

A Dialogue Between a Predestinarian and His Friend ~ John Wesley

Out of thine own mouth!

TO ALL PREDESTINARIANS.

1. I AM informed, some of you have said, that the following quotations are false; that these words were not spoken by these authors; others, that they were not spoken in this sense; and others, that neither you yourself, nor any true Predestinarian, ever did, or ever would, speak so.

2. My friends, the authors here quoted are well known, in whom you may read the words with your own eyes. And you who have read them know in your own conscience, they were spoken in this sense, and no other; nay, that this sense of them is professedly defended throughout the whole treatises whence they are taken.

3. But, be this as it may, do you indeed say, "No true Predestinarian ever did or would speak so?" Why, every true Predestinarian must speak so, and so must you yourself too, if you dare speak out, unless they and you renounce your fundamental principle.

4. Your fundamental principle is this: "God from eternity ordained whatsoever should come to pass." But from this single position undeniably follows every assertion hereafter mentioned. It remains therefore only that you choose which you please (for one you must choose) of these three things: Either,

(1.) To equivocate, evade the question, and prevaricate without end; or,

(2.) To swallow all these assertions together, and honestly to avow them; or,

(3.) To renounce them all together, and believe in Christ, the Savior of all.

FRIEND. -- SIR, I have heard that you make God the author of all sin, and the destroyer of the greater part of mankind without mercy.

PREDESTINARIAN. -- I deny it; I only say, "God did from all eternity unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass." (Assembly's Catechism, chap. 3.)

FRIEND. -- Do you make no exception?

PREDESTINARIAN. -- No, surely; for "nothing is more absurd than to think anything at all is done but by the ordination of God." (Calvin's Institutes, book 1., chap. 16, sect. 3.)

Friend -- Do you extend this to the actions of men?

Pred. -- Without doubt: "Every action and motion of every creature is so governed by the hidden counsel of God, that nothing can come to pass, but what was ordained by him." (Ibid., sect. 3.)

Friend. -- But what then becomes of the wills of men?

Pred. -- "The wills of men are so governed by the will of God, that they are carried on straight to the mark which he has fore-ordained." (Ibid., sect. 8.)

Friend. -- I suppose you mean the permissive will of God?

Pred. -- No: I mean, "all things come to pass by the efficacious and irresistible will of God." (Twissi *Vindiciae Gratiae Potestatis & Providentiae Dei*. Editio Jensoniana, par. 3, p. 19.)

Friend. -- Why, then, all men must do just what they do?

Pred. -- True: "It is impossible that anything should ever be done, but that to which God impels the will of man." (Ibid., p. 19.)

Friend. -- But does not this imply the necessity of all events?

Pred. -- "I will not scruple to own that the will of God lays a necessity on all things, and that everything he wills necessarily comes to pass." (Calvin's *Inst.*, b. 3, c. 24, sec. 8.)

Friend. -- Does sin then necessarily come to pass?

Pred. -- Undoubtedly: For "the almighty power of God extends itself to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men." (Assembly's Catechism, c. 5.)

Friend. -- I grant, God foresaw the first man would fall.

Pred. -- Nay, "God not only foresaw that Adam would fall, but also ordained that he should." (Calvin's *Inst.*, b. 3, c. 23, sec. 7.)

Friend. -- I know God permitted Adam's fall.

Pred. -- I tell you, "he fell not only by the permission, but also by the appointment, of God." (Calvin *Responsio ad Calumnias Nebulonis cujusdam ad Articulum primum*.) "He sinned because God so ordained, because the Lord saw good." (Calvin's *Inst.*, b. 3, c. 24, sec. 8.)

Friend. -- But do not those who differ from you raise many objections against you as to this point?

Pred. -- Yes: "Those poisonous dogs vomit out many things against God." (Ibid., b. 3, c. 23, sec. 2.) "They deny that the Scripture says God

decreed Adam's fall. They say he might have chose either to fall or not; and that God fore-ordained only to treat him according to his desert: As if God had created the noblest of all his creatures, without fore-ordaining what should become of him!" (Ibid., sec. 7.)

Friend. -- Did God then make Adam on purpose that he might fall?

Pred. -- Undoubtedly. "God made Adam and Eve to this very purpose, that they might be tempted and led into sin. And by force of his decree, it could not otherwise be but they must sin." (Piscatoris Dispute. Praedest., Praef., p. 6.)

Friend. -- But do not you ground God's decree on God's foreknowledge rather than his will?

Pred. -- No: "God foresees nothing but what he has decreed, and his decree precedes his knowledge." (Piscat. Disput. Praedest.)

