**Appendix 9. On Calvinism and Predestination**

Although Calvinism is believed by a great number of good people, there are many reasons why predestination can be seen to be an erroneous doctrine. It is important to understand the terms involved: in this appendix “predestination,” is used in the Calvinistic sense that everything that happens is God’s will, and God chooses those who will be saved and those who will be condemned to Gehenna (not all “Calvinists” believe exactly that, but that is a major tenet of what John Calvin, and his followers such as Jonathan Edwards, believed and taught). The doctrine of predestination and Calvinism are inextricably linked, and there are more erroneous doctrines in Calvinism than just predestination, so although most of the things below apply to predestination, this appendix will also deal with some other errors in Calvinism. It is important to note that some people claim to be Calvinists without believing in what is referred to as “five-point” Calvinism, but for the purpose of this entry, a Calvinist is someone who adheres to the full teaching of five-point Calvinism, although most of the points below also apply to anyone who calls himself a Calvinist, including “four-point” Calvinists.

**1). Calvinism makes God unloving.** It is a major tenet of Calvinism that God condemns people to Hell just because He decided to. Calvinists argue among themselves, as well as with non-Calvinists, over whether predestination is “single predestination” or “double predestination.” In double predestination, God actively predestines some people to heaven and the rest to “Hell.” In single predestination, God predestines people to heaven, and people go to “Hell” due to their own sin.

To us and many other theologians, the difference between double and single predestination is only semantic. If God predestined only some people to heaven, then by default He predestined the rest to Gehenna. Single-predestination Calvinists claim that God did not force sinners to sin, but the fact is that by His predetermining the sin and fall of Adam and Eve, and by His unwillingness to help sinners escape sin, He renders the unsaved state of sinners inescapable, and thus actually predestines them to Gehenna.

Since Calvinism teaches that people can only choose to be saved when God enables them to, and it is God Himself who makes the decision not to enable the doomed to go to heaven, then in fact He does choose some people for Gehenna. Interestingly, double predestination Calvinists themselves say that “single predestination” is doubletalk: if God predestines one group, then by default He predestines the other.

The doctrine of predestination makes God unloving. If a person motors a boat past a drowning man but does not rescue him even though he could have done so, we would say the man in the boat was unloving. Similarly, if God saves only those He chooses and leaves the rest to Gehenna even though He could have saved them, in every usual sense of the word “love,” that makes God unloving.

**2). Calvinism makes God the author of sin and evil.** Since according to strict Calvinism everything that happens is God’s will, then the sin and evil that occur are His will also. Many Calvinists admit this, but refer to it as a necessary consequence of God’s sovereignty. But saying that God is the author of sin and evil contradicts the most fundamental tenets of the Bible, that God is love and does not sin or encourage sin, and on that basis it can be seen to be a false doctrine.

Some Calvinists try to explain that what looks evil to us is not really evil because it is in the master plan of God. But that is double-talk. Jesus said that we could know people by their fruit. God defines love in many places, among them 1 Corinthians 13. If God is the author of sin and evil, then either love is not what He says it is, or He is not loving. The easy and biblical solution to this problem is that Calvinism is in error and God is not the author of sin or evil.

**3). Calvinism forces God to have two different wills.** Some Calvinists refer to these two wills of God as His decretive will and His preceptive will. God’s decretive will is defined as His sovereign and efficacious will; it is what actually happens. In contrast, God’s preceptive will (from the word “precept”) is defined as what God commands but what may not happen. The reason that Calvinism forces God to have two different wills is that God has hundreds of commands in which He tells us to behave in a certain way (“Do not steal,” “Do not commit adultery,” etc.), and yet because Calvinists believe that God predetermines everyone’s behavior, that means He made it certain that people would sin and break those very commands. For example, according to Calvinism, God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree in the middle of the Garden (His preceptive will), while at the same time having determined from eternity past that they would eat of the tree (His decretive will) in disobedience to His command.

But a doctrine that makes God have two different wills that are often contradictory and in conflict with one another makes God schizophrenic and it contradicts the Scripture that God cannot lie. If God commands us not to do something while willing and predetermining that we do it, then He is a liar. The fact that Calvinism forces God to have two different wills that often contradict one another shows that the doctrine is false.

**4). Calvinism makes it unavailable to read the Bible and believe it at face value.** According to Calvinism, an unregenerate person who is not empowered by God cannot choose to do anything good. Yet God asks everyone, in many different ways and places in the Bible, to do good. For example, God asks people to “choose life” (Deut. 30:19), but according to Calvinism people cannot “choose life” on their own, but have to have God’s enabling power to do so.

