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## Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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# Of Predestination (I)

by Hugh Binning

Lecture 15 on Christian Doctrine

*“In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”*

– Eph. 1:11.

*“What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory.”* – Rom, 9:22, 23.

**I**n the creation of the world, it pleased the Lord, after all things were framed and disposed, to make one creature to rule over all; and to him he gave the most excellent nature, and privileges beyond the rest; so that it may appear that he had made all things for man, and man immediately for his own glory. As man was the chief of the works of his hands, so we may, according to the Scriptures, conceive that he was chiefly minded in the counsels of his heart. And that, as in the execution of his purpose in creating the world, man had the pre-eminence assigned unto him, and all seemed subordinate unto him; so, in the Lord’s purposes concerning the world, his purpose about man has the pre-eminence. He, indeed, has resolved to declare the glory of his name in this world; therefore the heavens and the firmament are made preachers of that glory, Psal. 19:1,2,&c. But in a special manner, his majesty’s glorious name is manifested in man, and about man. He hath set man, as it were, in the centre or midst of the creation, that all the creatures might direct or bring in their praises unto him, to be offered up in his and their name, to the Lord their Maker, by him, as the common mouth of the world; and the Lord hath chosen this creature above all the creatures, for the more solemn and glorious declaration of himself in his special properties. Therefore, we should gather our thoughts in this business, to hear from the Lord what his thoughts are towards us; for, certainly, the right understanding of his

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everlasting counsel touching the eternal state of man, is of singular virtue to conform us to the praise of his name, and establish us in faith and confidence. Predestination is a mystery, indeed, into which we should not curiously and boldly inquire beyond what is revealed; for then a soul must needs lose itself in that depth of wisdom, and perish in the search of unsearchableness. And thus the word speaks in Scripture of this subject, intimating to us, that it is rather to be admired than conceived; and that there ought to be some ignorance of these secrets, which, conjoined with faith and reverence, is more learned than any curious knowledge. But withal, we must open our eyes upon so much light as God reveals of these secrets, knowing that the light of the word is a saving, refreshing light, not confounding, as is his inaccessible light of secret glory. As far as it pleaseth his majesty to open his mouth, let us not close our ears, but open them also to his instruction, knowing, that as he will withhold no necessary thing for our salvation, so he will reveal nothing but what is profitable. This is the best bond of sobriety and humble wisdom, to learn what he teacheth us; but when he makes an end of teaching, to desire no more learning. It is humility to seek no more, and it is true wisdom to be content with no less.

There is much weakness in our conceiving of divine things. We shape and form them in our minds according to a mould of our own experience or invention, and cannot conceive of them as they are in themselves. If we should speak properly, there are not counsels and purposes in God, but one entire counsel and resolution concerning all things which are in time, by which he hath disposed all in their several times, seasons, conditions, and orders. But because we have many thoughts, about many things, so we cannot well conceive of God but in likeness to ourselves; and therefore, the Scripture, condescending to our weakness, speaks so. 'How many are thy precious thoughts towards me,' saith David; and yet, indeed, there is but one thought of him, and us, and all, which one thought is of so much virtue, that it is equivalent to an infinite number of thoughts concerning infinite objects. The Lord hath from everlasting conceived one purpose of manifesting his own glory in such several ways; and this is the head-spring of all that befalls creatures, men, and angels. But because, in the execution of this purpose, there is a certain order, and succession, and variety, therefore men do ordinarily fancy such or such a frame and order in the Lord's mind and purpose. And as the astronomers do cut and carve in their imagination cycles, orbs, and epicycles in the heavens, because of the various and different appearances and motions of stars in them, whereas it may be, really, there is but one celestial body in which all these various lights and motions do appear, so do men fancy unto themselves an order in the Lord's decree, according to the phenomena or appearances of his works in the world; whereas, it is one purpose and decree, which in its infinite

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compass comprehends all these varieties and orders together. This much we may indeed lawfully conceive of his decree, that there is an exact correspondence and suitableness between his majesty's purpose and execution, and that he is a wise Lord, 'wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working,' having some great plot and design before his eyes, which he intends to effect, and which is, as it were, the great light and sun of this firmament, unto which, by that same wonderful counsel, all other things are subordinate; and so in the working it shall appear exactly as his counsel did delineate and contrive it.

