
THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF REPROBATION⁽¹⁾

THE DOCTRINE of election has always proved a stumbling block for those outside of the professing church and even for many within the professing church. The doctrine of reprobation, however, even more so. In 1965 the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the denomination to which such worthies as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck belonged, declared the doctrine of reprobation no longer binding in the churches. In North America, the Christian Reformed Church is now being asked to do the same. The objection to the doctrine of reprobation is twofold: 1) it lacks Biblical warrant; and 2) it cannot be preached as good news. With these objections in mind we want to look first at the Biblical basis for the doctrine and, second, at the way in which this doctrine functions as integral to the whole counsel of God and to the message of redemption through Jesus Christ alone.

The Biblical Warrant for Reprobation—The doctrine of reprobation has frequently been understood as a sovereign eternal wrath of God by which He damns men to an existence of everlasting death without regard to any demerit on their part. This common understanding is really a misunderstanding. The Reformed doctrine as formulated in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter III, Section 7, has at least two elements. Reprobation includes a sovereign act of discrimination whereby God extends mercy to some, but withholds it from the rest. This is God's preterition, or passing-by, of some sinners. Reprobation also includes an ordination to wrath, but a wrath that is *deserved* by the sinner because of his sin. Reprobation is, indeed, an eternal and sovereignly

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discriminating decree, but the damnation included in the decree of reprobation is never thought of otherwise than as penalty for sin.

The doctrine of reprobation is derived, first of all, from the way in which the Lord God is described in Scripture as dealing with the nations of the world in comparison to Israel, His chosen people. Israel is the elect nation in distinction from the other nations whom God has *not* chosen. Israel is chosen out of all peoples that are on the face of the earth (Deut. 7:6; cf. 10:15 and 14:2), and is separated from the other nations, set apart to be the Lord's possession (Lev. 20:24,26). The Lord does not simply pass by the other nations, but He does so when He could have done otherwise. All the earth is the Lord's (Exod. 19:5). God could have chosen other nations as well, but in fact He did not. The election of Israel was not forced upon God, nor did it betray the absence of other options for the Almighty. Reprobation includes a positive act of preterition.

In His eternal decree God not only determines to bypass the nations, but also to punish them for their sin. That the nations outside the pale of God's redemptive grace are worthy of condemnation is made abundantly clear in Romans 1:18-32. Condemnation, however, cannot be explained only as God's reaction to sin in the course of history. Not all sinners are punished; some are forgiven for the sake of Christ. Again, there is discrimination in the mind of God;

and according to His eternal purpose God wills to punish the nations with a punishment justly deserved, but wills not to punish Israel, although Israel was no more worthy of God's favor than the other nations. The nations are driven out before Israel because of their unrighteousness; but Israel must not think that she possesses the land because of her righteousness (Deut. 9:4,5). God's hardening of the hearts of sinners is a judicially inflicted punishment, but it is no less true that God hardens whom He wills (Rom. 9:18). Not only preterition, but also condemnation for sin are included in the eternal decree of reprobation.

The Scriptural pattern evidenced in connection with the election and reprobation of nations is repeated with respect to particular persons. God elects particular persons to salvation through the death and resurrection of His Son. At the same time Scripture makes clear that there are some who are not saved. The wages of sin is death or eternal condemnation. This is a threat under which all men by nature stand, and in the case of many the threat is actually realized. Those who have done good will come forth to the resurrection of life, but those who have done evil will come forth to the resurrection of judgment (John 5:29). We can say of those who are judged unto condemnation that they were not elected to salvation. It is the election that obtains salvation (Rom. 11:7).

There is a sovereign discrimination with respect to persons to which Scripture repeatedly refers. Many are called, but few are chosen (Matt. 22:14). Within Israel, election obtains salvation for some while the rest are hardened (Rom. 11:7). There is a difference between the world and those given to Christ out of the world (John 17:9; cf. 13:18). Not all

Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia believe, but those ordained to eternal life believe (Acts 13:48). There are names of particular persons not found written in the Book of Life (Rev. 20:15).

Not only does the sovereign Lord discriminate among men, but in discriminating, He wills to consign some to eternal punishment while determining to redeem others from their sin, though they are equally worthy of condemnation. God is not compelled to punish some sinners, as though forced by some power or necessity external to Himself. He wills to do so when He could will to do otherwise. Mark 4:12 indicates that Jesus' teaching in parables was that His audience might not see, or hear, or understand. This is the same kind

of threefold condemnation designed by God to result from the preaching of Isaiah (6:9,10). Jesus preached and taught, and many did not believe.

John the Evangelist points out that this was in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (John 12:37-40; quoting Isa. 53:1 and 6:10). What is said here is in line with an eternal purpose of condemnation to which the New Testament alludes at various points (I Pet. 2:3,8,9; Jude 4; cf. I Thess. 5:9).

It cannot be denied that such condemnation is just, that it is judicially warranted. Reprobation is not without regard to demerit. But that truth does not overturn the equally patent truth that sin and condemnation do not fall outside of

the plan and purpose of God. It is God who hardens; and not only so, but God hardens when He could have done otherwise (cf. Deut. 29:4).

There is abundant Biblical warrant for the historic Reformed doctrine of reprobation. This doctrine is not that God created some men for the purpose of damning them without regard to any demerit on their part, but that God has from eternity determined to condemn to everlasting death those whom He has not chosen to eternal life, and He has determined to condemn them on account of their sin. Now the question arises whether this doctrine belongs to the gospel or whether it serves to inhibit a spontaneous and enthusiastic evangelistic effort.

by Marie J. Post

Renaissance

Drawn by word and Word, drawn he knows not how,
the mystified Lazarus rises from his odorous sleep,
stumbles to daylight framed in the cave's slit opening,
stoops to loosen his feet from the hampering bindings of death,
rises to see his sisters standing in startling sunlight,
shocked faces disbelieving, hands at lips, stunned and waiting.
Still the sound he heard lingers, echoing behind him,
"Lazarus, come forth!" and, at the cave's bright entrance
where faces shimmer in wonder and silence,
a low bush flowers one rose for him to touch-test
proving that this, this is life . . . but only thorns tear
at his searching fingers, leaving them pricked and bleeding.

Just Between Us

There is no particular reason why you should know the name Lafcadio Hearn. I first heard of him, years ago, from an admirer of his, who delighted in Hearn's perceptive literary interpretations of the spirit and mind of Japan to the Western world around the turn of this century. Hearn held the chair of English literature at the University of Tokyo from 1896 to 1902. He not only, therefore, revealed Japan to the West, but tried also to translate the spirit of the West to Japan.

Last summer I noticed the announcement of a book sale in the Press want ad section. I scan them, once in a while (like every day), for just that purpose. The sale was at a private home, down the road a bit from where we live. And while I was not first at the door, I did get Mom and me on our way early.

Ah, what a collector the now deceased resident of the rather old farmhouse had been. Nothing there but good stuff, much of it beyond my means. He had obviously been a lover of Lafcadio Hearn, too. Most, if not all, that Hearn had written about Japan was there. And, mind you, two volumes of Hearn's lectures on English literature at Tokyo University. Still on

the shelves. No one had taken them. One quick grab and I had the first volume! For a moment!

