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Predestination in the Old Testament

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The title of this material this evening is predestination in the Old Testament. It is chiefly, as you will see, exegetical though this material can be arranged in the form of systematic theology. But I'm strong on studying the details and I think I shall take this opportunity to stress some things which perhaps you already know but yet which I think are worth stressing.

This chapter is a survey of what the Old Testament says about predestination.

Even an Arminian knows that the New Testament uses the word several times. But many Christians think that the Old Testament says nothing at all about it. On the contrary the Old Testament asserts the doctrine pervasively and explicitly. In particular, one will find there the two or three main ideas on which the Arminians argue most strenuously. One of these is the Arminian assertion of free will in opposition to Luther's and Calvin's denial of free will. But underlying this are two more fundamental doctrines. They make a strange combination for the Arminians deny both that God is the cause of sin and that God is the cause of salvation. One might anticipate that those who dislike the idea of reprobation would be quite happy with the idea of election. But the whole matter is somewhat complicated, and no one can make the least progress without examining the Biblical details. And these are the contents of this study.

Go ten pages. This is over 150 pages long so get comfortably seated and you know you can dream it all.

"The first Old Testament allusion to predestination is Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth."

The word predestination does not occur in this verse. Neither does the word Trinity occur anywhere in the Bible. Yet the Bible teaches both. No sermon, no confession of faith, no book on theology can restrict itself to the precise wording of the Bible. If the Bible says that Shechem is north of Jerusalem, and if it also says that Beersheba is south of Jerusalem, we can conclude that Beersheba is south of Shechem, though the Bible does not say so. The Scripture invites us to compare one passage with another and to draw the consequences. With reference to Genesis 1:1, the idea of creation, explained in many later verses, justifies certain conclusions that bear on the doctrine of predestination.

There are many verses later in Scripture, which, when put together, show that God created the universe out of nothing. One such verse comes quickly to mind: "God said, let there be light, and there was "light." Light appeared instantaneously by divine fiat, by divine command. Later on God formed the body of Adam, not out of nothing, but out of earth, and then he breathed life into the clay.

Creation ex nihilo, out of nothing, implies two things. First, there was no antecedent power to stimulate God; there was no one to suggest plans to God, or to suggest alterations to the plans God had; still less could anyone defeat God's purposes. God was alone. He could do as he pleased.

In the second place, after God created something, the thing created had no authority to complain, Why have you made me thus? A wren has no right to complain that it is not an elephant. God had decided to create a world, and a world by definition includes differences. The different things have no right to hold God responsible for the qualities they have or the qualities they lack. God is responsible to no one. He distributed wings, legs, horns, and minds just as it suited him to. No one has any claim on God.

Many of the items in the preceding paragraph are stated in more or less detail throughout the Bible. But they are included in the concept of creation. Creation implies the complete control of the sovereign Creator over the dependent creature. And complete control is predestination. Thus the Bible's very first sentence reveals the doctrine here to be studied.

Now Arminians, at least those who have escaped the contamination of liberalism, Arminians believe in creation. But they fail to see what it means. They suppose, particularly in the case of men, if not of angels, that once a being is created, he, she, or it can legitimately claim that God is obliged to treat him as he wants to be treated, rather than as God decides to treat him. Man has rights, they say, that God must respect. Quite the contrary, however, man has no rights in opposition to God. Whatever rights a man has, as was the case with qualities, are those God decides to give him. God as creator can give, withhold, or retake any rights as he pleases. Whatever he gives to man is a gift and not a debt. No one has any claims over the Creator. Let us see carefully how the Old Testament spells this out.

One might next cite the account of the flood to show God's control over the forces of nature. More profoundly, nature has no forces: They are God's forces, and he sends floods and earthquakes as he pleases. But since Arminians do not generally contest God's control of inanimate nature, this point requires little emphasis.

Yet when the forces of inanimate nature and human nature combine to produce historical events, the Arminian agrees only with hesitation. In Genesis 12 and following God makes certain promises to Abraham. God, not Abraham, will make Abraham's descendants a great nation. God will bless and curse. "Unto thy seed," God says in Genesis 12:7, "unto thy seed will I give this land." Then in Genesis 15:1 further promises are made. In particular, God promises

that Abraham shall have an heir, and a numerous posterity. More to the point, God in Genesis 17:1 declares that he is almighty. That is, he can do anything he wishes to. Now, the Arminians will admit that God can work on an elderly woman's body so that she can bear a son. But if God can do anything, he can also cause Abraham to choose to migrate to Palestine and later cause Jacob to migrate to Egypt so as to fulfill the prophecy of Genesis 15:13. In view of such prophecies, what answer must be given to the question, Was it possible for Jacob to will never to descend into Egypt? Can man will to prevent God's predictions from coming to pass? Must not man's will be to fulfill them?

Does it seem far-fetched to say that God controls men's wills? Consider another verse. Abraham had moved south to Gerar, in the kingdom of Abimelech. Abimelech immediately became enamored of Sarah's beauty. He took her. God then spoke to the king in a dream: "The woman which thou hast taken, she is a man's wife. But Abimelech had not come near her. She herself said, He [Abraham] is my brother. In the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. And God said I know for I also prevented you from sinning against me; therefore, suffered I thee not to touch her."

This is something the Arminians do not understand, nor can they fit it into their theology. Abimelech had no free will. He simply could not have chosen to lie with Sarah that night, because God controlled his will and caused him to refrain. A free will, of course, is one that is determined by nothing. It is equally able to make either of two incompatible choices. But God determined Abimelech not to make one of these choices; he caused him to make the other.

One further verse in Genesis, however, must be listed because it is one of the clearest Calvinistic and anti-Arminian verses in the whole Bible. After the death of Jacob, Joseph's brethren were afraid that Joseph might take vengeance on them for their earlier misdeeds. To them Joseph replied, "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." The jealous brothers had earlier considered murdering Joseph, but they changed their minds and sold him into slavery. Their intentions were evil, but God had controlled their wills. They simply could not have remained firm in their decision to kill Joseph, because God had decreed to send Joseph to Egypt for the purpose of later saving that family from starvation. The brothers decided to sell Joseph. God controlled their decision. They were not free to will his death, nor to let him go, either. So ends Genesis. And we'll turn from page 17 to 30.