There is no man so empty or shallow, but he hath some great design and purpose which he chiefly aims at; shall we not then conceive, that the Lord, who instructs every man to this discretion, and teaches him, (Isa. 28:26,) is himself wise in his counsel, and hath some grand project before him in all this fabric of the world, and the upholding of it since it was made? Certainly he hath. And if you ask what it is, the wise man will teach you in general – 'He made all things for himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil,' Prov. 16:4. Here, then, is his great design and purpose, – to glorify himself, – to manifest his own name to men and angels. Now, his name comprehends wisdom, goodness, power, mercy, and justice. The first three he declares in all the works of his hands. All are well done and wisely done. The excellency of the work shows the wonderful counsellor and the wise contriver. The goodness of any creature in its kind, declares the inexhausted spring of a self-being from whom it proceeds; and the bringing all these out of nothing, and upholding them, is a glorious declaration of his power. But yet, in all the works of his hands, there is nothing found to manifest his glorious mercy and justice, upon which are the flower and garland of his attributes, and unto which wisdom and power seem to be subservient. Therefore his majesty, in that one entire purpose of his own glory, resolves to manifest his wrath and his mercy upon men and angels, subjects capable of it; which two attributes are as the poles about which all the wheels of election and reprobation turn as you see in that place, Rom. 9:22, 23. Let this then be established as the end of all his works, as it is designed in his counsel, and nothing else. It is not the creature, nor any thing in the creature, which is first in his mind, but himself, and therefore of him, and for him, are all things. Here they have their rise, and thither they return, even to the ocean of God's eternal glory, from whence all did spring.

The right establishing of this will help us to conceive aright of his counsel of predestination. It is a common cavil of carnal reason, how can the Lord reject so many persons, and fore-ordain them to destruction? It seems most contrary to his goodness and wisdom, to have such an end of eternal predestination before him, in the creating of so many, to make men for nothing, but to damn them. Here

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carnal reason, which is enmity to God, triumphs; but consider, I say, that this is not the Lord's end and chief design, to destroy men. Even as it is not his majesty's first look, or furthest reach, to give unto others eternal life; so it is not his prime intent to sink them into eternal death, as if that were his pleasure and delight. No, indeed! Neither is the creature's happiness nor its misery that which first moves him, or is most desired of him, but himself only, and he cannot move out of himself to any business, but he must return it unto himself. Therefore the wise preacher expresses it well, 'He made all for himself, even the wicked for the day of evil.' It was not his great end of creating wicked men to damn them, or creating righteous men to save them, but both are for a further and higher end, – for himself and his own glory.

All seem to agree about this, that the great end of all the Lord's counsels and decrees is his own glory, to be manifested on men and angels; and that this must be first in his mind; not that there is first or last with him, but to speak after the manner of men. If he had many thoughts, as we have, this would be his first thought; and in this one purpose this end is chiefly aimed at, and all other things are by the Lord's counsel subordinate to this, as means to compass that. But as concerning the order of these means, and consequently of his majesty's purpose about them, men, by examining his majesty according to the creature's rules, or according to sense, bring him down far below his own infinite greatness. Some conceive that that was first, as it were, in his mind which is first done. Looking upon the execution of his purpose in the works of his power, they imagine, that as he first created man righteous, so this was his first thought concerning man, to create man for the glory of his goodness and power, without any particular determination as yet of his end. And I conceive, this is the thought of the multitude of people. They think God was disappointed in his work, when they hear he created such a glorious creature that is now become so miserable. They cannot believe that his majesty had all this sin and misery determined with him when he purposed to create him, but look upon the emergent of man's fall into sin and misery as a surprise to his majesty; – as if he had meant another thing in creating him, and so was, upon this occasion of man's sin, driven to a new consultation about the helping of the business, and making the best out of it that might be. Thus 'through wisdom' the world knows not God. They think God altogether like themselves, and so liken him to the builder of a house, who set nothing before him in doing so, but to build it after that manner for his own ends; but then being surprised with the fall and ruin of it, takes a new advisement, and builds it up again upon another and a surer foundation. But because they cannot say, that God takes any new advisements in time, but must confess that all his counsels are everlasting concerning all the works of his hands, therefore they

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bring in foreknowledge to smooth their irreligious conceit of God; as if the Lord, upon his purpose of creating man, had foreseen what should befall him, and so purposed to permit it to be so, that out of it he might erect some glorious fabric of mercy and justice upon the ruins of man. And that little or nothing may be left to the absolute sovereign will of God, to which the Scripture ascribes all things, they must again imagine, that upon his purpose of sending Christ to save sinners, he is yet undetermined about the particular end of particular men, but watches on the tower of foreknowledge to espy what they will do, whether men will believe on his Son or not, whether they will persevere in faith or not; and according to his observation of their doings, so he applies his own will to carve out their reward or portion of life or death. These are even the thoughts which are inbred in your breasts by nature. That which the learned call Arminianism is nothing else but the carnal reason of men's hearts, which is enmity to God. It is that very disputation which Paul in this chapter exclaims against, 'Who art thou, O man, that disputest?'