In Ezekiel 33:11 God says, “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?” But how can anyone make sense of this verse when it is read from a Calvinist point of view? The verse says God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but according to Calvinists, God gets glory from their death and He planned it in the first place. Furthermore, in Ezekiel 33:11, God is pleading with people to turn from their evil, but according to Calvinists, they cannot turn without God’s help. Thus, according to Calvinist doctrine, God is pleading with Israel to do something He knows they cannot do. Worse, He could help them turn from their sin, but He refuses to. This makes God’s plea disingenuous and misleading.

On the other hand, if Ezekiel 33:11 is read from the point of view that people have freedom of will to choose good or evil, it makes perfect sense. God does not want anyone to be wicked and die, so He pleads with them to turn from their evil ways, and He saves them when they do.

There are many verses that do not make sense if Calvinism is correct. One example is God’s statement just prior to the Flood: “So the LORD said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground…for I am sorry that I have made them” (Gen. 6:7 RSV). If Calvinism is right, the Bible says God was “sorry” He made all the people, but actually they were doing exactly what He wanted and predestined them to do. So why was He sorry? Another example is Luke 7:30 (NIV84), “But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves….” Unless there is genuine free will, how could anyone reject God’s purpose for themselves? Or Isaiah 1:2 (NIV84), “…the LORD has spoken: ‘I reared children…but they have rebelled against me.” If everyone is doing what God predestined for their life, then no one is “rebelling” against God, they are all obeying Him. These examples could be multiplied a hundredfold, and they show that if Calvinism is correct, the Bible cannot be read and believed at face value.

**5). If Calvinism is correct, then we humans cannot trust our senses.** We humans generally trust our senses, and it clearly seems that people actually make genuine choices, choices to do good and even the choice to accept Christ. Furthermore, God tells us that wisdom is the principal thing, and above all to be wise (Prov. 4:7). The reason wisdom is so important is that it enables us to discern good choices from bad ones. But if predestination is correct, we do not actually make the choice for Christ on our own, but God enables us to make the choice, which we then automatically make even though it feels like we are making the choice on our own. Similarly, unsaved people think they could choose Christ but simply refuse to, when, according to Calvinism, that is not the case at all—they are actually unable to choose Christ. If Calvinism is correct, the good choices we think we are making are just mental deceptions; we are not really making them, and so people cannot trust their senses.

**6). Calvinism claims that God never intended to save everyone, in direct contrast to the simple teaching of Scripture.** The Bible says God so loved the “world” that He gave His Son, that “whosoever” believes will be saved. But that simple scripture contradicts the fundamental tenet of Calvinism that God never intended to save everyone in the world; He only intended to save the ones He chose. Some Calvinists try to skirt this issue by redefining “world” or “whosoever” (and “all people” in 1 Tim. 2:4) by saying that these words are being used in a limited sense, not a universal sense, but there is no actual justification for that explanation other than it fits with the Calvinist’s preconceived doctrine.

There are Calvinists who admit that “world” and “whosoever” refer to everyone, but then they go so far as to say that God does love the “world,” and sending people to the Lake of Fire is an expression of His love because they get to suffer eternally for His glory. The old Calvinist saying is that, “those who find themselves suffering in hell can at least take comfort in the fact that they are there for the greater glory of God.” This makes God, along with anyone else who torments people for their own glory, unlovable.

God saying that He loved the world and sent His Son to save anyone who would believe is simple and straightforward, and shows that God does indeed love everyone and also that people have genuine freedom of will and can reject His love if that is the choice they make.

**7). If Calvinism is correct, evil does not actually exist.** Many Calvinists assert that everything—every single thing—that happens is God’s will; God predestined and controls everything that happens on earth. Since, by definition, God is good and God is love, Calvinist doctrine then means that everything that happens is good and loving; it is only that we humans cannot see that fact because we cannot see “the big picture of God’s master plan.”

At face value, the Bible disagrees with that assertion about God’s supposed “master plan.” God gave us His Word to teach us about Him and life, and it clearly reveals good and how to act in a good way, and evil and what kinds of thoughts and actions are evil. The Bible even says, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil” (Isa. 5:20). By making everything that happens part of God’s master plan and predestined by God Himself, Calvinists not only deny genuine evil, they make evil into good. Furthermore, the Bible clearly distinguishes between good and evil, so Calvinism cannot be right in making everything God’s will and therefore good.

**8). Calvinism creates a paradox for Christians.** Calvinism makes God the author of sin and evil, and the Bible tells us to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1). So to imitate God we would have to sin and cause evil. But the Bible also commands Christians not to sin and do evil. Since we would not be obeying God by imitating Him unless we were causing sin and evil, but since causing sin and evil would be breaking a different command of God, Calvinism creates an unobeyable paradox for Christians.