The idea of God's controlling the will and thoughts of men is not something rare or exceptional in the Bible. The next verse, after the one after I've jumped over, you find a lot of material in Exodus which I don't mention, is Deuteronomy 2:30: "Sihon, King of Heshbon, would not let us pass by him; for the Lord thy God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate that he might deliver him into your hand."

This differs from the case of Pharaoh in Exodus, it's mentioned some twenty times that God hardened his heart, only by the absence of any statement that Sihon hardened his own spirit.

Otherwise the verse asserts God's activity or causality for the purpose for which he made Sihon do what he did. Then Moses, in this passage, continues by declaring that God's purpose was fulfilled: Heshbon was totally destroyed and "only the cattle we took for a prey unto ourselves."

These verses have been instances in which the Lord caused certain people to think thoughts and make decisions to their own destruction. But consistent Arminians also dislike the idea that God causes some people to think thoughts and make decisions for their own good. If the will is free, God can cause good inclinations as little as he can cause evil decisions. However, Deuteronomy 30:6 says, "The Lord your God will circumcise your heart to love the Lord your God with all thine heart, and with all thine soul, that you mayest live."

Circumcision of the heart is here presumably identical to regeneration in the New Testament. In any case, the verse under discussion makes it clear that a great spiritual change is involved. This circumcision will cause them to love God with all their hearts, and will cause them "to return and obey the voice of the Lord." Circumcision is the cause; loving the Lord is the result. This particular verse does not say that if they are not circumcised they cannot love God; though this idea is given elsewhere in the Bible. But it obviously says that God's act causes them to love him. And of course God chooses, determines, predestinates, or selects which persons he will circumcise. That this future tense may refer more to the Messianic age than to the time of Joshua does not detract from the present argument. Whether sooner or later, God produces in these people the volition of love. In the Bible love is not an emotion, it is a volition.

It is impossible to list all the verses that bear upon the doctrine of predestination. Nor should too many verses be quoted that do nothing more than repeat a previous idea. For example, God's omnipotence, stated quite explicitly in Genesis, is stated just as clearly, but without much development, in Exodus 6:3; Numbers 24:4, 16; Ruth 1:20, 21 and more than two dozen times in Job. Such verses need not be quoted here unless they make some particular point. But the reader should be aware that this much of the doctrine of predestination is pervasive.

First Samuel 2:3, 6-9 seems to add a little bit. They say that God is a God of knowledge; he weighs the actions of men. He kills people and resurrects them. He keeps the feet of his saints. By themselves these verses do not seem to support the doctrine of predestination to any great degree. But one may surmise, and later verses will confirm it, that some of these predicted events, and the knowledge by which God predicts them, and God's employment of human agents in some cases, presupposes God's control of men's thoughts and volitions.

First Samuel gives more. In 12:22 it says, "It has pleased the Lord to make you his people." The reason the Jews could worship the Lord, as they did sometimes, was that God had chosen them. This did not depend on their volition. God is no respecter of persons, and the Israelites were not a great people, nor did they have any qualities that could determine God to choose them. His choice was simply his good pleasure. This resulted in their thinking, sometimes, that it was good to sacrifice as Moses commanded.

Of course the Israelites did not always have good thoughts, nor did they always worship God as Moses had prescribed. Why? First Samuel 16:14 says, "The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from the Lord troubleth thee."

This surely must be a hard verse for Arminians to swallow. For the present purpose it is not necessary to decide whether or not Saul had ever been regenerated. In either case God took from Saul whatever divine wisdom he had been given to govern his people. The Spirit having departed, Saul was not free to think the good thoughts or to will the good actions of his earlier reign. Not only was he unable to do good, the Lord himself sent an evil spirit upon him and thus caused him to choose evil thoughts and actions. The idea that man has some personal integrity and freedom that God dare not violate is the reverse of what the Bible teaches. God predetermines a man's thought and volitions. It is not that Saul could not do good, if he so willed. The point is he could have not so willed. He was not free; he was under the power of an evil spirit that the Lord had sent him.

A similar instance is given in 2 Samuel 17:14: "Absalom and all the men of Israel said, 'The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel.' For, this is why they thought it was better, the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom." Notice the chain of purposes. God purposed to bring evil upon Absalom. To accomplish this he not only sent Hushai to Absalom's council chamber, but caused Absalom and all his men to decide that Hushai's bad counsel was better than Ahithophel's wise counsel. God controlled their thoughts. It was impossible for Absalom to think and decide otherwise, for God was controlling their minds "to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom." The situation is all the more convincing because it is a standard rule of warfare to follow up a victory immediately. But then General Bragg made the same mistake after Chickamauga. God predestinated his delay too.

Now wait a minute, I can't read this all.

The same sort of situation is described in 1 Kings 22:20ff. The Lord had determined to kill Ahab. To do this, God sent a lying spirit to persuade Ahab to do battle at Ramoth-Gilead. Note that in verse 22, this is 1 Kings 22, and now verse 22, after the lying spirit, perhaps over-confidently, guaranteed to persuade Ahab, the Lord said, "Thou shalt persuade him and prevail also; go forth and do so."

The reader will remember that Ahab disguised himself so as not to attract the enemy's attention; but "a certain man drew a bow at a venture and smote the King of Israel." God controlled the flight of the arrow. He had as easily controlled Ahab's decision to go to war. Ahab could not possibly have willed otherwise.

Second Chronicles 10:15 is another instance of the divine determination of a king's choice. It said, "the cause was of God, that the Lord might perform his Word" – his promise, that is, to Jeroboam.

The list, though incomplete, grows tediously long. "Ezra 6:22 declares that the Lord "turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them." The next chapter adds, "the king granted him [Ezra] all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him." The last "him" probably means Ezra, and not the king; but nonetheless, it was the Lord who determined what the king would decide.