Then I saw why it had not been taken before me. Inside the front cover was the price: \$50.00, two volumes. Green, or pink, or red, or whatever color I get with envy, I browsed in volume one. Fascinating. I could see myself lounging some long afternoon, sometime, under the spell of this vividly lively mind. But... I could also see myself trying to explain to the family treasurer (without any success) why just these two volumes were worth... Never mind. I put the book back. Found a number of others though. Wonderful sale.

I dropped by next day. The two-volume Hearn was still there. Other buyers, I decided, who had to reckon with MaMa. We missed the next day, when prices were reduced, but hurried over on the morning of the last day. I dashed into the book room (I guess it was also the kitchen—there were book shelves all over the house, really) and looked anxiously for...

Miracle! They were still there! And the price had been reduced, the sales lady said. How much? What would you think of \$15?

Without so much as glancing over my shoulder, I expressed the thought that \$15 was just fine! Very fine!! Delicious!!!

Even the family treasurer was impressed by my buying skills.

And next time I'll tell you why I'm recounting all this.—*The Editor*

Voices

COMPASSION LACKING

I strongly disagreed with Norman Bomer's criticism of Ronald J. Sider's book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (January 25, 1980). Bomer seems to think that the people living in third world countries are responsible for their poverty because they are not Christians living in a free enterprise system. His "do nothing" stance until there is a spiritual common ground lacks Christian compassion. Bomer's fear of the social gospel prevents him from having any kind of objectivity towards Sider's attempts at finding Biblical solutions to the problem of world hunger.—*David Van Zytveld, Grand Rapids, MI*

ABORTION NEWS IGNORED

During the "Year of the Child" there was little in THE BANNER to condemn that great offense against children: abortion. We all read much more about keeping women out of church office than we did about keeping them out of the abortion clinics. Even the January 22nd anniversary of the 1973 Supreme Court decision earned not one mention of regret in the issues of January 18 and January 25.

As a member of the Christian Reformed Church (a pro-life denomination by synodical decision), I sadly regret that no one thought to reflect on the loss of seven million little lives since January 22, 1973. The offense against the little human lives aborted and the moral insensitivity fostered in minds across the country, Christian and non-Christian, young and old, by that court decision cannot be measured. Regular reminders in THE BANNER about this moral chaos would, I think, stir the church to proper action....—*Eunice Vanderlaan, Webster, NY*

A VOICE FROM HARLEM

It was with great interest that I read and reread the BANNER article of 1/4/80 by Karl Westerhof entitled, "Was H. J. Kuiper Wrong 25 Years Early?" Having been a member for many years of a multi-racial church, one is enabled thereby to gain a better perspective of the problems outlined in this article and a deeper sense of the difficulties confronting the denomination.

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THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF REPROBATION

The Proclamation of

Reprobation—The Reformed doctrine of reprobation Biblically understood and applied is essential to the proclamation of the gospel. Moreover, far from inhibiting the preacher, the doctrine motivates him to an ardent discharge of the Great Commission. Three observations will make this clear.

a) It is foundational to assert that the Reformed pastor is not required to preach a doctrine of reprobation which is not found in Scripture or in the historic confessions. If Reformed pulpits do not teach that God creates some men to be damned and others to be blessed, they are not necessarily unfaithful to the Word of God. In contrast to this caricature, the Reformed doctrine includes the two elements of preterition and condemnation for sin according to God's eternal purpose. These truths are to be held and propagated with due sensitivity to their place in the total plan and execution of redemption. As B. B. Warfield notes with respect to reprobation, "This side of the matter, in accordance with Jesus' mission in the world as Savior rather than as Judge, is less dwelt upon" (*Biblical and Theological Studies*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952, p. 302). Reprobation may not become a hobby of the preacher, but neither may it be ignored.

b) By means of the doctrine of reprobation the Reformed pastor is enabled more effectively to inculcate a covenant consciousness among the people of God. Scripture repeatedly stresses the basic division that runs through the whole human race

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between covenant keepers and covenant breakers. "The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish" (Ps. 1:6). The ungodly are apostate from the truth and in rebellion against the true and living God. The righteous are not without sin, but they believe in Jesus and are walking in the ways of the Lord. The Lord forgives them for Jesus' sake and accepts them in His righteousness.

This distinction between believers and unbelievers, between the just and the wicked, between covenant keepers and covenant breakers, is rooted in the distinction in the will and purpose of God between the elect and the reprobate.

It is true, and must be insisted upon, that no man has direct insight into the mind of God. No man knows the decree of God as God knows His decree. In this sense no man knows who are elect and who are reprobate. If that were all that could be said, the distinction between elect and reprobate would be meaningless for us, or at least without any practical value. The preacher could address no one as elect or as reprobate. Believers could never be comforted with the assurance that their salvation stands firmly secure in the eternal purpose of God, and unbelievers would not have to tremble at the contemplation of their doom which is no less firmly rooted in the sovereign will of God.

But men do not need to have insight into the eternal decree of God in order to be able to use the words "elect" and "reprobate" of particular persons. When Paul addresses the Ephesian Christians as elect (Eph. 1:3-14) he does so, not on the basis of a supposed knowledge of the decree, but on the basis of the relation which the Ephesians sustain to the covenant of grace. There are "saints" in Ephesus who believe and who are walking in the Spirit. Such is possible, ultimately, only because of God's gracious election, and therefore Paul calls these covenantally faithful believers the elect of God. By their fruits they are known. Similarly, unbelievers can be called reprobate because they show the marks of their reprobation in disobedience. Those who walk in the ways of wickedness are under the wrath and curse of God. They show the signs of reprobation and must therefore be viewed as reprobate.

It may be granted that this is not the usual way in which we use the word "reprobate." Commonly the word assumes some knowledge of the decree, and since no man has such knowledge, there is reluctance to say of any man that he is reprobate. In this context, such reserve is not only understandable, but required. However, the word "reprobate" as used in the Bible does not presuppose such knowledge. The Bible speaks of the reprobate in Romans 1:28, 1 Corinthians 9:27, II Corinthians 3:5-7, Titus 1:16, and Hebrews 6:8, though the same Greek word is not consistently translated using "reprobate" in either the older or newer English versions. In these verses the Biblical

authors are speaking from the point of view of the covenant concerning a relation certain persons sustain to the covenant. These persons show the signs or marks of reprobation as covenant breakers and their perseverance in ungodliness will surely bring them to the appointed condemnation.

The Scripture requires us to distinguish between covenant keepers and covenant breakers, between the kingdom of God and the realm of Satan. If we do not see this distinction as rooted ultimately in the plan and purpose of God from eternity, we make of it only a superficial distinction. It is reduced to a difference only on the surface, a difference in appearances. Only the signs are different. In this way the distinction is toned down. The believer is not really comforted and the unbeliever does not really feel threatened.

