

# Deeper Truth



## 7. The Doctrine of Predestination



CRAWLEY  
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## INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of Matthew chapter 24 the disciples ask Jesus an interesting question: “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” I’m not sure what answer they were expecting, but it was probably not the answer they got:

**And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. [Matthew 24:4-5]**

and

**And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. [Matthew 24:10-11]**

Those are verses that we should take careful notice of. The Christian church throughout the ages, and even more so today is engaged in a battle for the truth. How do we stay true to God’s word and how do we avoid being deceived by false teaching or doctrine? The sad truth is we will all probably know people who at one point were walking strongly in the faith but now seem to have been pulled away. The why’s and wherefores of that are not really the subject of the course, but rather “How do we stay true to God’s word?” How can we do our utmost to ensure we are not deceived or distracted, or worst still become those who deceive or distract others? The simple answer is to study God’s word and to understand the truths in there, and what it says and what it does not say.

We are also more likely to be led astray by subtle twists and modifications to God’s word rather than an outright denial. Satan at no point said to Adam and Eve “God doesn’t exist, help yourself to any fruit you like.” They would have seen through that deception very quickly. Rather he asked:

**“Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” [Genesis 3:1b]**

We also need to be aware of those truths that are fundamental to our faith and a denial of such will instantly lead us into error as opposed to other truths that can be interpreted in different ways, and for which Christians can hold different views. An absolute truth that must be defended to the uttermost is the fact that Christ will return. The means and manner of that return, and the whole are of what happens in the end times is however subject to much debate. With such subjects the various viewpoints will be presented.

Likewise, the truth that God created the whole universe out of nothing in one single act of creation is another truth we must hold to. The manner of that creation (was it over seven literal days or seven periods of time) is another area on which much has been written and different view put forth.

This course was first presented as an eight-part course at Crawley Community Church in 2012/13 and the content and accompanying notes have been expanded and revised for 2023/24.

All verses are from the from the English Standard Version (2001)

Bible verses and passages are shown in blue, other quotes are shown in red.

## CONTENTS

### **7. The Doctrine of Predestination**

#### **7.1 Predestination in General Terms**

- 7.1.1 The People of God**
- 7.1.2 The Messiah**
- 7.1.3 Creation**

#### **7.2 Historical Views of Predestination**

- 7.2.1 Salvation for all, some, or none?**
- 7.2.2 Arminianism**
- 7.2.3 Calvinism**

#### **7.3 Issues facing the different viewpoints.**

- 7.3.1 Issues facing Calvinism.**
- 7.3.2 Issues facing Arminianism.**

#### **7.4 The Doctrine of Election**

- 7.4.1 A Doctrine of Mystery**
- 7.4.2 A Doctrine of Mercy**
- 7.4.3 A Doctrine of Sovereignty**
- 7.4.4 A Doctrine that encourages Evangelism**
  - 7.4.4.1 God commands us to Evangelise.**
  - 7.4.4.2 God has chosen Evangelism as a means of salvation.**
- 7.4.5 A Doctrine of Certainty**
- 7.4.6 A Doctrine of Glorification**

#### **7.5 The Doctrine of Reprobation**

- 7.5.1 An Implicit Doctrine**
- 7.5.2 An Asymmetric Doctrine**
  - 7.5.2.1 Equal Ultimacy**
  - 7.5.2.2 Unequal Ultimacy**

#### **7.6 Infralapsarianism and Supralapsarianism**

- 7.6.1 Definitions of the Viewpoints**
- 7.6.2 Historical discussions of the Viewpoints**

#### **7.7 Pastoral and Evangelical Implications**

#### **7.8 Summary**

## 7. The Doctrine of Predestination

*Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us[ for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will... In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.* *[Ephesians 1:4-5 & 11]*

The doctrine of predestination is a subject often ignored in the church as many consider it a topic too difficult to discuss. Explanations of Predestination often seek to address the so-called 'paradox of free-will' whereby God's omniscience (total knowledge) seems incompatible with human free will. However, scripture does speak clearly on the subject and so God intended us to have a certain understanding although it is worth bearing in mind three key principles:

- a) A particular view of predestination is not necessary for salvation. Many eminent Christian scholars hold opposing views on this doctrine. Whereas the nature of God and the nature of Christ are subjects that are clearly defined and which we can defend with absolute certainty, predestination is not such a subject. There is freedom to disagree with a particular viewpoint and any discussion must start from the principle that the doctrine of predestination is of secondary importance; although important, interesting, and indeed liberating, the particular view we hold does not directly affect our salvation.
- b) Scripture is very guarded on the subject. Although certain things have been revealed, other have not and perhaps the greatest danger in studying this subject is there often comes a point when we stop studying scripture and start using human logic to infer certain unrevealed truths.