Friend. -- Well, this may truly be termed a horrible decree.

Pred. -- "I confess it is a horrible decree; yet no one can deny but God foreknew Adam's fall, and therefore foreknew it, because he had ordained it so by his own decree." (Calv. Inst., b. 3, c. 23, sec. 7.)

Friend. -- Do you believe, then, that God has by his own positive decree, not only elected some men to life, but also reprobated all the rest?

Pred. -- Most surely, if I believe one, I believe the other. "Many indeed (thinking to excuse God) own election, and yet deny reprobation; but this is quite silly and childish. For without reprobation, election itself cannot stand; whom God passes by, those he reprobates." (Calv. Inst., b. 3, c. 23, sec. 1.)

Friend. -- Pray explain what you mean by election and reprobation.

Pred. -- With all my heart. "All men are not created for the same end; but some are fore-ordained to eternal life; others to eternal damnation. So according as every man was created for the one end or the other, we say he was elected or predestinated to life, or reprobated, that is, predestinated to destruction." (Ibid., c. 21, sec. 1.)

Friend. -- Pray repeat your meaning.

Pred. -- "God hath once for all appointed, by an eternal and unchangeable decree, to whom he would give salvation, and whom he would devote to destruction." (Ibid., sec. 7.)

Friend. -- Did God make any man on purpose that he might be damned?

Pred. -- Did not I tell you before? "God's first constitution was, that some should be destined to eternal ruin; and to this end their sins were

ordained, and denial of grace in order to their sins." (Zanchius de Natura Dei, p. 553, 554.)

Friend. -- But is not God's predestining men to life or death grounded on his foreknowledge?

Pred. -- "So the vulgar think; that God, as he foresees every man will deserve, elects them to life, or devotes them to death and damnation." (Calv. Inst., b. 3, c. 22, sec. 1.)

Friend. -- And do not you think that reprobation, at least, is grounded on God's foreknowing men's sins?

Pred. -- No indeed: "God of his own good pleasure ordains that many should be born, who are from the womb devoted to inevitable damnation. If any man pretend that God's foreknowledge lays them under no necessity of being damned, but rather that he decreed their damnation because he foreknew their wickedness, I grant that God's foreknowledge alone lays no necessity on the creature; but eternal life and death depend on the will rather than the foreknowledge of God. If God only foreknew all things that relate to all men, and did not decree and ordain them also, then it might be inquired whether or no his foreknowledge necessitates the thing foreknown. But seeing he therefore foreknows all things that will come to pass, because he has decreed they shall come to pass, it is vain to contend about foreknowledge, since it so plain all things come to pass by God's positive decree." (Ibid., c. 23, s. 6.)

Friend. -- But if God has positively decreed to damn the greater part of mankind, why does he call upon them to repent and be saved?

Pred. -- "As God has his effectual call, whereby he gives the elect the salvation to which he ordained them, so he has his judgments towards the reprobates, whereby he executes his decree concerning them. As many, therefore, as he created to live miserably, and then perish everlastingly; these, that they may be brought to the end for which they were created, he sometimes deprives of the possibility of hearing the word, and at other times, by the preaching thereof, blinds and stupefies them the more." (Ibid., c. 24, s. 12.)

Friend. -- How is this? I say, if God has created them for never-ending death, why does he call to them to turn and live?

Pred. -- "He calls to them, that they may be more deaf; he kindles a light, that they may be the more blind; he brings his doctrine to them, that they may be more ignorant; and applies the remedy to them, that they may not be healed." (Ibid., b. 3, c. 24, s. 13.)

Friend. -- Enough, enough. Yet you do not make God the author of sin!

Pred. -- No certainly: "God cannot be termed the author of sin, though he is the cause of those actions which are sins." (Petri Martyris Vermillii

Com. in Roman., p. 413.)

Friend. -- How is he the cause of them then?

Pred. -- Two ways: First, by his eternal, unchangeable decree; Secondly, by his present irresistible power.

Friend. -- Did God then fore-ordain the sins of any man?

Pred. -- "Both the reprobates and the elect were fore-ordained to sin, as sin, that the glory of God might be declared thereby." (Zanchius de Nat. Dei., p. 555.) "The reprobates," more especially, "who were predestinated to damnation, and the causes of damnation, and created to that end, that they may live wickedly, and be vessels full of the dregs of sin." (Piscator contra Tauffium, p. 47.)

Friend. -- But surely the sins of the elect were not fore-ordained?