The simple and biblical answer to the paradox is that God is not the author of sin and evil. As the Bible says, God is good and loving, and He commands us to be that way too. Some people say they are Calvinists, but they also assert that God does not cause sin, He only “permits” it. However, Calvinism asserts that God is the Author and Designer behind every action and event, and everything that happens is according to His will, so to then say He only permits sin is a contradiction and doubletalk. The only way that there can be sin without God’s being the Author of it is for people (and demons) to have genuine free will.

**9). Some Calvinists claim that people do have free will even though God predetermines their destiny.** Some Calvinists believe that people have free will but God determines their eternal destiny. But to believe those contradictory things, Calvinists have to define free will as a person doing what he wants to do even though he cannot make a choice to do something else. For those Calvinists, the fallen nature of man and God’s predestination makes it certain that people whom God does not help are only able to make bad choice after bad choice, but those bad choices are “freely” made. However, logic dictates that if a person cannot make any other choice than the bad choices they are making, then they do not actually have free will. The very definition of free will is that a person can do things that they are not currently doing. There is no logical reason to define free will as “a person can only make a bad choice.” Free will involves assessing all the choices one has and then making a choice to do something, whether that choice is good or bad. An individual with free will can choose everlasting life with God rather than burning up in Gehenna.

We assert that the historical Arminian or libertarian definition of free will is the correct definition: the ability to decide to do, and do, other than what one is doing. And that is the definition of free will that is accepted in the world today: people who are doing hurtful things are told by family members, co-workers, counselors, police, etc., to stop doing harm and start doing good and helpful things. The world operates on the principle that people can change what they are doing, and that assumption is throughout the Bible as well. According to that definition of free will, a sinner can make the decision to stop sinning and accept God’s offer of salvation.

**10). Calvinism overstates the power of the fallen nature of mankind.** While it is true that every human is fallen and has a sin nature, Calvinists teach that the fallen nature makes it unavailable for the unsaved to make a truly “good” choice, such as choosing salvation. Calvinists teach that fallen man can only make the choice to do one bad thing after another, but not to choose a “good” thing instead of a bad thing. However, this is just an assumption made to fit their theology. There is no verse that says the fallen nature of mankind keeps people from making a good choice. Quite the opposite. When the Bible is read in a simple and straightforward way, we can see that in many verses God asks fallen people to choose Him and salvation. Furthermore, the Bible tells us that God is upset and angry when unsaved people do not make the choice to do good. Unsaved people make “good” choices all the time; choices about their money, jobs, friends, health, etc. Making the choice to live forever instead of dying forever is a “naturally” wise choice, just like eating healthy and exercising to live better and longer is a “naturally” wise choice. Those wise choices do not take divine intervention.

**11). Calvinism distorts repentance and forgiveness.** Forgiveness, in any meaningful sense of the word, presupposes guilt. There are conditions that must be met in order for a person to be guilty: for example, the person must be responsible in some way. A person is not responsible for something they did not do and could not prevent, or for something they could not help but do.

Calvinism teaches that God did not create people with the ability to make a “good” decision unless He helped them; especially the decision to repent and ask God to forgive their sin. But if a person cannot repent on his own, then God cannot righteously hold him responsible for not repenting. It would not be righteous or loving for God to hold people accountable for something they cannot do. Yet the Bible presents “repentance” as something that every person is asked to do: “...now he [God] commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30; cf. Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 26:20).

The straightforward reading of the Bible is that God asks everyone to repent, which means that people have the ability to obey God’s command if they want to of their own free will. Calvinist doctrine is that when the Bible says that God asks “all people everywhere” to repent, it does not actually mean “all” people “everywhere,” and thus it is not a genuine invitation to everyone. Calvinism is forced to say that the phrase “all people everywhere” uses “all” in the restrictive sense of “all those He plans to save anyway.” But that causes another problem: Since Calvinism teaches “irresistible grace,” meaning that no one who God wants to be saved can resist His will and remain unsaved, then it is not really accurate to say that God “commands” people to repent. God could not technically “command” people to repent who cannot repent on their own without His help, and neither would God need to “command” people to repent who could not help but repent when given His irresistible grace to get saved. The fact that the prophets of the Old Testament, John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, Paul, and others faced crowds of unbelievers and pleaded with them to repent is solid biblical evidence that those unsaved people had free will and could repent if they chose to do so.

**12). Calvinism makes Jesus’ statement, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9), meaningless, in fact, erroneous.** According to Calvinism, there are huge numbers of unsaved people God could save, but He chooses not to and instead has them suffer in torment in Gehenna. Furthermore, God is the ultimate cause of every disaster. But Jesus said that if anyone really saw him, that person would have seen what the Father was like. We cannot imagine Jesus allowing anyone to suffer if he could have helped that person, and we cannot imagine Jesus causing disasters. In fact, looking at Jesus, and then looking at the God that Calvinists present to us, show two totally different ways of being: Jesus helped everyone he could; while God helps only those He wants to help and lets the others suffer “for His glory.” Jesus taught us that we would know evil people by their fruit, but if Calvinists are correct that God is in control of the world today, then the fruit of His control is horrible because in general, the world is a hard and dangerous place.