John Calvin warns of rushing into this subject, and of those studying it, says the following:

***"When they inquire into predestination, let them remember that they are penetrating into the recesses of the divine wisdom, where he who rushes forward securely and confidently, instead of satisfying his curiosity will enter into an inextricable labyrinth."*** *[John Calvin 1509-1564]*

- c) Predestination cannot be divorced from the sovereignty of God. We cannot study predestination unless we are clear on the sovereignty of God. Ultimately God has declared that this is how things are. If, when all discussions ended, we still have problems with this doctrine then we actually have difficulties with the sovereignty of God. This is a subject we will return to later in this section.

Given this preface we can start to consider some scriptures and form some basic definitions for this doctrine.

*"You did not choose me, but I chose you..."* *[John 15:16a]*

*he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.* *[Ephesians 1:4]*

The basic idea is very simple; we did not choose to become Christians, however much it may have seemed that way, but God, through an act of His grace, chose, elected, or predestined us to be Christians.

***"That eternal act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, chose a certain number of men to be the recipients of special grace and of eternal salvation."*** *[Louis Berkoff 1873 - 1957]*

This definition will be examined in more detail as we progress, but it clearly shows that God has chosen us, and that our election is through grace alone.

Perhaps the biggest problem with predestination is the natural progression from the statement that if God has chosen (elected) some to be Christians then surely he has not chosen others, leaving them to a fate to horrible to contemplate, and surely that cannot be just or fair. There are two sides to Predestination; on the one hand there is election, but on the other there is the doctrine of reprobation. We talk of someone being 'a reprobate', dislikeable or despicable, but it literally someone who has been cast aside by God.

Reprobation can be defined as:

***“That eternal decree of God hereby He has determined to pass some men by with the operation of His special grace and to punish them for their sins, to the manifestation of His justice.” [Louis Berkoff 1873 - 1957]***

We must beware that scripture says very little about reprobation although we will consider a number of verses later on however the central issue remains; if God has chosen some then He must have 'not chosen', rejected others.

***When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth!***

***the Four]***

***[Sherlock Holmes – The Sign of***

## 7.1 Predestination in General Terms

Having introduced a very difficult concept we need to step back and consider some background information. Whilst there are specific aspects of predestination it is also important to note it is spoken of in scripture in more general terms.

### 7.1.1 The People of God

Throughout scripture God calls men and women. Individuals did not volunteer for service they were called. He called Abraham, He called Moses, and indeed as an entire nation, were chosen and called to be the people of God. There were many larger or stronger nations in the world, but God chose Israel.

*But you Israel, my servant, Jacob, Whom I have chosen.* *[Isaiah 41:8]*

*But now hear, O Jacob, my servant Israel, whom I have chosen.* *[Isaiah 44:1]*

*You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: 'I will establish your offspring forever and build your throne for all generations.'* *[Psalm 89:3-4]*

*Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.* *[Isaiah 49:7]*

And so, there is this mystery; God could have chosen Egypt, or Assyria, or Babylon to be His people, but He chose Israel.

### 7.1.2 The Messiah

Jesus is described very clearly as one 'chosen' by God to be our saviour.

*A voice came from the cloud saying; "this is my Son my Chosen One, listen to Him."* *[Luke 9:35]*

*As you come to Him the living stone, rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious.* *[1 Peter 2:4]*

### 7.1.3 Creation

In even more general terms God predestines the day-to-day operation of the universe. Scientists will tell us the Sun rises each morning because the Earth moves round the sun – and that is of course true, but ultimately God determines the fate of the universe, not gravity, and when He chooses for this universe to exist no more then it will end.

Wherever we look in scripture we see an active involved God; one who takes decisions and intervenes in human affairs, He chooses individuals and nations. Although this is a general use of the idea of predestination it shows that it is not so strange a concept to imagine that God chooses us to be part of His family.

## 7.2 Historical Views of Predestination

All the various views on predestination can be broadly grouped into two camps.