If we use the words elect and reprobate to mark out the visible distinction between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Antichrist, however, then we are saying that the difference is not one of behavior only, but roots in the will of God from before the foundation of the world and most certainly has profound consequences for the eternal weal or woe of the persons concerned. Satan seeks to enlarge his kingdom and rule by breaking down the distinction between the people of God and the people of the world. Reformed pastors must do all they can to sharpen and reinforce the radical antithesis, and they can contribute effectively to this end both by preaching reprobation as well as election, and by identifying the flesh and blood enemies of Christ as the reprobate.

There are, of course, hypocrites among the elect. But when the distinction between elect and reprobate and between covenant keepers and covenant breakers is insisted upon, and the elect are trained to resist Satan and overthrow his schemes, hypocrisy will soon betray itself in the signs of reprobation. It will become apparent where people's ultimate loyalty resides; church discipline will take its course, and the division between elect and reprobate will appear with ever greater clarity.

In inculcating a covenant consciousness and loyalty among the people of God, the Reformed pastor must not stop short of defining the basic division in the human race in the

most radical and pointed terms as the distinction between the elect and the reprobate.

c) The doctrine of reprobation establishes the urgent necessity of calling upon sinners with all earnestness and compassion to flee from the wrath that is sure to come.

The basic message of the doctrine of reprobation is that God has determined from eternity to punish with everlasting condemnation unrepentant sinners who, through their own fault, deserve to be punished. The Reformed pastor who does not preach this truth is not preaching the gospel, for the reason that salvation has no meaning apart from a clear and unambiguous statement of that from which Christ saves us. Christians must not be embarrassed by the fact that God destroys unrepentant sinners. Christ reigns in order to put all His enemies

A GOSPEL DEVOID OF THE DOCTRINE OF REPROBATION IS DECEPTIVE; IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, IT IS AN ANTI-GOSPEL.

under His feet (I Cor. 15:25). How could there be any good news if the gospel contemplated anything less than the assured and total overthrow of Satan and his kingdom? The Holy Spirit has put the imprecatory Psalms into the mouth of the believing church in order to nurture this hope. The imprecatory Psalms are the believers' "Amen" to the doctrine of reprobation.

The reprobate are to be called to faith in Christ not because God's reprobation from eternity can be undone, but because it cannot be undone. The Reformed pastor does not presume to know God's secret will, nor does he preach as if he did. He knows God's revealed will, namely, His will to punish sinners, and he preaches accordingly. When the reprobate turn in repentance and faith, they are no longer looked upon as reprobate but as elect. God's decree of reprobation from eternity has not changed, but our human perception of it changes when, in the purpose and

grace of God, the signs of reprobation give way to the signs of election. Jesus died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6) and Jesus justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). Jesus saves and calls those who from the point of view of the covenant show every sign of being reprobate and who are therefore properly addressed as reprobate.

Reformed theology has always said that no man has a right to think of himself as eternally reprobate. Statements to this effect can be found all the way from Calvin to Bavinck, both in the writings of a supralapsarian like Zanchius and in the writings of an infralapsarian like Turretin. Warfield writes, "Present unbelief is not a sure sign of reprobation in the case of adults, for who knows but that unbelief may yet give place to faith?" (*Studies in Theology*, New York: Oxford, 1932, p. 430).

In relation to the covenant, however, the doctrine of reprobation ought to be a source of alarm to the unbelievers. As the Canons of Dordt state it, "This doctrine is justly terrible to those who, regardless of God and of the Savior Jesus Christ, have wholly given themselves up to the cares of the world and the pleasures of the flesh, so long as they are not seriously converted to God" (First Head, Art. 16). The doctrine of reprobation is to be preached in order to sound the alarm to the unconverted. The good news of the gospel is not that theologians have slain the frightening specter of an eternal reprobation, but that Jesus has died to save His people from an otherwise certain doom. The gospel calls upon the ungodly—the reprobate—to believe and be saved.

Far from hindering evangelism, the doctrines of election and reprobation give point to evangelism. Without election there is no hope that any man will be saved. Reformed people usually see this point and rejoice in the doctrine of election. Too frequently, however, the other side of the coin is overlooked. If there were no eternal reprobation, the sinner would not need to be overly anxious or concerned. Sin would not have to be thought of as necessarily leading to condemnation. After all, who can be sure what will happen to men beyond the grave?

A gospel devoid of the doctrine of reprobation is therefore deceptive; in the final analysis, it is an anti-gospel.

REPROBATION IN COVENANT PERSPECTIVE:

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE *

Yesterday we began our consideration of the topic of reprobation from an historical perspective and we did that by means of taking as our point of departure the representation of the historic Reformed view that we find summarized toward the end of the Gravamen that has been submitted to the Christian Reformed Synod in these words:

I do not read in Scripture that the sovereign grace that elected me to be a child of God without any regard to merit on my part has as its logical and necessary opposite, a sovereign wrath that damns men to an existence of everlasting death without regard to any demerit on their part.

And it was my attempt to show that nowhere in historic Reformed theology, whether on the extreme supra-lapsarian side or on the extreme infra-lapsarian side do we have a representation of the Reformed faith and its view of reprobation in these terms; that we have in the historic Reformed expression a different representation, and I would like to at this time simply quote the summary statement of the Westminster Confession of Faith which states the doctrine of reprobation in these terms:

The rest of mankind God was pleased according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sins to the praise of his glorious justice.

And so the Reformed view does not think of reprobation apart from or without regard to the demerit of sin, but the demerit of sin is built into the doctrine.

I also suggested to you that the point of view of the Gravamen was precisely that of the Remonstrants in their discussions with the Reformed in the 17th century.

Now, therefore, I feel it incumbent at this point as we turn to the Biblical doctrine of reprobation to demonstrate for you that the Bible does indeed bring before us the doctrine of reprobation which has these two aspects which have characterized the historic Reformed view. We do find in the Scripture that there is, on the part of God, a passing by of sinners that are not elected unto eternal salvation, and coupled with that, these sinners are ordained to wrath and condemnation precisely because of their sin.

* A lecture by Norman Shepherd at the Christian Reformed Ministerial Institute, Grand Rapids, June, 1978.

Now, I would like to proceed to demonstrate that, and if the time were available to me, I could do that, by first of all appealing to the ethnic reprobation which we see manifested in the history of the nations, in distinction from the history of Israel, which is the elect nation. So, that would be the first topic: ethnic reprobation. And we could see from the Scripture that the nation of Israel is elect; secondly, that the other nations are not elect in the purpose and plan of God; and thirdly, that these nations are punished for their sin. Then we would proceed from that point to a consideration of personal reprobation by observing that the ethnic reprobation is as it were a writing large of what happens in terms of particular persons, and also with reference to particular persons we could see from the Scripture that there is an election of persons unto eternal salvation, that there is at the same time a passing by of those who are not elected; and thirdly, that those who are passed by are indeed condemned for their sin. But all of that is involved in the Biblical doctrine of reprobation, but because of time limitations I can't go into that in detail at this present time.

I turn rather to a consideration having dealt first of all with ethnic reprobation, then with personal reprobation, I would turn in the third place, and that's what I plan to do this afternoon, to the question of reprobation and responsibility; because I feel that if I did not take up this topic I could legitimately be accused of shirking the difficult problems and I don't want to do that, and as a matter of fact one of the questions that I've already received is a question which asks for an explanation of certain passages of Scripture that I do hope to take up in the course of these remarks.

