 20-21...they don't say that God **created** some for each of those purposes...rather they say that God **formed** some for each of those purposes
- The “making/molding” is not from scratch...the potter doesn't make the clay...he forms the clay which already exists
- That's the parallel that Paul is drawing here...God is not making people either holy or evil...rather he forms what already exists
- This is a critical distinction because the Bible doesn't teach that God originally created man sinful...or that he created sinful creatures in order to punish them!
- He doesn't create sinners because evil doesn't originate with God!
- God has simply taken the lump of clay known as sinful humanity and by sovereign election fashioned some of the clay into vessels that receive mercy
- God did not create some for heaven and some for hell...he did not assign some to hell in the same way he assigned some to heaven
- No, he worked with what he had...all people were destined for hell...and from those He formed some for election and some for destruction...but all were destined for destruction
- There is no neutrality in man...he is an enemy of God...the natural state of the clay is sinful, rebellious, depraved...God doesn't make them that way
- It is out of that lump (sinful humanity) that God elects some to everlasting life and passes over others allowing them to remain in their state of rebellion
- Neither of those actions on God's part are unjust
- So, in his perfect wisdom and righteousness, God has destined some people for salvation by His grace AND because of their sin and unbelief has left others to damnation by his wrath
- “It is nowhere suggested that God has the right to create sinful beings in order to punish them, but rather that He has the right to deal with sinful beings according to his good pleasure, either to pardon or to punish them.”⁹
- So, God does not predestine some to hell in the same way he predestines some to heaven (positive-positive)
- Rather, in the case of the elect, God positively intervenes in their lives to rescue them from their corrupt condition...and in the case of the reprobate, God simply passes over them and leaves them to their own devices (positive-negative)
- So, in the mass of fallen humanity, some receive the saving grace of God (the elect)...and He passes over the remainder (the non-elect)
- This is the point of vv. 22-23
- Paraphrase of v. 22: What if God, even though He desired to send men to hell for their sin immediately, withheld his judgment and was patient toward those deserving judgment?
- God is very patient with “vessels of wrath” who oppose, insult, hate, and rebel against him
- He has the right to destroy and judge them immediately...but he patiently endures their rebellion rather than giving them what every sin immediately deserves
- These vessels of wrath have been “prepared for destruction”

⁹ John Stott

- Notice that v. 22 doesn't necessarily state who it was that prepared these people or made them ripe for destruction...it has no subject
- v. 23 states that it is God who prepares vessels of mercy...God is the active agent in preparing vessels of mercy
- But v. 22 has no active agent...it doesn't say who prepared the vessels of destruction
- It may be that the people themselves are the active agents in forming themselves as vessels of wrath
- This idea is substantiated by the fact that the verb "prepared" could be a middle voice verb meaning it is reflexive...i.e. they prepared themselves...the people who continue in their sin and rebellion and hardness of heart have actually prepared themselves as vessels of destruction
- It is also possible that the verb "prepared" in v. 22 is in the passive voice (the form for middle and passive are identical)
- But it doesn't say who did the preparing...it may be that God has prepared them for destruction...that would fit the point of v. 18 and the analogy of the potter/clay in v. 21
- But even if we assume that God is the one who prepared these vessels of wrath, we must understand it as meaning that the hardening of their hearts and their "preparation for destruction" was a punishment for their own action of hardening themselves
- God has never prepared anybody for destruction...it is by their own evildoing they are prepared
- They are not made this way by God; rather, **God passed them over**...and in doing so, they become "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction"
- Regardless of whether they prepare themselves as vessels of destruction or whether God prepares them as vessels of destruction by giving them over to the hardness of their own hearts, the point is that God is exceedingly patient with them
- Why does God delay his judgment on the wicked? Why did God create people knowing they would fall into sin? → v. 23 ~ And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory
- God has mercifully chosen some out of the rebellious, wicked people of the world to be vessels of mercy
- These vessels have been "prepared beforehand for glory" (the elect)
- They are "vessels of mercy" – vessels into which and upon which God lavishes his undeserved kindness and grace and mercy and compassion and forgiveness!
- There is no question in this verse as to the agent involved in preparing "vessels of mercy" – God alone!
- The reason God delays his judgment is that he might display his incredible mercy on the elect
- Why? → so he can display in the elect "the riches of his glory"
- God graciously and gloriously saves the elect to make them trophies of his mercy...and, in doing so, he gets all the glory
- Notice that in both cases God's aim is to "make something known" (that verb occurs in vv. 22 and 23)
- The vessels are FOR wrath and FOR mercy:
 - v. 22 ~ What if God, although willing to **demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known**, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?
 - v. 23 ~ And **He did so to make known the riches of His glory** upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,
- In the case of the non-elect, God's purpose is to make known his wrath and power