**Arminianism:** from a major proponent - Jacobus Arminius (1560 – 1609)

Salvation depends on men taking the decision to accept and follow Christ.

**Calvinism:** from a major proponent - John Calvin (1509 – 1564)

Salvation depends on God taking an action to open our blind eyes so we might see and accept the truths of the gospel.

Before we look at these two terms in more detail, and because this is a tricky subject, let us first look at some of the options for salvation that we can reject, and see what we are left with.

### 7.2.1 Salvation for all, some, or none?

At a very top-level Scripture suggest that some are saved and some are not – so how do we reach that conclusion? Consider the relationship between a sovereign God and a fallen world. We could suggest there are six possible options:

	[Calvinism] God acts directly to provide-	[Arminianism] Men must act to obtain-
Salvation for none	1) Salvation is down to God, but he chooses to save no-one.	2) Salvation rests with men, but God provides no means for anyone to obtain that salvation.
Salvation for some	3) Salvation is down to God, and he chooses to save some.	4) Salvation rests with men, and God provides the means by which some may obtain that salvation.
Salvation for all	5) Salvation is down to God, and he chooses to save all.	6) Salvation rests with men and God provides the means by which all may obtain that salvation.

(1) and (2): We can dismiss these options. If there is no way to obtain salvation, either by a direct act of God, or a correct action on our part, then this whole discussion is pointless.

(3): This is broadly the view of Calvinism.

(4): This is broadly the view of Arminianism.

(5): This is Universalism (God's love will prompt him to save everyone regardless of their life or actions)

(6) :This is Pantheism (it doesn't matter what you believe – all roads lead to God)

As Christians we should dismiss all but (3) and (4). N.B. There will be a further discussion on the merits of Universalism when we consider the Doctrine of Heaven and Hell, and so Salvation for some and not for others does seem to be both what Scripture teaches, and the only logical conclusion.



### 7.2.2 Arminianism

This view states that God chooses us on the basis of His foreknowledge of the free-will decision we would make concerning our response to the gospel. God gave us free-will to choose or reject Him and He knew from the beginning of time who would accept Him and it is there people that he speaks of as being chosen or elect.

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* [Romans 1:16]

*For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.* [1 Timothy 4:10]

### 7.2.3 Calvinism

This view states that God chose us simply on the basis of His grace. Christians are those people to whom God has chosen to reveal Himself; to open blind eyes so to speak. Calvinists would point to verses in Romans that talk of man (in his sinful nature) as being unable to recognise the truths of God.

*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.* [John 6:44]

*So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.* [Romans 9:16]

*He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.* [Ephesians 1:4]

And this is the point of dispute; Arminianists would claim that every person, although fallen, is still left with the capacity to choose Christ. Man has not fallen so far that it requires the direct intervention of God to reveal the error of his ways and bring him to salvation. The attraction of Arminianism is clear; it emphasises our free-will decision to accept or reject the gospel. Non-Christians are not so much people that God has ‘passed by’ simply those who ‘so far’ have not responded to the gospel. Calvinists on the other hand, who would emphasise the direct action of God have to face squarely the question of reprobation. How can God choose some and reject others. How can He then punish those He has rejected since they had no control over their destiny?

Throughout church history there have been various views on predestination, and it would help to consider some of these. The two of the more popular views, that we have seen already, are named after particular theologians who championed that view. Arminianism is named after the Dutch reformed theologian; Jacobus Arminius (1560 – 1609) whilst Calvinism takes it named from the French Protestant theologian John Calvin (1509 – 1564). Many people associate Calvin with the doctrine predestination as he wrote extensively on it; however, both views have been held by eminent scholars throughout the ages.

Arminianism	Calvinism
Pelagius (354 – 420)	St Augustine (354 – 430)
Philip Melancthon (1497 – 1560)	St Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274)
<b>Jacobus Arminius (1560 – 1609)</b>	Martin Luther (1483 – 1546)
John Wesley (1703 – 1791)	<b>John Calvin (1509 – 1564)</b>
Charles Finney (1792 – 1875}	Jonathan Edwards (1703 – 1758)

Many of the above also modified their views over the years or changed from one opinion to another.