So, the theme is reprobation and responsibility, and as we have time at the conclusion of the hour I would like also to make a few observations concerning the proclamation or the preaching of reprobation. So then--reprobation and responsibility.

First of all I ask you to think with me concerning the problem of the closed situation--the problem of the closed situation. And again, we may go back to the basic thesis of the Gravamen: that God in his sovereign wrath damns men to an existence of everlasting death without any regard to any demerit on their part.

Now I think that we have in one way or another spoken of the judgment which is implicit in the statement of the Gravamen, a judgment upon the justice of God who would damn men without any regard to demerit on their part. We have seen that that is not precisely the Reformed view.

But now this afternoon we want to turn to the objection which is implicit in the Gravamen, and which is certainly explicit in the literature which has surrounded this particular ecclesiastical action: the objection that a decree of reprobation creates a closed situation in which there is no room for the preaching of the gospel.

If you are elect, that's fine, that's wonderful, congratulations to you; but if you are reprobate, that's just tough bananas; that's the way the cookie crumbles, and there's nothing that can be done about that. And, it's with that kind of understanding of election and reprobation that gospel preaching is undermined. The thought is if you are reprobate, no amount of persuasion or exhortation is going to do any good at all. If on the other hand you are elect, why bother preaching to you? You will inevitably come into the kingdom anyway.

Now, I don't think that we should under-estimate the amount of damage that has been done to the Reformed faith by this way of thinking. It's a way of thinking which is thoroughly deterministic and fatalistic and I'm afraid that that is how Calvinism is frequently understood in the popular mind.

Now, how are we to come to grips with this question of the closed situation which seemingly renders gospel proclamation nugatory? One way of coming to grips with the problem is the way which is proposed by the Gravamen. The Gravamen, in effect, accepts this kind of analysis at face value. If you're reprobate, no amount of preaching can help. If you're elect, you're going to come in anyway and we don't need to preach. The Gravamen accepts that analysis at face value, with some hedging on the election side, but seeks to come to grips with the problem by simply denying what is said about reprobation. What is said about election is accepted, as I say, with some hedging, but what is said about reprobation is simply denied.

In other words, if the fatalism of decretal theology is to be undone, it has to be undone by way of a dramatic loosening up of the situation. Reprobation must be removed from the sphere of the decrees, and if the word reprobation is retained at all, it can only be retained to refer to God's reaction in history to what is an historical act of sin. In other words, in my judgment, the Gravamen concedes the objection that has traditionally been made against the Reformed doctrine, that that Reformed doctrine is indeed deterministic and fatalistic; and it proceeds to provide a response to that objection by placing an arbitrary limit on the degree of determinism which will be permitted, by placing a limit on the degree of determinism which will be tolerated. And the loss will be compensated then by the introduction of a degree of indeterminism. Or to put it more simply, the freedom of God to reprobate sinners must, in terms of the Gravamen, be limited by the freedom of the sinner to return to God. That seems to me to capture the thrust of the Gravamen.

Now the problem here is the dilemma which arises from a failure to make the proper distinction between the creator and the creature. In terms of this dilemma, because the proper distinction between the creator and the creature is not made, the will of God and the will of man are thought of as operating in the same dimension. And therefore, to the extent that God determines, to that extent man is not free.

His actions are not genuine, significant, historical actions. On the other hand, to the extent that man engages in significant, historical action, by making genuine decisions, to the extent that man determines, to that extent, God is not free.

Now this is the logicism which gives rise both to the problem which is contemplated in the Gravamen--and to the solution which the Gravamen proposes or offers for the problem. Both the statement of the problem and the statement of the solution are together enmeshed in a logicism that in the final analysis can provide no answer to the problem. Both the problem and the answer as envisioned by the Gravamen are enmeshed in the same dilemma.

If a decree of reprobation destroys man's freedom to reject the gospel--if a decree of reprobation destroys man's freedom to reject the gospel as well as to accept it, of course, then it's inevitable that a decree of election destroys man's freedom to accept the gospel as well as to reject it.

Now that is not simply symmetrical reasoning on my part for the sake of balance, but it is an unavoidable conclusion, given the particular grounds on which reprobation is being denied. Those grounds are: that sin is not really and truly demerit unless it has its origin in an ultimate way with man himself.

Now, if sin is not demerit, except on that basis, then faith can have no significance as a way of salvation, as an action which we perform except on the same basis that it be thought of first of all as outside of the decree. Election, therefore must be a response to faith as reprobation is to unbelief; and instead of Calvinistic determinism we simply have Arminian indeterminism, but the logic of the Remonstrants is relentless.

Genuine freedom and the significance of human history can only be purchased at the price of God's freedom and that means at the price of the doctrine of creation and of providence; and the loss of those doctrines do not lead to the freedom of man but they lead to chaos in which there is neither divine sovereign decree nor human freedom.

But historic Calvinism is not determinism nor fatalism and it certainly is not Arminian indeterminism. But, and I stress this, neither is it some combination of these two diametrically opposed positions. It's not some combination of determinism and indeterminism which is held in a tension by some kind of dogmatic tour de force. We do not rest with a paradox. We do not rest with a contradiction which is irreconcilable not only for man but also for God.

There is from the Calvinistic point of view no ultimate contradiction. Rather, if we are to be true to our Calvinistic principles, we must from the outset reject the dilemma that has given rise to the statement of the problem, as well as to the solution proposed by the Gravamen. We must reject the dilemma as such and place ourselves squarely upon the revelation of God.

Calvinists do not offer the world a contradiction: God's sovereignty--human responsibility. We do not offer the world a contradiction. We offer the world the covenant--the covenant. And it is in terms of the covenant that we can understand the situation into which we enter as preachers of the gospel. It is the reality of the covenant established between God and man that gives urgency to our work as evangelists.

At the same time that covenant is rooted and grounded in the sovereign decree and purpose of God. And that decree and purpose are inclusive of both the decree of election and the decree of reprobation.

Now, our immediate purpose will be to draw out the consequences of the dynamic of this covenant for our understanding of reprobation. And to do that we begin with what I called the covenant dynamic in life--the covenant dynamic in life.

Here we begin with the reformed doctrine concerning the comprehensive decree of God. To quote the Westminster Confession: "God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass." The leading proof text for this doctrine is Ephesians 1, verse 11, "We are foreordained unto life according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will."

The cosmic scope, the comprehensive scope of the counsel of God's will is given not only with the words "all things" but also by what is said in the preceeding verses; namely, God's will includes the summing up of all things in Christ, the things in heaven and the things upon the earth. Included in this decree are not only what is good and right, but also what is sin and evil. The summing up of all things in Christ includes his triumph over his enemies, I Cor. 15. We may not be able to comprehend this truth, but the truth is clearly given.

If the arch-crime of human history, namely the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, is according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, Acts 2:23, Cf. 3:18 and 4:28--if that arch-crime is according to the determinate counsel and will of God, we should not balk at the inclusion of lesser crimes within the decree of God.