But certainly, all this contrivance is nothing beseeming the wisdom or sovereignty of God, but reflects upon both; upon his wisdom, that he should have thoughts of creating the most noble of his creatures, and yet be in suspense about the end of the creature, and have that in uncertainty what way his glory shall indeed be manifested by it. Is it not the first and chief thought of every wise man, what he intends and aims at in his work, and according to the measure and reach of his wisdom, so he reaches further in his end and purpose? Shall we then conceive the only wise God so far to have mistaken himself, as to do that which no wise man would do? He who is of such an infinite reach of wisdom and understanding, to fall upon the thoughts of making such an excellent creature, and yet to lie in suspense within himself about the eternal estate of it, and to be in a waiting posture what way his glory should be manifested by it; whether in a way of simple goodness only, or in a way of justice, or in a way of mercy, till he should foresee, off the tower of foreknowledge, how that creature should behave itself. Our text speaks not thus; for in the place, (Eph. 1) we have the Lord, in his eternal purpose, carving out to such and such particular persons 'an inheritance,' and 'adoption of children,' for that great end 'of the glory of his grace,' ver. 11, and 5, 6. And predestination falls out, not according to our carriage, but according to the purpose of him who 'works all things' that he works, 'after the counsel of his own will,' without consulting our will, And if you inquire what are these 'all things,' certainly we must take it simply for all things that are at all, or have any real being: his power, his hand must be in it, and that according to his own counsel, without respect had to the creature's will, according to his own good pleasure, ver. 5, 11. He had no sooner a thought of working and making man, but

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this purpose was in it, to make such men to the praise of his glorious grace, and to fore-ordain them to an inheritance, and others to make or fit them for destruction, as the text, Rom. 9:22, bears. Herein the great and unsearchable wisdom of God appears to be a great depth, that when he hath a thought of making such a vessel, he hath this purpose in the bosom of it, what use it shall be for, whether for honour or dishonour; and accordingly, in his counsel, he prepares it either to glory or destruction, and in time makes it fit for its use, either by sin or grace. Here is the depth that cannot be sounded by mortal men. ‘O the depth of the riches both of his wisdom and knowledge! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!’ The whole tenor of the Scriptures shows that his majesty was not surprised and taken at unawares by Adam’s fall, but that it fell out according to the determinate counsel of his will. If he knew it, and suffered it to be, certainly he permitted it, because he willed it should be so; and why may he not determine that in his holy counsel which his wisdom can disabuse to the most glorious end that can be? Why may not he decree such a fall, who out of man’s ruins can erect such a glorious throne for his grace and justice to triumph into? It is more for the glory of his infinite wisdom, to bring good, and such a good out of evil, than only to permit that good should be.

Then such doctrine is repugnant to the Lord’s absolute power and sovereignty, which is Paul’s sanctuary, whither he flies unto as a sure refuge, from the stroke or blast of carnal reason. ‘Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour?’ ver. 21. Hath not the Lord more absolute dominion over us, than the potter hath over the clay, for the potter made not the clay, but the Lord hath made us of nothing? so that simply and absolutely we are his, and not our own, and so he hath an absolute right to make any use of us he pleases, without consulting our wills and deservings. Can any man quarrel him for preparing him to destruction, seeing he owes nothing to any man, but may do with his own what he pleases? What if God, willing to make known his power, and justice, and wrath, have fitted and prepared some vessels for destruction, with which in time he bears much, and forbears long, using much patience towards them, ver. 22. Can any man challenge him for it? And what if God, willing to make known the riches of his grace, have prepared some vessels to glory, shall any man’s eye be evil because he is good? ver. 23. Shall man be left to be his own disposer, and the shaper of his own fortune? Sure it was not so with Esau and Jacob: they were alike in the womb. If there was any prerogative, Esau the eldest had it, – they had done neither good nor evil. What difference was then between them to cast the balance of his will? Can you imagine any? Indeed carnal reason will say that God foreknew what they would do, and so he chose or rejected them. But, why doth not the apostle answer thus

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unto that objection of unrighteousness in God? ver. 14. It had been ready and plain. But rather he opposes the will and calling of God, to all works past or to come. He gives no answer but this, 'he will have mercy because he will have mercy;' that is the supreme rule of righteousness, and hitherto must we flee, as the surest anchor of our hope and stability. Our salvation depends not on our willing or running, on our resolving or doing, but upon this primitive good pleasure and will of God, on which hangs our willing and running and obtaining. It is certainly an unorderly order, to flee unto that in men, for the cause of God's eternal counsels, which only flows from his eternal counsel, Eph. 1:4. Hath he chosen us because he did foreknow that we would be holy, and without blame, as men think? Or hath he not rather chosen us to be holy and without blame? He cannot behold any good or evil in the creatures, till his will pass a sentence upon it; for from whence should it come?