## 7.3 Issue facing the different viewpoints

Both Calvinism and Arminianism have a number of issues that need to be addressed:

### 7.3.1 Issues facing Calvinism.

- Predestination seems incompatible with free will.
- Predestination suggests God acts unfairly towards a certain group of people.
- Predestination can imply there is no need for evangelism or any outreach to those who are not saved (God has already decided)

### 7.3.2 Issues facing Arminianism.

- This view has to make large assumptions with a number of key passages.
- This view presents the possibility that none might be saved.
- This view presents the possibility that our preaching, evangelism and outreach as a church might ultimately be ineffective.
- This view focuses on man's actions rather than God's actions.

## 7.4 The Doctrine of Election

We can now consider the doctrine of election in more detail.

### 7.4.1 A Doctrine of Mystery

Firstly, we must acknowledge that we will never understand this doctrine fully; it is shrouded in mystery. With the exception of Romans 9 there are few passages that delve deeply into the subject. It is stated in multiple passages and stated clearly. Ephesians 1 states categorically the fact of election but in no way attempts to explain it, or deal with the questions it raises, and so we must beware of building a great structure of teaching on so small a foundation.

*In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.* [Ephesians 1:11]

Election is part of 'His will' and 'His good pleasure' and ultimately the answer to the 'whys' of this doctrine are; "because that is how God wants it to be".

### 7.4.2 A Doctrine of Mercy

Paul goes straight to the heart of the problem within Romans 9 with the story of Jacob and Esau:

*And the Lord said to her [Rebekkah], "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger."* [Genesis 25:23]

Rebekkah was pregnant with Jacob and Esau. The normal course of events would be for the older to inherit the birth right and the Father's inheritance, and be stronger, yet the word of the Lord comes that, for some reason, He has chosen the younger brother to be the stronger one and to inherit and indeed, the older brother, Esau, would serve the younger brother, Jacob.

*"I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert."* [Malachi 1:2-3]

The Lord spoke through Malachi about His clear choice of Jacob over Esau – the words love and hatred show clearly the depth of the division, a division that was made in the womb before either twin had done good or bad; before either had merited acceptance or rejection.

*though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls.* [Romans 9:11]

And Paul asked the question; "Is God unjust?" No for the overriding fact is that He shows mercy and compassion. Esau and Jacob were not just two twins one of whom God chose and one whom He rejected; nor are we simple people whom God chooses or rejects; we are all sinners. Our natural state is that of condemnation. Esau and Jacob were by nature both sons of sinful parents; they did not have to sin to be under judgement, they inherited that sinful nature from their parents and from Adam. The miracle that Paul seeks to stress is that God showed His mercy to one son (some people) even though He did not have to show mercy to either (any people)

Election and Reprobation are not equal sides of a balance, in the former God deals mercifully with people, in the later he allows justice to run its natural course. The whole point Pauls says is that in some cases God shows mercy.

*"When all deserve death, it is a marvel of pure grace that any receive life.* [Geoffrey B Wilson 1959 -2022]

The fundamental truth that Paul is stressing here is not that **some** are rejected but that **any** are saved. No-one is dealt with unjustly by God for cannot be unjust; rather we should consider election and reprobation as follows:

*What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!*

*[Romans 9:14]*

Of course, this does not fully answer all of the problems; this is just the first point that Paul would have us consider: we must primarily view election as an act of mercy and thank God that He has saved us.

### **7.4.3 A Doctrine of Sovereignty**

Again, we come back to the sovereignty of God. Paul continues his argument in verse 20 by emphasising this aspect. To all who would question God on this matter he asks:

*But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is moulded say to its moulder, "Why have you made me like this?"*

*[Romans 9:20]*

He used the picture of the potter who takes clay, some of which to make a noble object and some to make a common object. Just as it would be foolish for the clay to argue over its ultimate destiny so too, Paul implies, it is foolish for us to argue with God.

We should be careful however with this picture; we are not lumps of clay but created beings precious to God. Nor does Paul actually say that God chooses some men for ultimate glory and some for ultimate destruction, he simply asks "what if it were thus so." Our faith might not be as strong as Paul's, nor might we agree with him, but Paul here is speaking personally and saying that should it be that God worked in this way then he, Paul, would be comfortable with that.

As Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were bough to the fiery furnace they allowed God to be God. God can save but even if he doesn't then He is still sovereign.

*If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.*

*[Daniel 3: 17-18]*

### **7.4.4 A Doctrine that encourages Evangelism**

One of the questions often raised when considering predestination concerns the purpose of evangelism. If God has already determined who will spend eternity with Him what is the point of sharing the gospel?