Now this doctrine is not without immediate relevance to reprobation and therefore deserves to be developed fully. If in the infra-lapsarian view the sin is not included in the decree of predestination, but it is included in the comprehensive decree, and therefore though the infra-lapsarian and the Remonstrant have a formally identical description of reprobation, materially they are poles apart. For the infra-lapsarian the decree is the ultimate explanation for the historical fact. For the Remonstrant the fact explains the decree.

And we have already observed the importance of this distinction between infra-lapsarianism and the Remonstrant view for the way one reads the Gravamen. We could also, I think quite properly argue, that a comprehensive decree includes the final destinies of men and angels. This argument is legitimate but I only mention it at this point without seeking to develop it.

I quote Herman Bavinck:

The decree of reprobation means only this: that the final cause of all sinful reality of the entire history of the world, together with all the interrelations existing between the events, is not inherent in the reality itself for how could that be possible, but lies outside of it in the mind and will of God.

My purpose in drawing attention to the comprehensiveness of the decree is rather to take account of the way in which the decree functions in the dynamic of the covenant, the covenant life of God's people. What is the conclusion which the people of God are to draw from the fact that all things which come to pass do so according to the determinate counsel and plan of God?

May I suggest to you that it was not the Calvinists but the Remonstrants who argued that such a decree renders human history meaningless. They were quite rational. They were quite logical and they were quite wrong. This is the logicism that must be cut out of Reformed thinking once and for all so that we do not make our Reformed faith to be semi-Remonstrant.

The conclusion we draw from the comprehensiveness of the divine decree is not that there isn't much difference between Calvinism and Greek philosophical determinism after all, that's not the conclusion. But the conclusion we draw is that God is working out his purposes and in doing so he is frustrating the plans and the purposes of the ungodly who are under the authority of Satan.

Psalm 33 tells us how the doctrine of the decrees is to be appropriated subjectively.

Jehovah bringeth the counsel of the nations to naught,
He maketh the thoughts of the people to be of no effect.
The counsel of Jehovah standeth fast forever, the thoughts
of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation
whose God is Jehovah, the people whom he hath chosen for
his own inheritance.

The doctrine of the decrees does not lead to hopelessness but it leads to assurance and comfort. The doctrine of the decrees does not lead to passivity but motivates to action.

Precisely because the apostle Paul knew by divine revelation that everyone involved in the shipwreck would be saved, that was what the angel said would happen--precisely on that ground Paul pleads with everyone to stay on board the ship in order to be saved, because if you do not stay on board you will not be saved.

Because Paul is absolutely sure that God is at work in the Philippians to will and to work his good pleasure he exhorts them to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling and that is the dynamic. The decree, the purpose of God, the fixed purpose of God, does not destroy the initiative but is appealed to to ground and to motivate human action.

Now that way of thinking and reasoning and speaking is utter foolishness to the pagan mind. The pagan mind cannot comprehend that. It is not in spite of the decree or outside of the decree, that human history has meaning, but precisely because of the decree and within the decree. This is the wisdom of God at which the reprobate stumbles; but it is the way in which God relates to us and the way in which we relate to God--it is the way of the covenant. It is the genius of Calvinism which is thoroughly covenantal in its conception and in its structure.

If I may quote Bavinck again, Doctrine of God, Bavinck says:

God and his creatures must not be viewed as rivals or competitors. "God, because he is God, and the universe, is his creation, by his infinitely majestic activity of knowing and willing, does not destroy but rather creates and maintains the distinct existence and freedom of the creature. It is incomprehensible for modern man how there can be real moral action which is not rooted in the sovereign freedom of man. Modern man cannot conceive how there can be real genuine moral action which is not rooted in the sovereign freedom of man and the readiness with which we entertain this objection as an insurmountable problem. For the doctrine of the decrees is simply an index to the extent of indwelling sin and blindness, in spite of the light that we have received as Reformed people."

The way out of that is to saturate ourselves with Biblical patterns of thought. And a good place to begin doing that is with the Book of Psalms. Our forefathers perceived that and Calvinists are not Psalm singers for nothing. They sang the Psalms in order to implant and inculcate Biblical patterns of thinking in the hearts and minds of the people and the Book of Psalms is the book of the songs of the covenant and if you want your people to think covenantally, then there's no better way to achieve that than to have them sing the songs of the covenant from the book of Psalms.

The decree of God, they learned then, the decree of God does not destroy, but it grounds the covenant relationship between God and his people. It is precisely because God is frustrating the plans of Satan and his host that we are motivated to be active and busy doing that very thing--laboring for the Kingdom.

And it is from this perspective that we can proceed now to look more specifically at the dynamic of the covenant: first of all as it relates to election, and then we'll look at reprobation in particular. The covenant dynamic then in relation to election.

It is a basic truth of the doctrine of election that election cannot be undone. Romans 8, verse 30 sets forth the so-called golden chain of predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. God accomplishes what he purposes to do, but it is also true that we as creatures cannot see election as God sees it. We are not God, we are not the creator and the secret things belong unto God, Deut. 29, verse 29. We cannot know election from the perspective of the creator. We can know election only from the perspective of the creature. Specifically we can know election only from the perspective of the covenant which election establishes between God and his people.

Now because men are by nature sinners they are prone to forget that they are creatures. They want to see election the way God sees it and that is why election often functions in the popular mind in a way different from the way it functions in Scripture. For example, the thought is, if you are elect, you're safe. Heaven is assured. You can relax. There are no mortal dangers. The only concern is to seek for some assurance that one is elect and that process may, of course, cause some heartache.

But in the Bible to be of the elect is to be in covenant with God, and in covenant with God you are surrounded by dangers and temptations. The enemy goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. The church is a pilgrim people and therefore you are to arm yourself with that panoply which is described in Ephesians 6. You must stand firm. You're exhorted again and again to stand firm in the faith. You must persevere in Christ.

Now that was true under the old covenant as well. In Deut. 7, verses 6 through 8 Israel is assured in no uncertain terms of her election as the people of God. It's not because you're more in number than other people, but because the Lord loved you and because he remembered the covenant, the oath which he swore to Abraham, therefore the Lord has chosen you.

Now precisely in that context in which Israel is assured of her election, God reminds Israel that he is a God who keeps covenant with those who keep covenant with him. He will also most certainly repay, even destroy those who hate him, verses 9 through 11 of Deut. 7. Election then establishes Israel in the covenant, in the way of righteousness, and if Israel does not walk in that way, Israel will most surely be destroyed.

Now the same dynamic is operative in the new covenant. II Pet. 1, verses 1 through 11 is an excellent example of it. "The divine power has granted unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness. We have exceeding great and precious promises, but you are to add to your faith diligence, virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, kindness and love." And in terms of verse 10 of II Pet. 1, you who are the elect of God and have been called into fellowship with Christ, you are the ones who are precisely to make your calling and election sure. In that way, verse 11, entrance into the eternal kingdom will be ministered unto you. Make sure of what you already have.

Now, it is not then that the man who is elect does not need to run the race because he's elect, but it's precisely the man who is elect upon whom it is incumbent to run, that he may obtain, and the knowledge of election inspires the running. Those who fail to run, who forsake the faith through disobedience, these do not obtain the prize. So we have the phenomenon in Scripture of an elect nation, Israel, that is rejected by God. Notice how forcefully the point is made in Amos 3, verse 2. You only, says God, you only, have I known of all the families of the earth, and we pour into that knowledge of Israel everything that we say about election. You have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will visit you with all your iniquities.