Arminian objections should doubtless be considered in a separate section, but since the term "free will" occurs twice in this chapter, a break in the tedious list of Calvinistic verses may be a welcome relief. Ezra 7:13 is a decree of King Artaxerxes. It permitted all the Jews "which are minded of their own free will to go up to Jerusalem, to go with thee." This is Artaxerxes speaking. Verses 15 and 16 say that they may take their "free-will offerings" with them.

The matter of "free-will offerings" is easily disposed of. There are several other Old Testament verses that use this phrase. But they have nothing to do with the theory of free will. The Hebrew term for "free will," as an English word, means abundantly, spontaneously, voluntarily. It contrasts with the offerings that are prescribed by law, and which therefore are not spontaneous, nor even abundant. The question as to whether or not God controls the decision is entirely absent. So too in 7:13 the same Hebrew word is used. Even if the heathen king had used the English term "free will," we would not be greatly impressed by his theology. Artaxerxes simply meant that if any Jew wanted to return to Jerusalem, he was free to go – he was free from royal restrictions. But Ezra, to indicate the inspired view of the matter, adds in 7:27, 28, "Blessed be the Lord...which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart...and hath extended mercy unto me before the king." Ezra does not reflect on God's moving some Jews to return to Jerusalem, but he is very clear that God controlled Artaxerxes.

Here go another twenty pages.

The Psalms contain a large number of passages that bear indirectly on predestination by teaching the sovereignty of God. These will be omitted here because an opponent would take refuge in their indirectness and refuse to see their implications.

He would want something more explicit. Well, the Psalms provide such verses also. Yet the Calvinist will never renounce logic: If the Scripture implies something, that something must be accepted. If a college student in a Logic class complains about the age-old and worn out syllogism, namely — All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore, Socrates is mortal — and remarks, the football player in the back row whose weight is twice his IQ, if he remarks, "I agree that all men are mortal and that Socrates is a man, but you can't force on me the idea that by mere human logic that Socrates is mortal," if that is his objection, the professor must reply, If you do not grasp implication, you cannot understand anything, for nothing else is clearer.

Hence, when Psalm 14 emphasizes total depravity by saying, "They are corrupt...they are all together become filthy, there is none that doeth good, no, not one"; and when this is joined to Job 15:14 and 25:4, (I skipped over Job, that was some of the pages I skipped over) and later verses both in the Old Testament and the New, one sees that all people are totally alienated from God. Genesis 6:5 said that every imagination of the thoughts of his [man's] heart was only evil continually. The result is not simply that the natural man cannot do good; he cannot even want to. How then, as Job asked, how then can a man born of a woman be clean? The will of man must be changed; and only God can make a man clean. God must redirect his thoughts. The man himself is not free or able to do so. God, of course, decides, chooses, predestinates whom he will cleanse.

Why should Arminians think that God cannot or will not alter a man's volitions? Psalm 33:6-11 says, "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made...he spake and it was done.... The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought; he maketh the devices of the people of none effect." The Arminian will doubtless say that God sends pestilence, storms, or fire from Heaven upon the armies of wicked kings, and thus brings their plans to nought. So he did. But cannot the Creator also defeat his enemies by causing them to make inefficient choices? If the Arminian should insist that these verses do not explicitly teach that God causes human volitions, what can he say about the next verse: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance." God chooses whom he will cleanse; God chooses who his heirs shall be. The heirs do not resist his choice, because God controls their response. If this Psalm is not sufficiently explicit, the next two, and especially the second, leave no loophole.

Psalm 51:10 does not touch upon regeneration, but upon an already regenerate man who has grievously sinned. He pleads, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." David does not claim to be able to cleanse himself. This requires the omnipotent, creative power of God. The verb is the same as in Genesis 1:1, and in the matter of creation David can no more cause it, hinder it, or alter it in any way than he could the original firmament. David also prays, "Renew a right spirit within me." Previously he had an adulterous and murderous spirit. Now he asks God to change his mind so that never again would he so think. And though it breaks the order of verses, it is pertinent at this point to join Proverbs 20:9 with Job and with the Psalms. Quote from Proverbs: "Who can say, I have made my heart clean?" Only God can regenerate the mind, or change it after sin, and cause it to think holy thoughts. And if Arminians think any holy thoughts, they should thank God for them instead of boasting of their own free will.

The next verse, Psalm 65:4, seems at first sight to be as explicit as any Calvinist could wish. Does it not say, "Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth and causeth to approach unto you." Isn't God's causality in mercy stated here in the clearest terms? Well, not exactly. The word cause is not in the Hebrew. Not even the causative Hiphil form of this verb approach is in the text. It is the Piel form – a somewhat emphatic form, but not quite causative. Worse yet, it is

here not so much emphatic as it is a way of turning an intransitive verb into a transitive one. The translation is, "Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth and bringeth unto you." Nevertheless, if this is not such an explicit statement of causality as the King James seems to make it and the Calvinist might wish for, it is still entirely too Calvinistic for the Arminian. Clearly and explicitly it says that God chooses certain people; and it also says that God brings these people to himself. If God brings them, they cannot refuse to be brought. The Psalm as a whole praises the omnipotence of God and his activities in many spheres. The subject is God's sovereignty, not his limitations.

Nothing could be more anti-Scriptural than the exhortation of a very popular contemporary evangelist. As a couple of hundred people came down the aisle to the front after the sermon, the evangelist addressed the fifteen thousand in their seats. And he said, I was there and heard it, "You have prayed for these who now stand before me, he said, and that is good; you will pray for them tomorrow, and that is good; but there is no use of your praying for them now, for not even God can help them (that is a verbatim quotation and I have had other evidences of the same words used in other places than Indianapolis) not even God can help them – they must decide by themselves." The wording here may not be absolutely verbatim, but that one phrase is (not even God can help them) that is precisely word for word. David's religion and David's salvation were completely different.

Skipping now to the book of Proverbs.