#### **7.4.4.1 God commands us to evangelise.**

Whether we understand it or not, there is a clear command from God to share our faith with others.

*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."*

*[Isaiah 52:7]*

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*

*[Matthew 28:19]*

The same God who sovereignty decrees our election also sovereignty commands our involvement in the task of evangelism.

## **7.4.4.2 God has chosen evangelism as a means of salvation.**

God not only fore-ordains the end of salvation but also the means of that end, and Paul says that we are involved in that process.

*For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? [Romans 10:13-15]*

*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. [1 Corinthians 1:21]*

*but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. [1 Corinthians 1:23]*

We are sensible people who are not going to do a foolish thing unless it is the means by which God has determined that salvation will be achieved.

Predestination does not take away the need for evangelism but rather it encourages us to evangelise all the more as we have the knowledge that the sovereign Lord has chosen men and women to respond to that message.

## **7.4.5 A Doctrine of Certainty**

Continuing on from the last point, election assures us of the certainty of the outcome of the gospel message. Because God has chosen men and women to receive the gospel we know that it is not preached in vain.

Paul faced the agony of his people, the Jews, rejecting the gospel, yet in Romans 10 & 11 he talks with confidence of their ultimate salvation. That confidence was not based on his ability as a preacher, but on the sovereignty of God, the certainty of whose promise could not be thwarted even when current events seemed to indicate otherwise.

Left to our own free will the possibility exists that no-one would respond to the gospel, yet we know that because God has sovereignty chosen men and women there will be a response.

*so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. [Isaiah 55:11]*

This is a comment not so much of God working in the one bringing the word, but the assurance that God is working in the heart of the recipient.

Apart from preaching, which to the world is foolishness, so too, the way we conduct our meetings is foolishness unless we are dependant and trusting in the sovereignty of God to achieve a result.

*But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. [1 Corinthians 14:24-25]*

#### 7.4.6 A Doctrine of Glorification

We need to make it clear that the purpose of election is primarily and ultimately to glorify God. We should not just sit back now that we are Christians, as many verses stress our choosing is for an immediate purpose.

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* [Ephesians 2:10]

*Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonourable, he will be a vessel for honourable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.* [2 Timothy 2:21]

Yet our final aim is to glorify God, and this must be stressed as the purpose of election.

*to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.* [Ephesians 1:6]

*so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.* [Ephesians 1:12]

*who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.* [Ephesians 1:14]

## 7.5 The Doctrine of Reprobation

In considering predestination we have concentrated on election; predestination unto salvation. We must now look more closely at the other side of the coin, namely reprobation.

*"It is not sufficient to consider Jacob, we must also consider Esau.*

*[RC Sproul 1939 -2017]*

We can define reprobation as that eternal decree of God whereby He has determined to pass some men by with the operation of His special grace and to punish them for their sins to the manifestation of His justice."

Let us consider two aspects of reprobation:

### 7.5.1 An Implicit Doctrine

The difficulty with reprobation is that although it is clearly shown in scripture there is very little said about it and men often add to what is said and so come to wrong conclusions. Whilst Calvin very much championed the doctrine of predestination he described this as a *decretum horribile* (dreadful decree) and warned about reading too much into the doctrine. Reprobation is an implicit doctrine in that many aspects are only implied or hinted at meaning we should be wary of declaring them to be absolutely true.

### 7.5.2 An Asymmetric Doctrine

A 'symmetric' doctrine of Predestination is something to be rejected (see the following notes on Equal Ultimacy). This proposes that God rejects in the same way as he saves i.e. God creates a new and righteous heart in the elect and a rebellious heart in the reprobate.

As has been said already Predestination can be defined as God showing mercy to some and showing justice to others. As such this is an asymmetric (unequal) doctrine i.e., it is not balanced. The natural tendency of man is however to seek to 'restore the balance' and create a symmetric doctrine. Such steps lead to error.