Seeing then this order and contrivance of God's purpose is but feigned, it seems to some that the very contrary method were more suitable even to the rules of wisdom. You know what is first in men's intention is last in execution. The end is first in their mind, then the means to compass that end. But in practice again, men fall first upon the means, and by them come at length to attain their end; therefore those who would have that first, as it were, in God's mind, which he doth first, do even cross common rules of reason in human affairs. It would seem then, say some, that this method might do well; that what is last in his execution, was first in his purpose, and by him intended as the end of what he doth first, and so some do rank his decrees; that he had first a thought of glorifying man, and to attain this end he purposed to give him grace, and for this purpose to suffer him to fall, and for all to create him. But we must not look thus upon it either. It were a foolish and ridiculous counsel, unbeseeming the poor wisdom of man, to purpose the glorifying of man whom he had not yet determined to create. Therefore we should always have it in our mind that the great end and project of all is the glory of his mercy and justice upon men; and this we may conceive is first in order, neither men's life nor death, but God's glory to be manifested upon men. Now, to attain this glorious end, with one inclination or determination of his will, not to be distinguished or severed, he condescends upon all that is done in time, as one complete and entire mean of glorifying himself, so that one of them is not before another in his mind, but altogether. For attaining this, he purposes to create man. He ordains the fall of all men into a state of sin and misery; and some of those, upon whom he had resolved to show his mercy, he gives them to Christ to be redeemed, and restored by grace; others, he fore-ordains them to destruction; and all this at once, without any such order as we imagine. Now though he intend all this at once and together, yet it doth not hence follow that all these must be

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executed together. As when a man intends to build a house for his own accommodation, there are many things in the house upon which he hath not several purposes; but yet they must be severally, and in some order done. First the foundation laid; then the walls raised; then the roof put on; yet he did not intend the foundation to be for the walls, or the walls for the roof, but altogether for himself. Even so the Lord purposes to glorify his mercy and justice upon a certain number of persons, and for this end to give them a being, to govern their falling into misery, to raise some out of it by a Mediator, and to leave some into it to destruction; and all this as one entire mean to illustrate his glorious mercy and justice. But these things themselves must be done not all at once, but one before another, either as their own nature requires, or as he pleases. The very nature of the thing requires that man be created before he sin; that he sin and fall before a Mediator suffer for his sin; that he have a being before he have a glorious being; and that he have a sinful and miserable being, before he have this glorious and gracious being which may manifest the grace and mercy of God. But it is the pleasure of the Lord that determines in what time and order Christ shall suffer, either before or after the conversion of sinners, or whether sinners shall be presently instated in glory, and perfectly delivered from all sin at their first conversion, or only in part during this life.

Seeing then this was his majesty's purpose, to make so many vessels of honour, upon whom he might glorify the riches of his grace and mercy; and so many 'vessels of wrath,' upon whom he might show the power of his anger; you may think what needed all this business of man's redemption. Might not God have either preserved so many as he had appointed to glory from falling into sin and misery; or at least have freely pardoned their sin without any satisfaction; and out of the exceeding riches of his mercy and power, have as well not imputed sin to them at all, as imputed their sins to Christ, who was not guilty? What needed his giving so many to the Son, and the Son's receiving them? What needed these mysteries of incarnation, of redemption, seeing he might have done all this simply without so much pains and expense? Why did he choose this way? Indeed, that is the wonder; and if there were no more end for it, but to confound mortality that dare ask him what he doth, it is enough. Should he be called down to the bar of human reason, to give an account of his matters? 'Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or, being his counsellor, hath taught him,' that is in the depths of his unsearchable understanding, that he chose to go this round, and to compass his end by such a strange circuit of means, when he might have done it simply and directly without so much pains? Yet it is not so hidden, but he hath revealed as much as may satisfy or silence all flesh. For we must consider, that his great project is not simply to manifest the glory of his goodness, but of his gracious and

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merciful goodness, the most tender and excellent of all; and therefore man must be miserable, sinful, and vile, that the riches of his grace may appear in choosing and saving such persons. But that it may appear also how excellent he could make man, and how vain all created perfections are, being left to themselves, therefore he first made man righteous, and being fallen into sin and misery, he might straightway have restored him without more ado. But his purpose was to give an exact demonstration of mercy, tempered and mixed with justice; and therefore he finds out the satisfaction in his eternal counsel, 'I have found a ransom.' And so he chooses Jesus Christ to be the head of these chosen souls, in whom they might be again restored unto eternal life. And these souls, he, in his everlasting purpose, gives over to the Son to be redeemed, and these the Son receives. And thus the glory of mercy and justice shines most brightly, yea, more brightly, than if he had at first pardoned. O how doth his love and mercy appear, that he will transfer our sins upon his holy Son, and accept that redemption for us; and his justice, that a redemption and price he must have, even from his Son, when once he comes in the stead of sinners! And in this point do the songs of eternity concentre.

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