Even the book of Proverbs, which consists mainly of ethical instructions, contains, though only a few, but contains some very strong statements on predestination. Proverbs 16:1 reads, "The preparations of the heart in man and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." The King James margin gives "disposings" as an alternate for "preparations." This verse, rather clearly, is not restricted to the facts of conversion alone. It quite generally covers all the thoughts of one's heart and all the answers one gives to any question. In this God works, not merely by ordinary methods of persuasion or other means of uncertain power, but by omnipotent effectiveness. All the indirect material relevant to God's sovereignty, passed over so briefly in the foregoing pages, gives the background for God's complete control of men's minds and thoughts. The verse in Proverbs continues by indicating that the words we speak, as well as the preparation of the heart, are from the Lord. That this is true, not only of devout Christians, but also of wicked kings, has been said before and will be said again.

In fact it is said again only three verses further on. Proverbs 16:4 states, "The Lord has made all things for himself: yes, even the wicked for the day of evil." Is this not clear enough to force an Arminian to become a Calvinist or to reject Christianity altogether? Methinks it would, if the Arminian were rational. God made the wicked. Like a Potter with indifferent clay, God made, of the same lump, vessels of dishonor as well as vessels of honor. This was part of his eternal plan, and every part of it contributes to the manifestation of his power and glory.

A moment ago reference was made to wicked kings. Proverbs 21:1 speaks of all kings, both good and bad: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord...he turneth it whithersoever he will." Surely no one can seriously maintain that this refers only to the one king who happened to be reigning when the verse was first written down. It applies to Pharaoh, to Abimelech, and, as we shall see, to Cyrus, and to every other ruler. God turns their hearts whithersoever he will. He caused Hitler's decision to invade Russia – much to Churchill's delight. He also caused Pontius Pilate to execute Christ. Had not God controlled this governor, Pilate might have listened to his wife's warning and so wrecked the whole divine plan of salvation. God turns the hearts and thoughts of rulers any way he pleases; and common citizens, subjects, or slaves are not a whit more independent or free than are the king. No one can choose otherwise than as God ordains.

Now in Isaiah, to get along in the Old Testament a little bit, there are some two dozen verses that bear rather directly on the doctrine of predestination. This estimate does not include complete paragraphs which, like Isaiah 6, describe in terms of grandeur the glorious and awful sovereignty of God. However, one or two verses, verses 9 and 10, from Isaiah 6, must be listed. "Go and tell this people, Hear ye...but understand not.... Make the heart of this people fat and make their eyes [sic, ears] heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be healed." Perhaps at a later date God would convert them, and even in the interval, "until the cities be wasted," there might be a tenth who would worship God; but for the most part Isaiah was to preach so as to blind their eyes, close their ears, and stupidly misunderstand in their hearts. Consider: This is the same chapter in which Isaiah saw the Lord on his throne and his train filled the temple. Do verses 9 and 10 contradict verses 1 to 4? Or is this how "the whole Earth is full of his glory"?

The same idea, and possibly a part of the same situation, is repeated in Isaiah 19:14: "The Lord has mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof; and they have caused Egypt to err in every work...." The animosity toward the doctrine of predestination is largely, though perhaps not entirely, due to the idea that God causes evil and sin. One might even think that if indeed he did, the Scriptures would disguise, dilute, and hide the terrible truth. Quite the contrary, the Old Testament is full of it, and God's causation of good seems less frequently mentioned. This does not mean that the Old Testament is devoid of God's mercy and lovingkindness. Such is frequent enough. The meaning is simply that the direct references to predestination seem to envisage evil more often than good. The New Testament reverses the proportion. But both Testaments explicitly and emphatically teach both.

"Next, Isaiah 29:16 repeats the theme of the Potter and the clay, and condemns anyone who complains. Incidentally, Pharaoh never complained.

Another verse in Isaiah. "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak comfortably" in tones that Handel beautifully approximated. Yet verses 12-17 warn those who think they are something by reason of their free independence of God. It says "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand...? Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord or, being his counselor, hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him...? Behold the nations are as

a drop from a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance.... All nations before him are as nothing....”

That this rebukes the proud independence of free will is obvious; but there is another idea here also. Most Arminians – there are some consistent exceptions – admit that God is omniscient. Then when a Calvinist insists that God knows what a man will do at some future date, Arminians answer that knowledge does not imply control. Examples are given: Standing on a promontory or a high tower, below which two roads meet at right angles, down there, an observer sees two cars approaching the intersection at high speed. The observer knows they will collide, but it is not his knowledge which causes the collision.

Two mistakes ruin this illustration. The first mistake is that the observer does not really know. The collision might be probable; but just possibly one of the cars hits a boulder that has dropped from the cliff in a spot the observer cannot see. It smashes on the boulder, the other car continues unharmed. Man is not omniscient; God is. The second flaw in the illustration has at least a better notion of omniscience: Even if God knows everything, they say, he does not cause the event in question. But if God knows a future event, the event is inevitable. If it were not inevitable, then God might “know” a future event that finally never takes place. But this is ignorance, not knowledge. If in 2000 B.C. God knew that Hitler would invade Russia, or that I should get a haircut on October 3 at 2:20 p.m., the event would still be inevitable. Now, if God did not determine this inevitable event, who did? The event was certain back in 2000 B.C. If God did not make it certain, there must be, beside God, another power that fixes at least some future events. That these events will occur, God discovers empirically by looking into the future and seeing what events his rival decided to cause.”

Such a view is utterly anti-Scriptural. “Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counselor has taught him?... Who instructed him...and taught him knowledge?” Oh, no one taught him, someone may say. He found it out by himself. He just examined how his created universe ran itself, and with the sagacity of Sir Isaac Newton discovered what would happen in the future. No one taught Newton, he found it out by himself. But if Newton had created the planets and carefully arranged their mechanism so that they would revolve in elliptical orbits, and if he had the omnipotence to create a perfect mechanism, he would not have had to look into the future and discover how they were moving. He would have known how they were moving because he had made them move that way. Now, God is not only a great astronomer; he is also an omnipotent and therefore omniscient psychologist.

Isaiah 41:22-25 says much the same thing and repeats the idea of the potter and the clay. Though this time it is God’s agent in the clay. Isaiah 42:1-4 is a prophecy whose fulfillment needs God’s control of every detail. Verse 9 also mentions God’s foreknowledge. The chapter extols his sovereignty. This theme continues into the next chapter also.