*"God gives mercy to the elect by working faith in their hearts. He gives justice to the reprobate by leaving them in their own sins. There is no symmetry here; one group receives mercy, the other receives justice, but no-one is a victim of injustice."*

*[RC Sproul 1939 - 2017]*

*As of two twins, of which one is taken and the other left, the end is unequal, while they both get what they deserve , yet in these the one is in such a way is delivered by God's great goodness, the other is condemned by no injustice of God's. For is there unrighteousness with God? Away with the thought!" [Augustine, 354-430]*

#### 7.5.2.1 Equal Ultimacy

Equal Ultimacy (or a symmetric view) is a view of predestination that must be rejected. It is a frightening concept that suggests that just as God actively creates belief in some men and women so He also actively and purposely creates unbelief in others. The doctrine would propose that the God who is active and effective in opening blind eyes and just as active and effective in closing open eyes. In this regard both election and reprobation are seen as equally ultimate. This doctrine has various other names such as '*absolute reprobation*' or '*Hyper-Calvinism*', but they are just different names for a view that we must reject as being unbiblical.

The difficulty is that there are, at first glance, verses that would tend to support this viewpoint of God actively preventing people from recognising the truth.

*But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt,*  
 [Exodus 7:3]

*So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.* [Romans 9:18]

We quickly jump in and say if God purposed to save some then He purposed to not save others, but the Bible no-where talks of a divine predestination unto rejection.

God does not coerce men into sin, nor does He create disbelief in their hearts, This concept totally destroys the integrity of the character of God and must be rejected and as much as verses might suggest this scripture stops short of this absolute view of reprobation.

Pharaoh is equally represented in scripture as being responsible for his own downfall.

*But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite [from the plagues], he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.* [Exodus 8:15]

Hyper Calvinism is not just a slightly more extreme doctrine than Calvinism it is totally at odds with Calvinism.

Calvinism	Hyper Calvinism
Asymmetric view	Symmetric view
Unequal Ultimacy	Equal Ultimacy
God passes over the reprobate	God works unbelief in the reprobate

**7.5.2.2 Unequal Ultimacy**

A better way to view this doctrine is that of unequal ultimacy. God does not deal equally in dispensing belief here and unbelief there, but He works unequally. Although this sound odd at first it is perfectly in line with God's character and justice. Towards God's chosen, the elect, God shows His mercy, towards others, the reprobate, He shows His justice; in one case mercy, in the other justice. They are different responses hence we call this a view of unequal ultimacy.

We can explain this idea further by returning to Pharaoh. We have already rejected the absolute view of reprobation whereby God worked unbelief in Pharaoh's heart, so let us reconcile this passage with the unequal ultimacy view of reprobation. There are two ways God could have hardened Pharaoh's heart; actively or passively. To actively harden his heart God would have had to create fresh evil to bring forth the result He wanted. Yet God is not a source of evil, He cannot create evil in someone or be the author of sin, instead he hardens passively.

When God passively hardened Pharaoh's heart he removed part of His control that held sin at bay. Scripture talks of God grace restraining evil in the world and being a counteracting force to it. What God did was to allow Pharaoh ultimate freedom to act as he wanted; he gave him enough rope to hang himself, to use the well-known phrase. All the restraints that God has established in the world were withdrawn and Pharaoh was allowed to sin more.

In this way God hardened Pharaoh's heart, not be being a source of sin but by allowing Pharaoh greater freedom to sin.

This is the view of unequal Ultimacy. To the elect God shows His mercy, to the reprobate He shows His justice and removes some of the restraints that might earlier have prevented them from sinning. Unequal actions, but in neither case does God act unfairly or unjustly.



*For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. [Jude 4]*

*They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.*

*[1 Peter 2:8b]*

In these cases the reprobate are in that position, not through any positive action on God's part, but merely through a withholding of grace. The difference may seem arbitrary, but it is the difference between a God who acts unjustly and a God who acts justly - although mysteriously. The point that must be emphasized is that at no point does God act unfairly. If we wish to ask the question why should He show His mercy to some and His justice to others then the only answer we have is:

*"because of His good pleasure."*

*[Ephesians 1:3]*

If at this point you are still confused by the passages or unsure what to think or what conclusions to draw then you are in good company.