Pred. -- Yes, but they were: "For we neither can do more good than we do, nor less evil than we do; because God from eternity has precisely decreed that both the good and the evil should be so done." (Piscatoris Responsio ad Amicam Duplicationem Conradi Vorstii, p. 176.)

Friend. -- I understand you, as to God's decreeing sin. But how is his irresistible power now concerned in the sins of men?

Pred. -- "God is the author of that action which is sinful, by his irresistible will." (Dr. Twisse, par. 3, p. 21.)

Friend. -- How do you mean?

Pred. -- "God procures adultery, cursings, lyings." (Piscat. Responsio ad Apologiam Bertii.) "He supplies wicked men with opportunities of sinning, and inclines their hearts thereto. He blinds, deceives, and seduces them. He, by his working on their hearts, bends and stirs them up to do evil." (Pet. Martyr. Ver. Comment. in Rom., pp. 36, 413.) And thus "thieves, murderers, and other malefactors are God's instruments, which he uses to execute what he hath decreed in himself" (Calv. Inst., b. 1, c. 17, s. 5.)

Friend. -- Do you not then charge God himself with sin?

Pred. -- No: "God necessitates them only to the act of sin, not to the deformity of sin." (Twissi Vindiciae, par. 3, p. 22.) Besides, "when God makes angels or men sin, he does not sin himself, because he does not break any law. For God is under no law, and therefore cannot sin." (Zuinglius in Serm. de Provid., c. 5, 6.)

Friend. -- But how does God make angels or men to sin?

Pred. -- "The devil and wicked men are so held in on every side with the

hand of God, that they cannot conceive, or contrive, or execute any mischief, any farther than God himself doth not permit only, but command. Nor are they only held in fetters, but compelled also, as with a bridle, to perform obedience to those commands." (Calv. Inst., b. 1, c. 17, s. 11.)

Friend. -- This is true Turkish (Muslim/Islamic) doctrine, and ought so to be exploded as that used to be in these words: --

"I do anathematize the blasphemy of Mahomet (Mohammed), which saith that God deceiveth whom he will, and whom he will he leadeth to that which is good. Himself doeth what he willeth, and is himself the cause of all good and all evil. Fate and destiny govern all things." (Nicetus Saracenita.)

Pred. -- Nay, our doctrine is more ancient than Mahomet (Mohammed): It was maintained by St. Augustine.

Friend -- Augustine speaks sometimes for it, and sometimes against it. But all antiquity for the four first centuries is against you, as is the whole Eastern Church to this day; and the Church of England, both in her Catechism, Articles, and Homilies. And so are divers of our most holy Martyrs, Bishop Hooper and Bishop Latimer in particular.

Pred. -- But does not antiquity say, Judas was predestinated to damnation?

Friend. -- Quite the contrary. St. Chrysostom's express words are, "Judas, my beloved, was at first a child of the kingdom, and heard it said to him with the disciples, "Ye shall sit on twelve thrones; "but afterwards he became a child of hell."

Pred. -- However, you will own that Esau was predestinated to destruction.

Friend. -- Indeed I will not. Some of your own writers believe he was finally saved, which was the general opinion of the ancient Fathers. And that scripture, "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated," plainly relates not to their persons but their posterities. But, supposing Esau or Judas to be damned, what is he damned for?

Pred. -- Without question, for unbelief. For as we are saved by faith alone, so unbelief is the only damning sin.

Friend. -- By what faith are you saved?

Pred. -- By faith in Christ, who gave himself for me.

Friend. -- But did he give himself for Esau and Judas? If not, you say they are damned for not believing a lie. This consideration it was which forced Archbishop Usher to cry out, "What would not a man fly unto, rather than yield, that Christ did not die for the reprobates; and that none but the elect had any kind of title to him;

and yet many thousands should be bound in conscience to believe that he died for them, and tied to accept him for their Redeemer and Savior? Whereby they should have believed that which in itself is most untrue, and laid hold of that in which they had no kind of interest."

Pred. -- But what then do you mean by the words, election and reprobation?

Friend. -- I mean this: First, God did decree from the beginning to elect or choose, in Christ, all that should believe to salvation. And this decree proceeds from his own goodness, and is not built upon any goodness in the creature. Secondly: God did from the beginning decree to reprobate all who should obstinately and finally continue in unbelief.

Pred. -- What then do you think of absolute, unconditional election and reprobation?

Friend. -- I think it cannot be found in holy writ, and that it is a plant which bears dismal fruit. An instance of which we have in Calvin himself; who confesses that he procured the burning to death of Michael Servetus, purely for differing from him in opinion in matters of religion.