Now, you see, if the exodus is the great election, then the exile is the great rejection. It is surpassed only by Israel's election in the restoration and her rejection in 70 A.D. because she turned her back upon her Messiah. Paul speaks in Romans 11 of the fall of Israel and of the casting away of Israel according to God's will. Verse 8--"God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear," and you're reminded of those devastating words in Dt. 29, verse 4, speaking of Israel, Moses says: "But Jehovah has not given you a heart to know and eyes to see and ears to hear unto this day." Jehovah has not given to you the eyes to see, the ears to hear, as it is unto this day.

Now, what is true of the nation is also true of the person. Judas is introduced into the community, the covenant community of the elect, but he is rejected as a son of perdition because of his apostasy (John 17:12). We have the brother in I Cor. 5, verses 1 through 5, addressed as one of the saints in Corinth but he is to be delivered to Satan because of his immorality. We have Simon of Samaria who believed (Acts 8, verse 13), but becomes entangled in the bond of iniquity (vs. 23). Those who have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and then become entangled therein again are worse off than they were before their enlightenment (II Peter 2, verse 20). Here we have elect persons who are excommunicated.

Now then you see the question is, does that mean that God's election has fallen to the ground? Does that mean that God's election has failed? Well, that's precisely the question to which Paul

could have qualified here

addresses himself in Romans 9 and Romans 11 and you know his answer. No, by no means--God's election has not fallen to the ground. That election stands fast. It cannot be shaken.

Psalm 89 tells us that God casts off and rejects His anointed but God does not break His covenant. Hosea 11 tells of God's rejection of his people but also of the steadfastness of His electing love for them. The rejection of the elect does not mean then that God's election has fallen to the ground.

God will achieve His purpose. What that rejection means is--what that rejection tells us, is that there is no redemption outside of Jesus Christ. God's election from the point of view of His decree--that stands firm. But that is the secret things which belong to God. Our knowledge of election is through the covenant. And in terms of the covenant those who do not keep covenant with God will be punished and so we have the phenomenon of excommunication. Again--what does that teach us? Not that God's election has failed, but it teaches us that there is no redemption outside of Jesus Christ. That is why God reprobated the nation. That is why God did not give Israel a heart to know, eyes to see, or ears to hear. God did not do that--that you and I--we might know and see and understand as they did not, that outside of Jesus Christ there is no salvation.

For you see we do not need simply to be elect; we must be elect in Jesus Christ. And there is no privilege which God grants which falls short of Jesus Christ that can save us. It is only Jesus who can save us. God could have given such a heart to Israel as a whole as He did to the remnant. But He did not. God could have given a believing heart to Simon as He did to the other Samaritans. But He did not. Why? That we might know how utterly dependent we are on Jesus Christ and His redemptive work for our salvation and knowing that--that we might believe.

And that is why reprobation in the wisdom of God serves the purposes of God's grace--both the fact of it and the knowledge of it which is given to us in Scripture. God's election does not fail, on the contrary, God's election is the driving force behind redemptive history--it's the driving force behind all of history, and knowing this we can rest in the Lord.

I did not say we can relax in the Lord as though we could be at ease in Zion. No, we rest in the Lord because we know why we stand where we do, in the kingdom of God. It is because of the sovereign grace of God through election in Jesus Christ.

We are assured of God's grace and favor, for God teaches us to sing in the words of the covenant song, "we are his folk, He doth us feed, and for His sheep He doth us take; We are His people, the sheep of His pasture." (Ps. 100). And being that, we are encouraged to persevere as the elect of God. For we have been saved by God's election in Jesus Christ and to us who rejoice in that salvation, Jesus says: "He that endures to the end shall be saved." It is precisely because of what we have by God's sovereign election that we are encouraged to persevere in the faith in obedience to Jesus Christ.

To summarize then: Election does not mean--election does not mean that we can live by sight. Election does not mean that we have insight into the decree of God, so that we can relax. Rather, election calls upon us, election summons us, to live by faith in Christ, to walk in the Spirit, to be in fact the people of the New Covenant. Election establishes covenant--that's the point--the gifts are all ours by grace and they are enjoyed in the way of faith (II Peter 1, verses 3 and 5).

You see, election does not destroy the need for faith. It's not as though, well, if you're elect you're going to be saved, it doesn't make any difference whether you believe or don't believe. No, election does not destroy the need for faith. But election calls us to faith. Because really, to call upon men to believe in Jesus Christ, and there we're talking about evangelism--to call upon men to believe in Jesus Christ is really to call upon men to believe in their own election.

Now that idea is not mine. That comes straight out of Ursinus, his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism. This is Ursinus: "And as everyone ought to have this faith and repentance (that is, the universal call of the gospel), and as everyone ought to have this faith and repentance, so each one ought certainly to believe that he is of the number of the elect or else he will charge upon God a lie."

In other words, if we ask men to believe in Jesus Christ, to turn from sin; we are, in effect, asking them to believe in their own election. This is what Ursinus is saying. The goal of our election and calling into covenant with God is then realized in the way of faith and repentance. And that is why the church of the new covenant sings Psalm 103. "But the lovingkindness of Jehovah is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him. And His righteousness unto children's children to such as keep His covenant and to those that remember His precepts to do them."

Now, you see, with that conception of the way in which election functions in the dynamic of the covenant, in terms of which we see that election as a call to service, so that we do not take a passive attitude. With an understanding of the way in which election, election which never falls to the ground, God accomplishes His purpose and that the end of history, what comes about, will be what God has determined precisely because we know that and believe that. You see, we are encouraged to persevere in the faith to which we have been called. That's the way election functions in the Bible.

Now you see, the point here is, that we turn to the covenant dynamic in reprobation. And when we do that we see that there is an analagous phenomenon.

The objections that have been raised against the doctrine of reprobation are many and varied. A major objection as we have seen is that reprobation undermines the power of preaching. What is the point of preaching to those who are condemned?

Another objection is the anxiety aroused in persons. "What if I am of the reprobate? How can I be sure that I'm not one of the reprobate?" And when people begin thinking that way, you can easily see that the doctrine tends to engender a sense of hopelessness and futility.

Now I think we should at least attempt to address ourselves to questions of this kind. And I'd like to do that, first of all, by making this observation. And please note carefully the way in which I'm stating this point, because it could be very easily misunderstood. I want to block out the possibility of misunderstanding more specifically at a later point, but even here I want to warn you not to misunderstand what I am saying.

Reprobation from within the context of the covenant (please underline with about four lines that expression); reprobation from within the context of the covenant, that is to say, reprobation from the point of view of the covenant is not incontrovertible. Now we have seen that in terms of the concrete language of Scripture those with whom God has established covenant and who are therefore the elect of God, they, again from the point of view of the covenant, may stumble and fall. But that does not mean that God's election has fallen to the ground. God accomplishes His purposes.