*The controversy is one I can't join on either side...After all, when we are most free, it is only with a freedom God has given us: and when our will is most influenced by Grace, it is still our will. And if what our will does is not 'voluntary', and if 'voluntary' does not mean 'free', what are we talking about? I'd leave it all alone."*

*[CS Lewis 1898-1963]*

## 7.6 Supralapsarianism & Infralapsarianism

### 7.6.1 Definitions of the Viewpoints

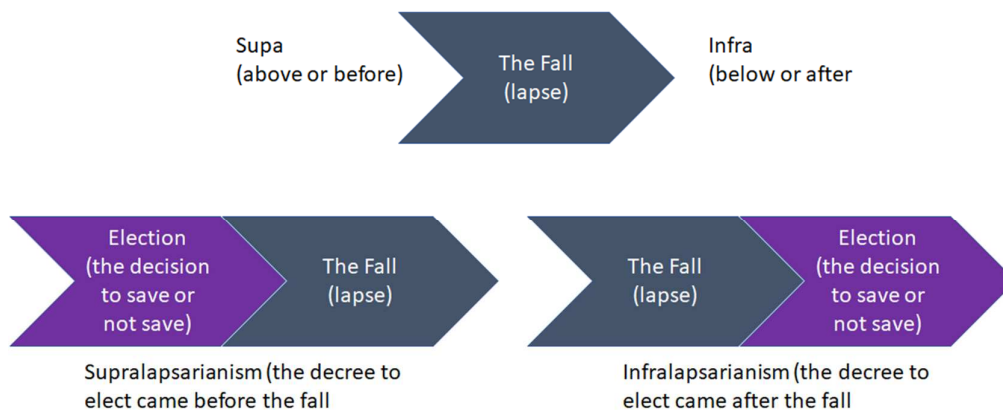
Two slightly different views of predestination are called Infralapsarianism and Supralapsarianism. These deal with the order of God’s eternal decrees and the relationship between election and Adam’s fall.

Many would argue the differences between these views are not worthy of debate, although there must be value in considering all topics relating to God and his plan for salvation.

*“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. [Deuteronomy 29:29]”*

We can talk of the fall of a ‘lapse’ and the two prefixes set and order in relation to the fall.

Supra means ‘above’ or ‘before’ and is the view that election was decreed before the Fall.  
Infra means ‘below’ or ‘after’ and the view the election was decreed after the Fall.



It should be noted that most scholars would accept Infralapsarianism with there being very few proponents of Supralapsarianism, either now or through history, but the view point will be reviewed.

Whilst we still might see this as a somewhat academic debate someone has pointed out; “Conviction and hanging are parts of the same process, but there is a difference between whether a man is hung before he is convicted, or convicted before he is hung.”

**Supralapsarianism** is a view that would prioritise God’s sovereignty. God has already determined to display justice to some and mercy to others and mankind is created with this distinction in place. The fall is permitted to divide men into those ‘predestined; groups to which God can then display justice or mercy.

He views men as unfallen, yet decrees to display his sovereignty by acting differently towards them.

**Infralapsarianism** is a view that would prioritise God’s mercy. Man is created holy and with the ability to remain holy. The fall is permitted which divided men, and from that point the ‘decree’ of God predestined decision to show justice or mercy. Is enacted.

He views men as fallen and from that fallen state chooses to act in different ways towards them.

Both viewpoints have benefits and drawbacks. Supralapsarianism is very close, although not identical to, hyper-Calvinism and as such is a difficult doctrine to hold to and is the more minority view.

## Arguments for Supralapsarianism

- Ephesians 1:4 is key verse *[he chose us in him before the foundation of the world]* that Supralapsarianism would say is underplayed in an Infralapsarianism viewpoint.
- Unless the Father owns (elects) His people prior to their being sold into sin (the fall), then how could He redeem them? How could He “buy back” from sin and condemnation that which He never owned before sin and condemnation?

## Arguments for Infralapsarianism

- the Supralapsarian view makes God responsible for the fall and for evil
- Infralapsarianism sees fallen mankind as in a position from which they can be redeemed

*If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.* *[John 15:19]*

but I chose [elected] you out of the world [the Fall]

## 7.6.2 Historical discussions of the Viewpoints

These viewpoints have been the subject of much debate throughout history:

### Synod of Dort (1618-1619)

Convened in the Dutch town of Dordrecht by the Dutch Reformed churches to discuss the rise of Arminianism in light of the more commonly held few at the time of Calvinism

*Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, He hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault from their primitive state of rectitude into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation.* *[Chapter 1 Article 7]*

**chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen.** i.e. because mankind has fallen God chose to elect some back to himself

### Synod of Utrecht (1905)

Convened in the Dutch town of Utrecht to give clarity on certain issues, including Infralapsarianism and Supralapsarianism

*In regard to the first point, infra- or supralapsarianism, Synod declares that our Confessional Standards admittedly follow the infralapsarian presentation in respect to the doctrine of election, but that it is evident both from the wording of Chapter I, Article 7, of the Canons of Dort and from the deliberations of the Synod of Dort, that this is in no wise intended to exclude or condemn the supralapsarian presentation.*

## 7.7 Pastoral and Evangelical Implications

Before we summarise some key points on this doctrine it is worth considering the pastoral and evangelical implications. We cannot just study this from an academic point of view without realising the very real way it which it impacts our lives.