If the theme of God’s foreordination of evil events seems to have been overemphasized in the foregoing – though it is the Biblical emphasis and not an invention of the present writer – Isaiah

43:7 says that God created, and therefore foreordained, for his own glory, those who bear his name. Who dares to say that not even God can help them? Indeed they come to him willingly; but it is God who set his name on them and made them willing. Verse 10 continues, "Ye are my witnesses, sayeth the Lord, and my servants whom I have chosen that ye may believe me and understand that I am he. Before me there was no other god formed [who determined events for my help], neither shall there be after me." God chose his servants for a purpose, and God's purpose could not fail. Isaiah then repeats it: "This people have I formed for myself: they shall show forth my praise." Can these people, by an alleged free, undetermined will, refuse? By no means: "they shall show forth my praise" (43:21).

Isaiah 45 is an overpowering assertion of God's sovereignty. It begins with Cyrus, the Lord's anointed, and a statement of what God will do by him and for him. Then comes what is probably the most exalted statement in the Bible about the sovereignty of God. It is utterly destructive of Arminianism. The later verses, 18-23, are not to be ignored; but the middle section begs for praise. The incomplete quotation is only a reminder of the whole. This is the incomplete quotation: "I am the Lord, and there is none else; there is no God beside me. I girded thee, though thou hast not known me."

It is a shame to interrupt even an incomplete quotation, but the present task is to call attention to the meaning. God girded Cyrus, though Cyrus did not know it. One must not suppose, when God girds, guides, and controls someone, that the person is aware of it. Even regeneration, as the Puritans pointed out, is not a conscious experience; much less God's control of Pharaoh, Absalom, or Cyrus. Their knowledge comes later, if at all. Then afterwards the text continues: "I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil. I the Lord do all these things."

The two theses most unacceptable to the Arminians are that God is the cause of sin and that God is the cause of salvation. In both cases the Arminians look to free will. Man is the first cause of his sin, and, still independent of God, man is the first cause of his conversion. Isaiah in this verse makes Arminianism Biblically impossible.

A certain commentator is a good example of how the Arminians try to escape from the plain meaning of the verse. The commentator says Hebrew *ra*, that's the word for evil, translated sorrow, wretchedness, adversity, afflictions, calamities, but never translated sin. God created evil only in the sense that he made sorrow, wretchedness, and so on, to be the sure fruits of sin. That is a certain comment. Now the most remarkable point about this comment is that the commentator told the truth when he said *ra* is never translated sin in the King James version. How could a commentator have made such a statement knowing that it was true? The only answer is that he must have examined every instance of *ra* in the Hebrew text and then he must have determined that in no case did the King James translate it sin. And this is a fact. But if he compared every instance of *ra* with its translation in every case, he could not have failed to note that *ra* in Genesis 6:5 and in a number of other places is translated wickedness. In fact *ra* is translated wickedness some fifty times in the Old Testament. He could not have failed to notice

this; so he says with just truth, *ra* is never translated sin. Since he favors the word evil, a partial list of verses in which this translation occurs will be given; and second there will be a partial list where wicked or wickedness is used.

Going through the Bible, one must read as far as Genesis 2:9-17, 3:5-22, 6:5-8, "the knowledge of good and evil." But this is not simply a knowledge of sorrow and calamity, it is primarily a knowledge of disobedience and sin. Similarly Genesis 3:5-22 refers as much to sin as it does to punishment. In fact, Genesis 3:22 hardly refers to punishment at all. True, Adam was banished from the garden, but the word evil in the verse refers to his disobedience and sin. Whatever lame excuse can be given for excluding sin and retaining only punishment in the previous four verses, Genesis 6:5 is clearly and indisputably a reference to sin. God did not see adversity or afflictions, he saw sinful thoughts. *Ra*, in this verse at any rate, means sin. The same is true of Genesis 8:21. In fact, sin and punishment are separated here. God will not again curse or smite as he had just done, for man's heart is evil. The flood was a punishment, but the evil was the sinful heart of man. Toward the end of Genesis, *Ra* refers to an alleged theft, many sins from which the angel had redeemed Jacob, and three times the brothers' sin against Joseph. In Genesis 50:17 again, the sin is easily distinguishable from the feared punishment.

Is it necessary to plod through all the Old Testament to show that *ra* often means sin as distinct from its punishment? It should not be necessary. But to show the pervasiveness of the doctrine and the perverseness of Arminianism, something from II Chronicles will be listed, namely 22:4, 29:6, 33:2 and 6, 36:5, 9 and 12. Ahab did evil in the sight of the Lord. That's *ra*. Ahab did evil in the sight of the Lord. Our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the Lord. Manasseh did evil in the sight of the Lord. He wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord. Jehoiakim did evil in the sight of the Lord. That's Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin did evil in the sight of the Lord. He did evil in the sight of the Lord. Where do I turn over some pages?

At any rate that shows that *ra* means sin at least in these several verses. Rather the number of verses that I have quoted. And God created this and ordained it. I do have a section here on Ezekiel. I can't read it; it's time to go on. I don't want to give the impression that God only predestinates evil, but since that is what is so often denied, my emphasis is on this point. But I have about 20 pages here on predestination in the book of Ezekiel where the predestination involves the raising of the dry dead bones to spiritual life. And the merciful aspect of it is far from absent. But I have emphasized the darker aspect because that is the one that is most objected to.

Now, in conclusion, not only is predestination mentioned in the Old Testament, it is pervasive and emphatic. Seventy-five passages or more. Some not just a verse but a whole chapter. Some seventy-five passages have been quoted in full or in part. I didn't read them all but they're all here. A tremendous amount of indirect evidence of background material has not been referred to at all. Predestination, unconditional election, sovereign grace, and reprobation also are pervasive doctrines. No wonder the Westminster Confession makes the eternal decree the third most important of all Biblical doctrines. Soli Gloria Deo.

Moderator: ... so you can answer it. Ask a question and he can answer it and we'll get it all on tape. Dr. Clark we turn it over to you.

First of all, these questions that have been given to me in written form. There are three on this card. One I can answer in one word. That will save time. The first question is "In the utility of creation, its origination, its progression and final consummation, is there any greater revelation than that of Revelation 4:11 and Romans 1:20?"

Now I am not sure what the person means by the utility of creation, but I would suppose that if you wish to pick out some passage of the Bible that has tremendous importance and is most indispensable, I would not choose Romans 1:20 nor Revelation 4:11. I would choose Romans 3:20-26. I think those contain more of the Biblical truth than any other half dozen verses in all the Bible. But maybe that is not what the person meant by the question.

The second question he asked is "is there any adequate revelation for the purpose of creation outside the Bible?" I answer that in one word: no. Then what happens after the final consummation of all creation? That might take a long time to answer, but I could mention one or two things. All marriages are dissolved. We become as the angels of heaven. Food and stomach disappear and we enjoy theology for eternity. That's a partial answer of course.

It is now, then, here are two questions. Oh yes, here comes some more. What propositions do you try to get across when you present or preach the gospel? Well, first of all, I would say that the whole Bible is the gospel, not just a little part of it. And I do not like to reduce its scope and center only on some pet subject. I do however recognize that there are things that must be emphasized more than others. And that is what I said just a moment ago. That the doctrine of the propitiatory sacrifice or the satisfaction view of the atonement is one that I certainly try to get across. But I also try to follow Paul's advice to preach the whole counsel of God in order not to be guilty of the blood of men. I think we must preach the whole counsel, and this distinction between kerygma and church doctrine, as the Neo-orthodox put it, I have no sympathy with that.

Now that second question here. Would you venture a rendering of Acts 1:3 that would help clear the cobwebs of empiricism from our minds? No. I have already done it several times over. But I realize of course that when a person who has a, and I say this with at least a little humility, when a person has studied a subject for a relatively long period of time so far as human life is concerned and he has a lot of details in his mind, then when he talks to other people, students for example, who have not had the opportunity of 80 or 90 years because you know I am a senile person that gives superfluous lectures, it takes time for all of this to sink in. And it doesn't surprise me in the least that there are cobwebs of empiricism in a person's mind, and it requires thinking, meditation, consideration. It isn't something you can grasp in a day or two. And I have repeated a number of times the problem that I challenge empiricists to answer, the problem first of showing how you can get from a pure sensation, if there is such a thing, to perception. And then the problem of educated people having no images and so on, which to my mind are

destructive of empiricism, but which a great many people haven't thought about so much. And so it takes time and makes discussion.

Now then, in your reference to Saul's or Paul's understanding, oh well well well, in reference to Saul's understanding before his conversion please explain what you mean as to what degree Paul understood. I guess you mean what propositions Saul understood. Well, I think the main proposition that troubled the Apostle Paul was that he realized that Jesus claimed to be God. And for him this was blasphemy. Now, he understood more too no doubt but the chief proposition that angered him was that a mere human being claimed to be God. That's ... short answer to that question.

Will you please expound James 1:13-14 where it says that no one is tempted to sin by God, God tempts no one. How does this fit into what you have said this evening? And I think that question ... well it at least overlaps the two on this sheet. But I'll answer it. The cause or the responsible cause of an action is always the immediate cause and not the remote causes. The remote causes are, one of the remote causes of sin is Adam's sin by which we become sinners, but the immediate cause of sin is ourselves. It is we who will to sin. I think the Bible makes it fairly clear, we cannot escape responsibility by saying that we inherited the sin of Adam. In fact, this makes our own sin worse. In the case of David, that I referred to a little while ago, David doesn't say "I committed a terrible sin, but after all I was born in sin and couldn't help it." What he said is "I committed a horrible sin and, what was worse, I was born that way." This reference to something more ultimate does not relieve a person of responsibility. If anything it makes the situation worse. Now this leads to the question I have here.

Why is man held responsible for his sin? And what is your definition of responsibility? I just love definitions, if I can ever get them. Because you ought to know what the words mean if you use them. And if you use a word ambiguously you're sure to become confused. And we ought to define responsibility and what the basis of responsibility is. Now, responsibility, etymologically, and I think philosophically too, means to be answerable, you give an answer to somebody. This is responsibility. And we are answerable to God because God demands an answer from us. That is why we are responsible. Now, in addition to this general principle, which governs the rest of the situation, the Bible teaches I believe the Bible teaches that there are degrees of responsibility because the servant who knew his lord's will and did not do it was beaten with many stripes, but the servant who did not know his will was beaten, but not beaten with many stripes. And Jesus in his reply to Pilate said that the people who delivered him had the greater sin than Pilate had. So there are degrees of heinousness in sin. These degrees depend on the degree of knowledge that a person has. The more knowledge a person has, the more responsible he is. And so God assigns degrees of responsibility on the basis of how much a man knows. No man, as the Bible puts it, is utterly ignorant. Though, as I say, some people asymptotically approach it. But no man is absolutely ignorant. And therefore all men are at least minimally responsible. But men in high places and people who have studied are more responsible than other people. It is a great responsibility to be a minister, for example. A minister presumably knows more about the Bible than other people. And the more you know the

more responsible you are. Now responsibility then is, to define it, is to be answerable to a superior power. Now this also means that although God is the cause of all sin, God is not responsible because there is no higher power to demand an answer of him. So responsibility is a characteristic of people to whom divine commandments have been given. But there are no commandments imposed on God by any superior power, for there is no superior power. This is briefly my interpretation of responsibility and why a person is responsible for his sin. God decided to hold a man in certain degrees responsible, degrees corresponding to the degrees of his knowledge. Now other people no doubt wish to follow this up and ask other questions. This is all that has been presented to me in writing. Yes, over here.

Questioner #1: I'd like to ask you with regard to the fall of Adam. I understand, I think, that you would assert that God caused Adam to fall.

Oh yes.

Questioner #1: Ok. Now

If he had not, his whole plan of salvation would have been showered??? from ever beginning.

Questioner #1: Well, I'm not against showers.