The Bible says that God loves humankind, and He evidenced that love by giving dominion over the world to Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:26-28), who then gave it over to the Devil (Luke 4:6), and the Devil now has dominion over the world (1 John 5:19), and has the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Furthermore, there is a real, genuine war between Good and Evil (Dan. 10; John 8:42-45; John 10:10; Rev. 12:7). This is one reason why God is referred to as a “man of war” (Exod. 15:3), and why, when His people are under attack by evil forces, He rouses Himself and goes to war (cf. Ps. 18:6-18; Josh. 10:9-14; 2 Kings 7:5-7; 19:35-36; 2 Chron. 20:22). God is good and fighting for good on earth. Like Jesus, God is good, giving, selfless, and sacrificial. God gave His only Son so that anyone who wanted to could be saved, and then He honors our choice as to whether to accept salvation or not.

To see whether Calvin’s God was selfish or selfless all we need to do is ask the question, “Why would God willfully choose to not empower certain people to be saved, knowing they will then be damned forever?” Although a Calvinist might assert that why God did not save everyone is a mystery, the traditional Calvinist answer to that question is that God does all things for His glory, even predestining people to suffer in Gehenna. But it is commonly known that caring for one’s own glory more than the well-being of others, and especially allowing others to suffer for one’s own personal glory is the height of selfishness and is diametrically opposed to the loving character of God that is set forth in Scripture, and it certainly is opposed to the way Jesus lived his life.

**13). It is a common Calvinist claim that if God is not totally in control of life, then God would not be God.** A good answer to that assertion is, “Who says?” There is no verse that says any such thing; that is just an unsupported assertion. God does not have to control the destiny and actions of everyone in order to be God. God is God because He is God, and part of the work of humankind is to see Him for who He is by the way He reveals Himself in His Word. The Bible reveals Him to be loving, honest, and just, and He allows people to make their own free will choice as to whether or not they want to spend eternity with Him.

In fact, if God is love as love is commonly understood, then He would not control the free will choices that angels and humans make. It is universally recognized that controlling other people who have the maturity to make their own decisions is not loving, kind, or even good. People are created in the image of God, and people resent it when others are overbearing, micromanaging, and controlling. In modern vocabulary, a “helicopter Mom” is a mother who hovers over her children and oversees their decisions in an unhealthy way. “Total control” is often unloving, not loving. God created people to resent being controlled so we would do something about the situation and assert who we are as individual creations of God. In a similar way, it seems that God does not, and does not want to, control everything that people do. He wants to give them the truth and wisdom and allow them to make wise choices on their own. Logic dictates that for God to be the God revealed in the Bible through the straightforward reading of Scripture, He cannot be using “irresistible grace” to control the decisions that people make. In any case, there is no verse or logic that says God cannot be God unless He controls everything happening.

**14). Calvinism makes being an ambassador for Christ meaningless (2 Cor. 5:20).** According to Calvinism, no one we approach with the Gospel can believe without God’s help. But if God is the one who gives people the ability to see the truth and get saved, then they can see the value of Christ on their own without our help. Churches that are Calvinistic, such as the Presbyterian Church, never do altar calls or ask if anyone wants to be saved, because they do not believe that anyone’s response matters. They assert that God will save those He wants saved. This contradicts the command in Scripture that we witness for Christ and try to spread the Gospel.

Scripture says, “We plead on Christ’s behalf, ‘Be reconciled to God.’” (2 Cor. 5:20 HCSB). We assert that God has made us ambassadors for Christ and told us to plead with others on behalf of Christ because they need to hear about the Gospel in order to make their own choice for Christ out of the freedom of their will. In fact, that is the testimony of Scripture (Rom. 10:14-17).

**15). Calvinism is not uncontestably supported by Scripture, as many Calvinists claim.** The verses that seem to support predestination and Calvinism in some translations, such as Ephesians 1:5 and Romans 8:28, can all be either translated or understood in a non-Calvinist way. In contrast, there are hundreds of very simple and clear verses that support genuine freedom of will. These verses, such as John 3:16, have to be misread or redefined by Calvinists to fit their theology.

God authored the Bible so that the average believer could read it and understand the heart and message of God, and there are hundreds of plain and straightforward verses in which God asks people to choose Him, to have faith in Christ, obey God, etc. The message of free will and personal responsibility for accepting or rejecting God is throughout the Bible and is clearly and simply written. God wants all people to be saved; He so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever believed would be saved, and He pleads with us to “choose life.”