Now you see, we say something analogous with reference to reprobation. Those who are outside of covenant with God, and who are therefore from the point of view of the covenant reprobate, they may be brought into fellowship with God. Also those who were in covenant with God and who have rejected it and fallen away and apostacized, they may be restored again. And the point may be readily demonstrated from the history of redemptive revelation.

To begin with, Israel was the elect nation. God did not choose the other nations. The Bible says that specifically and expressly and if that isn't a passing by, I don't know how more plainly the Bible could say it. Israel is chosen. I have not chosen the other nations, God says. God has passed them by. And He punished those nations for their sins and He did that according to His own will. And, in comparison with elect Israel, the nations were reprobate. Nevertheless, in the fulness of time, the nations are called into covenant with God to be numbered among the elect.

Again, you see the Psalms bring this out. The Psalms are filled, even in the context of the old covenant, with the anticipation of that ingathering. Think of Psalm 87. Breathe the intoxicating air of Psalms 91 through 100. The great commission set into action the forces that will accomplish that goal. Paul says in Romans 11, verse 11 that by the fall of Israel salvation has come to the Gentiles. "Those who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, these have been brought nigh by the blood of Christ." (Eph. 2:12). The reprobate nations are now numbered among the elect.

Now a similar phenomenon is seen within the history of Israel itself. If the Exodus is the great election of Israel, as we saw, the exile [is] the great rejection or reprobation of Israel (II Kings 17, verse 20). And Jehovah rejected the seed. Jehovah rejected all the seed of Israel and afflicted them and delivered them into the hand of the spoilers. And the same holds true of Judah. Nevertheless, precisely the rejected nation is once again elect (Isa. 14, verse 1). "For Jehovah will have compassion on Jacob and will yet choose Israel and set them in their own land."

Jer. 31, verses 27 through 37 is the great prophecy concerning the establishment of the new covenant, for the covenant cannot be undone. Jer. 33, verses 23 through 26, the people who have been cast off cannot be cast off. The covenant cannot be shaken any more than the cosmos itself.

Similarly, in Romans 11 we have a pardoned and rejected people of God who are gathered again as His people. The branches that have been broken off will be grafted in--verse 23. Paul contrasts their fall with their fulness--verse 12. He contrasts their casting away--verse 15, with their reception again. Israel had to be brought to acknowledge her reprobation, but it would have been a mistake to conclude from that, that there was no hope.

The lesson to be learned from redemptive history on a broad scale is precisely relevant for individual persons as well. In Galatians 2:15, Paul uses the expression "the sinners of the Gentiles". To be a Gentile was ipso facto to be a sinner. The two words were synonymous, sinner of the Gentiles. That is to say, reprobate, not one of the elect, not a Jew, a sinner of the Gentiles.

But Galatians 3:28 tells us that in Jesus Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek. The sinner has become a saint. The reprobate has been elected to eternal life.

In I Corinthians 5, verse 5 the sinner is excommunicated, rejected, cast out. But the purpose of that discipline is that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Again, you see, reprobation does not lead to hopelessness, it leads to Jesus Christ. It doesn't lead to hopelessness. It leads to Jesus Christ.

And I'm going to say more about that in a moment, but it is necessary for me, at this point, to say that from within the context of the covenant, as I said a moment ago, reprobation is not incontrovertible. But that does not mean that there is no incontrovertible decree of election and reprobation. From the point of view of the decree of God reprobation is incontrovertible.

Now what we are doing is simply taking account of the concrete way in which the Bible as the book of the covenant speaks. And that's my objective, to speak the way the Bible speaks. Bavinck made the point when he said, and this is Bavinck now, "That election and

reprobation do culminate in a final and total separation. Nevertheless here on earth they repeatedly criss-cross". Let me quote Bavinck again. He was able to say, as one committed to the full orbed historical doctrine, quoting The Doctrine of God now, "No one has a right to interpret the decree of reprobation as an iron decree, determining only the final destiny of the lost, who are then viewed as inexorably shut up to this eternal state of perdition no matter what penitent efforts they may put forth." That's Bavinck.

Now let me quote Warfield. After all, I'm Presbyterian so I have to get Warfield in the picture some way. And this is a statement that's tucked away in an article on the doctrine of infant salvation. Now you can discount what is said about that particular doctrine, but listen to what he says about reprobation. This is Warfield now:

But present unbelief is not a sure sign of reprobation in the case of adults, for who knows but that unbelief may yet give place to faith? Nor in the case of infants, dying such, is birth outside the covenant a trustworthy sign of reprobation, for the election of God is free. Accordingly, there are many, adults and infants, of whose salvation we may be sure, but of reprobation we cannot be sure; such a judgment is necessarily unsafe even as to adults apparently living in sin, while as to infants who "die and give no sign", it is presumptuous and rash in the extreme.

Now as was said earlier, to say from within the covenant that the elect may stumble and fall does not undo God's election. So now, we must say that from within the covenant, the restoration of the reprobate, or the addition of the reprobate to the covenant does not mean that God's reprobation has fallen to the ground. Now see, that's a very strange way of putting it, but I'm simply adapting Paul's language to the other side of the picture. The fact that Paul sees some elect stumbling does not mean that God's election has fallen to the ground, because God works out His purpose.

Now, we also say the fact that we see the reprobate coming to Christ does not mean that God's reprobation has fallen to the ground. Pardon that way of speaking, but you understand, we're wrestling with the way of saying it which is faithful to the Biblical representation.

For example: the election of the nations in the fulness of time does not, as is suggested in the Gravamen, does not undo or negate their former rejection. The election of the nations in the fulness of time, these that were formerly reprobate, does not undo or negate that reprobation.

The history of the nations from the time of Moses to the end of the Old Testament is a history which is not reviewed by God. It is a history which is not revised by God. That history is not rewritten and will never be rewritten. The nations then and there were passed

over in the history of redemption and they were destroyed for their sins. And that remains true even though God has something more in store for the nations in the further unfolding of redemptive history.

Now the same holds true for Israel itself. The choosing again of Israel in the restoration after the exile, that choosing again of Israel in the restoration of which Isaiah 14:1 speaks, that restoration does not negate Israel's reprobation. The reprobation of the exile, that being carried away into Babylon, all that is associated with it, the reprobation of the exile, is not just a passing something, never to be remembered. That exile is not simply an unfortunate chapter in the story of Israel which we can read and then forget. In fact, that reprobation remains in effect to this day. For the Bible tells us that it is only a remnant that is restored to the promised land. And that means that for the majority who went into exile the reprobation is the final word. It's the final word. That reprobation is not reviewed or revised.

Now the same would have to be said about Romans 11 and the fulness of Israel, speaking now from an amillennial point of view. The fulness of Israel in Romans 11, in contrast to their casting away, is on the amillennial interpretation, but a remnant of Israel. For the rest of Israel the hardening of which Romans 11 speaks is the final word of reprobation.

Now for the postmillennialist interpretation of Romans 11 the fulness is a fulness in contrast to the present remnant, the remnant at the time which Paul writes. But again, even then, the anticipated fulness does not negate the present reality, from Paul's perspective, of a vast casting away, a reprobation. Remember the language which Paul uses: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear unto this very day," Romans 11, verse 8. Now again, that history will never be rewritten. The reprobation does not fail of its appointed end.