I certainly try to add a detail once in a while.

Questioner #1: It is my understanding also that St. Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, and the majority of reformed men did not assert that. They asserted that he had free will. And it is my understanding too that such scholars such as Roger Nicole and others have sorta castigated you for being outside of reformed tradition. Now, I've been thinking a lot about this because I hold your position. How do you feel about what these men thought about this area. They seem to me to be contradictory.

I have a little question as to the accuracy of the statements you present as factual. It is true that St. Augustine, early in his life, before he had matured as a Christian, although he denied free will for us sinners, allowed that Adam had free will before the fall. But this was written in an early work of his and it is retracted in his later works. I would like you to read the *de praedestinatione sanctorum* and there's another one, something about grace or the gospel, I forget the title just now.

Questioner #1: Do you remember where that is in that work?

No its not a long ways. Its not 420 pages of double columns like *City of God* is.

Questioner #1: My specific question with regard to these matters, I don't ever recall hearing the phrase by Augustine, Luther, or the others, that God created evil.

I thought your statement was that Augustine, Luther, and Calvin supported free will.

Questioner #1: Now this is a question along with that.

Now Martin Luther wrote a big thick book denying free will. So, and as for Calvin, I recommend that you read book 3, chapter 23 which came up in a discussion earlier today.

Questioner #1: My point is Adam before the fall. It is my understanding that Augustine and his followers did not believe that Adam, or they did believe Adam had a free will before the fall.

Augustine in his early work *De Libero Arbitrio* held just what you say, but in his later work he retracted it.

Questioner #1: Do you feel like this is, then do you disagree with those who say you're outside of the reformed tradition? In other words, it seems that they assert that this is not in the major confessions.

On this point I would talk about the confessions for a minute. On this point, I rather have the opinion that I agree with Augustine's later point of view, with Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, and with Calvin's positions too. And I don't see how you can make it plainer than in the book 3, chapter 23 but there are other places in Calvin too.

Questioner #1: With regard to Adam before the fall?

Oh yes, universally, yes.

Questioner #1: Alright, then my next question is this: what is the difference, last question, what is the difference between Adam's will before the fall and Adam's will after the fall?

As far as being determined by God's decree there is no difference whatever.

Questioner #1: What is the difference? Any difference at all?

Oh, well, the difference is that before the fall he was, God determined him to think good thoughts, and at and after the fall God determines him to think some evil thoughts.

Questioner #2: So you wouldn't disagree with those who castigates you and put you outside of the Reformed faith. You think you're right in line with the Reformers.

I hardly think that is what Roger Nicole says. But anyhow, if he says it, I would respectfully disagree. Roger Nicole is one of the best theologians in all of the United States if not in the world. He is a tremendously learned man.

Moderator: Dr. Clark, you made a statement in your lecture tonight about a certain football player who weighed twice as much as his IQ and we have a football up on the front pew here. He has been all pro for quite a few years and he says he'd like to take you on afterwards. And my question is your predestination in the parking lot after you talk.

What did he say?

Moderator: He said that it was predestined that you meet him in the parking lot afterwards.

I'll challenge you at a game of chess.

Moderator: We'd like for some of you who have not asked questions to feel free to ask them. I realize the questions are being finalized ????

Audience: Is that what we call the convicting work of the holy spirit?

Questioner #3: Dr. Clark, I have a question that I think many might be asking and that is, in light of your comments that God is the cause of sin, I think that many would object, and I've heard some object, that this is destructive of any form of ethical system whereby God would, we would say judiciously reward or punish an individual for doing something concerning which he had no choice or concerning which he was foreordained to do from eternity past. And how would you respond to this? And the whole question of commands and the judicial character of rewards and punishments.

Well in the first place I would, might ask, and it might take me a half an hour to give the first paragraph of the answer. I might first ask, how could you have moral responsibility if you had free will? If a person decides something without any cause or reason at all, perfectly indeterminate, I would think that that person is insane. And hence not responsible. It is only through a theory of determinism that you can have moral responsibility. We are responsible in the degree in which we know. The knowledge is involved. As Charles Hodge says, the intellect totally controls the will, but according to indeterminism, the will is completely undetermined by anything. How a person can say if you accept determinism you cannot have ethical norms, that is a statement for which I would want an argument. And I think I could easily show many difficulties in any argument that led to that conclusion. Maybe that's not a good enough answer, but that would be the beginning of it. And you asked something else slightly different, what was it?

Questioner #3: How would God, how would you explain that God judiciously rewards and punishes?

I think you mean judicially, don't you?

Questioner #3: Go back ??? from eternity. Which could not have been otherwise.

How could God have judiciously foreordained certain actions? Oh, just the way he created the world. He decided to give elephants trunks and legs. Thick ones. He gave a wren only 2 legs, very thin.

Moderator: I think he does mean judicially instead of judiciously.

Questioner #3: Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't understand what you meant.

Judicially. Well, the rules of law, moral law, are those imposed by God. And God imposes the laws as he pleases. The law then becomes the judicial basis for condemnation. If a person breaks the law, then the law is the judicial basis for his condemnation. This is part of God's decree. It is all the same decree, but with many details. Let me see, something passed through my mind on this. Now too many ideas go and I can't recall them too well. But sin is a violation or a lack of conformity unto the law of God. So He establishes the ground on which he will condemn people. That's the judicial position.

Moderator: A new question.

Questioner #4: I heard the comment made a number of times since my exposure to Calvinism about 5 years ago that a higher good is accomplished as a result of God allowing salvation to come through Christ after the fall. I've heard it just said, it permits a higher good to take place if you take a look at the fall in terms of something in history. Ok, my question is, since man was in a sinless state, even though he had the potential for sin, prior to the fall and no condemnation was evidenced on mankind at that point in time, then why is it that God would permit the fall to allow that higher good that when in reality if he had not permitted the fall condemnation would not have come upon man? Why is it a higher good for salvation to take place as a result of sin destroying the relationship of man when actually prior to the fall no such salvation would have been necessary. If I'm correct in assuming that no such salvation was necessary.

In the first place, I do not accept the statement that God permitted the fall. God caused the fall. Permission is an idea that is incongruous with omnipotence and sovereignty. And Calvin is very clear that permission plays no part in Calvinistic theology. Then I think maybe that is the basic answer to your question. But something else that I might want to say that I just thought of again in answer to the other question. When I say that God controls the will and choice of man, I do not deny volition and choice. In fact I assert it. But I do not assert that man is equally able to make either of two contradictory choices. He makes the choice that God has determined that he should make. And that is really essential to the doctrine of salvation and faith because man is, in his sinful estate, is utterly unwilling to accept the divine gospel and hence his mind must be changed. So God makes a man willing. His willingness is determined. It is not a matter of something he does apart from God. If somebody comes up to the aisle and wants to shake the hands of the evangelist, which of course doesn't do him any good anyhow, if anything happens it is God that makes it happen. I do not agree that God is impotent. And that there is no use

praying to him. God converts people, regenerates them, and gives them the gift of faith. This is determined by God, it is not a matter of free will at all.

Questioner #5: Dr. Clark, in Calvin's Institutes, in the first book he argues that when God moves a man's will he does it in this manner, that God wills to have an action take place and therefore when he wants to have a sinful action take place that he makes, that he wills that a sinful man act and then the sinful man when he acts because his will is bent toward sin acts in sin. Now somewhere in your lecture you threw out a sentence that made me wonder if you are agreeing with Calvin or if you are leaving out the step of God willing the man's will to move and just simply saying man's sin.

No I think I said considerably more than that. It is not that God says, "well commit some sin, you think it up, I don't care which." I gave you the precise example of Absalom and Ahithophel. And God made Absalom commit this one particular sin because no other sin in that situation would have accomplished what God wanted to have accomplished. And the sin was to accept the bad military counsel of Hushai instead of the perfectly good military counsel of Ahithophel.

Questioner #5: Do you agree with Calvin then? In the shall we say mechanism in which that takes place. Where God causes a man's will to move and then the man because he is sinful acts ...

I am not conscious of any disagreement with Calvin on that point at any rate.

Questioner #5: Thank you.

Moderator: Just a couple of more questions because I know that some of you have to go but here's one...

Questioner #6: I'm inquiring about the difference between infra and supralapsarianism. In Warfield's book he defines infra and supra as a difference in the order of decrees but he does not go into the nature of what this order is well enough. He says it is not temporal, and he says the logical order. But would it be more fruitful, and I'd like your definition after this last comment, would it be more fruitful to say that the infra brings sin in by mysterious bringing in this idea of permission instead of action. Whereas the supra says that they are both directly activated.

The idea of permission has been invented by some people who wish to avoid saying that God is the ultimate cause of sin. They want to save God's holiness against objections. The trouble is that the notion of permission does not do what these people want done. Because God would still be well, responsible. He would still have his holiness questioned if he permitted something that he could have stopped. If there is a situation in human life where say a child is about to be run over by a car and it is possible for a bystander to run out and save him and the bystander permits the auto to hit him this is not very happy either. So permission does not solve the Arminian's problem. And as I said before Calvin expressly repudiates permission.

Questioner #6: What is the difference between infra and supra.

The difference is that infralapsarianism puts the decree of election subsequent to the decree of the fall. Now someone at lunch had a different notion of infralapsarianism but if you wish to check various theologians you can look up Henry Bradford Smith, Louis Berkhof, my father, and oh well maybe Charles Hodge and I think you will find in all of them that they put the decree of election after the decree of the fall. My criticism of this is that they confuse logical sequence with temporal sequence. And my contention is that the logical sequence is precisely the reverse of the temporal sequence. A person chooses an end and then works back from the end to where he is now on something that he can do. At lunch I used this illustration: if you wish to buy your wife a little present, a box of candy, or a scarf, you want to buy a gift for her and you decide on a box of candy. That's the beginning of it. Now you say how can I get a box of candy to give her? Well you have to think where a candy store is. And then when you decide where the candy store is you have to say well how do I get there? You may drive or take a bus or something. And then how are you going to buy the candy. Well you need some money. And so that is the way you think. You begin at the end and think back to where you are. That's the logical order. Now the temporal order is exactly the reverse. You put some money in your pocket, you take the bus, you go to the store and get the candy.

Now in the case of lapsarianism we have the temporal order given in the Scriptures quite clearly. You begin at Genesis go through. Now then if you wish to talk about the logical order of the decrees you just reverse that. I hope that meets your question.

Moderator: Dr. Clark as further discussion of it, in the last chapter of his, of the Festschrift edited by Ronald Nash in his reply to Roger Nicole includes a similar illustration. Now there was a question down here I understand.

Questioner #7: Dr. Clark, I'll start out by saying that I would concur in the question or the position that I was about to place before you and the question has really already been presented in a way. But I was interested in your view or comments on the position of the supralapsarian. And not just to ask a question in particular but rather some brief comment that you might make that we might have time for. That is, say that in this discussion the idea of perhaps the essence of the supralapsarian position being found in the providence of God in that while he did elect he not only did elect to life but he elected to destruction. And that hence it was hence naturally preceding the other decrees and principally that of the fall itself. Or that he did elect without consequence or consideration to sin and the eventual fall of man. Would you mind commenting on that please.

Well I would say that the eternal decree of God embraces every event that takes place in the whole history of the world. But there are some events that attract our attention more than others. And the Dukes of Edom are not quite so important as the doctrine of election or reprobation or the glory of God, or justification and so on. And hence this matter of the logical order of the decrees is usually limited to a small number of important points. But you could expand it of

course to take in all the minor details. And since God acts for a purpose, to get the logical order you need to state the purpose first and then the means by which he accomplishes that purpose. I think that is the key to this problem. Is that a sufficient, or at least half-sufficient answer to your question.

Questioner #7: Yeah

Moderator: Dr. Clark, on behalf of a number of people who are visiting Believer's Chapel and will not be here in the morning, I want to say for all of us and including them we do appreciate very much your being with us.

Let me express my thanks for your kind invitation. I enjoyed it all more than you did.

Moderator: Thank you.