- In the case of the elect, God’s purpose is to make known the riches of His glory
- In both cases, God is glorified:
 - He is glorified in the elect by them glorifying God for salvation (election)
 - He is glorified in the reprobate by passing over them for salvation and using their life for his glory even in their rebellion (reprobation)
- So, the revelation of God’s wrath to the objects of his wrath was with a view to the revelation of his glory to the objects of His mercy
- The glory of God’s grace to the undeserving elect shines more brightly against the background of his wrath to the deserving non-elect
- This doesn’t solve the burning question in our minds: Why does God prepare some people in advance for glory and pass over others that results in their destruction?
- But it does tell us why...he elects some to salvation so that we get the blessings and he gets the glory
- From a corrupt mass of clay, God chose some to make vessels of mercy to display his glory
- But understand that election and reprobation are not equal opposites
- God did actively choose some for salvation and then pass over others
- **But in neither case is anyone treated unfairly...some receive the justice they deserve...others receive the mercy they don’t deserve...but God is not unjust in either case!**
- “So election and reprobation both occur before creation, and both are based on God’s plan to display his glory in the creation and through the lives of his creatures. Yet they are not equal, and they are not opposites. Election is the rescuing of a person from their works, and reprobation is confirming someone in their works. Election is saving and active, reprobation is damning and passive. Election and reprobation are not akin to divine Duck-Duck-Goose. The doctrine of reprobation is true, but it is not the same as the doctrine of election. The Bible does teach that God is sovereign over salvation, and God forms a soul for its destiny, but this does not teach that God is active in predestination in the same way in which he is active in reprobation.”¹⁰

1 Peter 2:7-8 ~ This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone,” 8 and, “A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

- Note the human responsibility evident in this verse:
 - “the stone which the builders rejected”
 - “they are disobedient to the word”
- **Jude 4** ~ For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ”
- Note the human responsibility evident in this verse:
 - “ungodly persons”
 - “who turn the grace of God into licentiousness”
 - “who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ”

¹⁰ <https://thecripplegate.com/reprobation-does-god-elect-people-to-hell/>

- So, what applies to the non-elect is not specific selection unto eternal damnation out of the state of lostness but a divine passing over
- This does not change the fact that God desires to see people saved

Ezekiel 18:32 ~ ‘For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,’ declares the Lord GOD. ‘Therefore, repent and live.’

1 Timothy 2:4 ~ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth

2 Peter 3:9 ~ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance”

- Thus, we must not see election and reprobation as symmetrical actions on the part of God...they are not equally ultimate
- “In election, God powerfully acts to change a person from a sinner to a saint. God does not act to change a saint into a sinner. Election is an act of God; reprobation is simply the reflex of that action, the fact that God has not elected everybody.”¹¹
- “God does not have to elect anybody. When God chooses to save a sinner, He puts forth an action to save that person. God works to create belief in us. This contrasts with the doctrine of reprobation. God does not put forth an effort to cause people to sin. When God chooses to bypass a sinner, He does not work to create unbelief in that person's heart. Rather, God simply lets him go his own way.”¹²
- In this sense, the work of God in condemning the wicked is not the exact opposite of his work in saving sinners
- It is significant that no terminology like “elect unto destruction, etc.” occurs in Scripture; thus, one may not posit an equal but opposite action
- “While logically the election of some implies the rejection of others, Scripture is clearly reluctant to set these two ideas in strict balance.”¹³
- “We also must remember that *there are important differences between election and reprobation as they are presented in the Bible*. Election to salvation is viewed as a cause for rejoicing and praise to God, who is worthy of praise and receives all the credit for our salvation...God is viewed as actively choosing us for salvation, and doing so in love and with delight. But reprobation is viewed as something that brings God sorrow, not delight (see Ezek. 33:11), and the blame for the condemnation of sinners is always put on the people...never on God himself...So in the presentation of Scripture the cause of election lies in God, and the cause of reprobation lies in the sinner. Another important difference is that the ground of election is God’s grace, whereas the ground of reprobation is God’s justice. Therefore, ‘double predestination’ is not a helpful or accurate phrase, because it neglects those differences between election and reprobation.”¹⁴
- “In spite of the fact that we recoil against this doctrine, we must be careful of our attitude toward God and toward these passages of Scripture. We must never begin to wish that the Bible was written in another way, or that it did not contain these verses. Moreover, if we are convinced that these verses teach reprobation, then we are obligated both to believe it and accept it as fair and just of God, even though it still causes us to tremble in horror as we think of it.”¹⁵

¹¹ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/the-doctrine-of-reprobation>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth*, 185.

¹⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 686.

¹⁵ Ibid.