We all have a desire to reach out to the unsaved, especially when those people are close to us, family and friends. This doctrine is usually ignored because we cannot help but ask the question; "Has God chosen that person or not?". And if the answer is no what does that mean for me?

The position a person is with regard to their faith and belief in Christ is something that is ultimately between them and God. We can believe that certain people are saved with a high degree of certainty, and we can believe that certain people are far from God, based on our observation of their lifestyles, but we can never know.

God can save that person that seems furthest from him in an instant, and that person that seems so close to God should never put their trust in their own 'goodness' or 'righteousness', in case their pride takes over.

We must always accept that God is a God of love and mercy who wants all people to come to Him, and this should spur our evangelism and our prayers for others. We may be the very means by which God brings into being something He had planned from the beginning of time.

The fact that we do not fully understand a doctrine that at times seems contradictory is, strangely, a positive point. It would be sad if we could reduce all of God's character and actions to a few pages of notes and conclude that we had now 'summed everything up'. We should be excited that God is so much greater than us, and that our intellect will at times be confounded by how God seems to work. God is not compelled to work in a way that we think is right or even a way that we understand or agree with, the amazing thing is that in so many instances He has made Himself fully knowable and understandable.

Predestination, regardless of how we might position ourselves on the details, affirms a God who from the beginning of time has taken an interest in His creation, who desires all people to come to him, and in some mysterious way manages to combine our free-will with His sovereignty.

## 7.8 Summary

Seven points need to be emphasised in bringing this subject to a close.

- 1) A particular view of predestination is not necessary for salvation. We can hold different views to each other and still be in harmony.
- 2) Predestination cannot be divorced from the sovereignty of God. Often our difficulties in accepting this doctrine come from a failure to acknowledge the sovereignty of God.
- 3) Election and Reprobation are subjects of unequal ultimacy. In the former God deals with men mercifully, in the later he deals with them justly.

If I ultimately end up in heaven it is because God has chosen me, if I ultimately end up elsewhere it is because I have rejected God.

- 4) Under no circumstances in either election or reprobation does God act unjustly or unfairly.

God will ultimately give to all people what they desire. To those who accept him in this life he will allow them to be with him for all eternity, to those who reject him in this life he will allow them to be apart from him for all eternity.

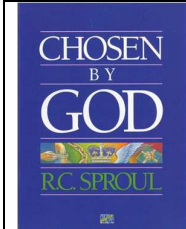
- 5) Election encourages us to evangelise since we know for certain there will be a response to the gospel.
- 6) The ultimate purpose of predestination is to glorify God.
- 7) God is not, nor ever will be, a source of evil. He does not work sin in men's hearts and when He 'hardens' men hearts it is by withholding His grace and allowing them greater freedom to follow their own desire.

***"When they inquire into predestination, let them remember that they are penetrating into the recesses of the divine wisdom, where he who rushes forward securely and confidently, instead of satisfying his curiosity will enter into an inextricable labyrinth."***  
***[John Calvin 1509-1564]***

## Questions for consideration

- Do you agree with CS Lewis that this is a subject best left alone? If not how would you sum up your viewpoint in a couple of sentences?
- When God created Adam and Eve do you think he 'knew' that they would fall? Is so, why did he not create them such that they would not sin?

## Further Reading

 The image shows the front cover of the book 'Chosen by God' by R.C. Sproul. The cover is primarily blue with white and gold text. At the top, 'CHOSEN' is written in white, followed by 'BY' in smaller white letters, and 'GOD' in large, bold white letters. Below the title, there is a small illustration of a landscape with a sun and trees. At the bottom, the author's name 'R.C. SPROUL' is written in white. A small publisher's logo is visible at the very bottom.	<p><b>Chosen by God RC Sproul (1985)</b></p> <p>A contemporary classic on predestination, a doctrine that isn't just for Calvinists. It is a doctrine for all biblical Christians</p>
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Deeper Truth