There is discrimination in the history of God's dealings with men. Matthew 13, verse 11: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but unto them it is not given". That's discrimination.

Matthew 11: 25 and 26: the Father hides and the Father reveals according to His good pleasure; so also the Son reveals the Father and to whomsoever he will.

That's discrimination, and that discrimination is evident in every segment of human history. It makes no difference where you make the cross-cut in human history, in 400 A.D., in 1858, in 1902 or 1978, at every segment there is discrimination in God's dealings with men, and what is true at every point is also true at the last point in the day of judgment.

As J.R. Wiskerke points out in his very helpful book, Volk van Gods Keuze--as Wiskerke points out: "God hardens and He rejects by way of judgment." Let's take account of that, full account of that.

He hardens and rejects, but He hardens and He rejects by way of judgment, and insofar as these acts of judgment last to the end of history, they serve to reveal the decree of reprobation. As Wiskerke says:

The shadow of the coming full judgment lies over all who are in the course of history cast off and rejected. Into that full judgment come precisely those who beforehand were not elected in the decree but reprobated. Nevertheless, the Bible does not present these truths as fatalistic or deterministic and the reason for that is that they are presented from within the context of the dynamic of the covenant life which is established by God. Both reprobation and election are presented as covenant truth. The way in which God realizes election is the way of faith. Election does not annul the need for faith but calls forth faith. Because man is by nature unbelieving, he must receive faith as a gift.

The way in which reprobation is realized is the way of unbelief. Unbelief is ours by nature. We do not need it as a gift from God. We are responsible for it. But reprobation does not annul the need for unbelief any more than election annuls the need for faith.

The dynamic of the covenant is quite different, you see, from the position represented by the Gravamen, that is to say, a sovereign wrath that damns men to an existence of everlasting death without regard to any demerit on their part. It seems to me that that conception of the Gravamen could only arise, together with the solution which the Gravamen presents, could only arise out of a massive forgetfulness of the covenant. A massive forgetfulness of the covenant and of the dynamic of the covenant. And that dynamic as constitutive for the heart of the Reformed faith.

The way of the covenant, that's Ezekiel 18, "the soul that sinneth it shall die, but if the wicked turn from all his sins and do that which is lawful and right he shall live. I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. Turn yourselves and live."

Now, the Gravamen wants to take account of that language of the Bible. But what it has done is sought to take account of it the way the Remonstrants did and that's an abandonment of the Reformed faith. We have to take account of this language of the Bible in terms of the covenant which is the genius of our Reformed understanding.

Now my time has elapsed, but I am going to beg your indulgence because I would like to say a remark about G.C. Berkouwer and his particular position. Berkouwer not too long ago published his book, A Half Century of Theology, in which he describes the transformation, in his own thinking, on the doctrine of reprobation. He found progressively less tolerable what he calls the irrevocable dialectic of revelation and hiddenness. It's the difference between the word of the gospel and the eternal decree, the difference between what God says He will do, and what He has determined to do.

To quote Berkouwer: "No matter how emphatically it was claimed that the gospel could still be preached, the background loomed as a decision made by a God who remained hidden from us within an irresolvable dialectic of revelation and hiddenness." Berkouwer says the gospel is preached but it is not preached wholeheartedly. It is always preached with reservation. In other words, the gospel of grace is threatened by a hidden decree and a hidden decree always leads to hopelessness and despair.

Now again, the solution which Berkouwer finds is the negation of an eternal decree of reprobation, and really, a calling into question of the decree as such. It belongs to the sphere of hiddenness. Now in that Berkouwer is, of course, supportive of the decision of the Gereformeerde Kerken and I believe that the Gravamen now before the Synod of the CRC seeks the solution in the same direction. And in my judgment this solution is not supportive of a robust preaching of the gospel, but is really destructive of it in spite of its intention.

Now let me explain why I've come to that conclusion. The reason is, that the answer which is proposed by the Gravamen is an answer which remains within the sphere of the divine decree. Specifically a negation of the decree of reprobation. It's an answer within the sphere of the determinist-indeterminist dilemma. It is an answer within the sphere of sight rather than within the sphere of faith. Only as we have insight into the decree (and we gain that insight by negating it), only as we have insight into the decree is the room created for the genuine functioning of belief and unbelief.

In order to have true comfort the decree must not remain secret. It must be exposed, and it must be exposed by way of denial. The objection is to the hiddenness of it. As long as the decree remains secret we have no true comfort. God may not have any secrets and therefore we destroy the decree and thereby we gain insight and the decree no longer constitutes a threat. We have slain the boogey man. There are no monsters after all. The darkness is past. Light has come. There is no decretum horribile. The comfort now resides in the fact that the basic decisions are, after all, ours to make. Freedom can be genuine only if it is freedom from the hidden decree of reprobation.

But my point is that the excision of the decree of reprobation is still working from out of the perspective of the decree rather than from out of the perspective of the covenant. It is still trying to be creator instead of creature. It is a solution which asks us to seek our comfort in the sphere of the decrees where God lives rather than in the sphere of the covenant where we live, and therefore it is a solution which asks us to seek our comfort elsewhere than in Jesus Christ, whom God has sent to us to be our Saviour. We are asked to ascend to heaven to bring Christ down instead of finding Him near in our mouths and hearts, the word of faith.

Heidelberg Catechism tells us that our only comfort is that we belong not to ourselves but to our faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ, and without Him we lose all comfort. But, you see, we lay hold of Jesus not by an insight into the decree, by trying to find out who is really elect and who is really reprobate. We do not lay hold of Jesus by denying that there is such a thing as a decree of reprobation. Jesus is laid hold of by faith as He comes to us clothed in His gospel.

The solution which is offered by Berkouwer in the Gravamen is that man shall live by insight. The gospel of the new covenant is that the "just shall live by faith". That's the covenant. Now to live by faith is to live in covenant with God through Christ.

From within the covenant, the doctrine of God's eternal decree of reprobation does not consign us to anxiety or hopelessness but tells us that God will by no means clear the guilty. He has irreversibly determined to condemn sinners. There is no hope in ourselves, no way of escape, but God has come to offer His Son. And we see sinners, the reprobate, responding in faith. And such a response does not mean, "Well, then, we don't have to take the eternal decree of reprobation seriously after all. That's just a dark cloud that's passing over". No, it doesn't mean that.

It means that whereas there is no hope in ourselves, there is hope in JESUS CHRIST, for He is our help and our shield. You have it inscribed over every service of worship in the CRC. Our help is in the name of the Lord who made the heavens and the earth, and that's why reprobation belongs to gospel proclamation, so much so that we do not have gospel proclamation without it.

Reprobation says that God condemns sinners and if we do not warn men of this truth we are not preaching the gospel.

Well, that leads to the remarks about proclamation, but I'm not going to give them because I've indulged your patience far too long.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

The above is a transcript of the second lecture in a series of two. It has been very carefully checked for accuracy against the authorized tape of the lecture. What was on the tape was edited only where there was an obvious correction made by the speaker himself. An authorized tape of the lecture is available through the library of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia.