

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY CHARLOTTE

LOVED UNTO LOVE: ANALYZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOVE AND  
PREDESTINATION IN PAUL'S THEOLOGY

SUBMITTED TO DR. ROBERT J. CARA  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
NT520 - PAULINE EPISTLES

BY  
MATTHEW B. MCFARLING  
APRIL 26, 2019

## INTRODUCTION

To some, the concepts of God's love and Reformed predestination are antithetical to one another.

Take Thomas Talbott for example:

The Reformed doctrine of pre-destination—with or without its corollary, the doctrine of reprobation—is a form of blasphemy in this sense: those who accept the doctrine inevitably attribute Satanic qualities to God, they inevitably confuse the Father in heaven, whose essence is perfect love, with the Devil himself.<sup>1</sup>

Talbott demonstrates his polemic with the following logic: if the Reformed doctrine of predestination is in fact true, then: “(1) God himself fails to love some of the very persons whom he has *commanded* us to love. (2) The very God who commands us to love *our* enemies fails to love his enemies. (3) Loving-kindness is not an essential property of God, not part of his essence. (4) God is less loving, less kind, and less merciful than many human beings.”<sup>2</sup> In the mind of Talbott, “[God’s] essence is perfect love,” therefore, predestination cannot be true.<sup>3</sup> To Talbott, love is antithetical to predestination; not only God’s love, but *our* love as well. That is why he believes, “it is simply not possible, not *psychologically* possible, not even *logically* possible, to love God with all one’s heart, to love one’s neighbor as oneself, and simultaneously to believe the Reformed doctrine of predestination.”<sup>4</sup> Talbott does not only make a moral accusation against the God of Reformed theology, but also against anyone who believes Reformed theology.

I hold to a Reformed doctrine of predestination, therefore I completely disagree with Talbott’s argument. Direct responses have already been made to Talbott on theological and philosophical grounds, so my goal in this paper is not to address every particular point of his

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Talbott, “On Predestination, Reprobation, and the Love of God,” *Reformed Journal* 33 (1983): 11.

<sup>2</sup> Talbott, “On Predestination,” 13, (emphasis original).

<sup>3</sup> Talbott, “On Predestination,” 11, (emphasis original).

<sup>4</sup> Talbott, “On Predestination,” 11.

polemic.<sup>5</sup> Instead, my attention is drawn to the perceived antithesis between the concepts of love and divine election. Even those who are not fiercely opposed to Reformed theology may struggle to reconcile the two concepts. Talbott claims they are incompatible, but in the Bible, the concepts of love and predestination have an unbreakable unity with one another. This is especially true in the Pauline Epistles, which will be my focus.

What is the relationship between love<sup>6</sup> and predestination<sup>7</sup> in Paul's theology? Throughout the Pauline Epistles, love is both the nature out of which and the response unto which God peculiarly elects his believers.

#### DIVINE ELECTION AS AN ACT OF GOD'S LOVE: 1 & 2 THESS

Perhaps the most explicit connection between God's love and divine election is in 1 Thess 1:4. The verse is set within a grammatically complicated sentence focused on Paul's thankfulness for the Thessalonian believers (1:2-10). The phrase "we give thanks to God" indicates that the Thessalonians' conversion, good works, and benefits were ultimately a result of *God's* action, not the believers.<sup>8</sup> In 1:3, he thanks God for their faith, hope, and love. In 1:4 we see the ultimate reason behind their living faith, namely, their election. On the word level, Paul only uses the

---

<sup>5</sup> For direct arguments against Talbott, I highly recommend the theological argumentation of John Piper ("How Does a Sovereign God Love?: A Reply to Thomas Talbott," *Reformed Journal* 33 [1983]: 9-13) and the philosophical argumentation of Jeff Jordan ("The Topography of Divine Love: A Reply to Thomas Talbott," *Faith and Philosophy* 32 [2015]: 182-87).

<sup>6</sup> This paper is not concerned with only one specific Greek word for "love," such as *ἀγάπη*, but rather the whole concept of love throughout the NT. There are potential nuances between the specific words for "love," but it is not my intention to include one word while excluding another in this study.

<sup>7</sup> I am referring to the doctrine as it is articulated in Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1938), 114, "Predestination includes two parts, namely, election and reprobation, the predetermination of both the good and the wicked to their final end, and to certain proximate ends which are instrumental in the realization of their final destiny." Within this umbrella of predestination, my paper will emphasize the doctrine of election, defined by Berkhof as, "that eternal act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, chooses a certain number of men to be the recipients of special grace and of eternal salvation. More briefly it may be said to be God's eternal purpose to save some of the human race in and by Jesus Christ," see Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 114.

<sup>8</sup> Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 87. All English quotations of Scripture will be from the ESV unless otherwise stated.

word ‘election’ (ἐκλογὴ) here and a few places in Romans (Rom 9:11; 11:5, 7, 28), but as a concept, the doctrine is pervasive throughout his writings (Rom 8:29, Eph 1:4, 1 Thess 5:9, 2 Thess 2:13).<sup>9</sup> Paul could have described the act of God’s election as “loving,” but instead he describes the recipients, the elect themselves, as “beloved” (ἠγαπημένοι) (1:4). James Everett Frame writes that on a grammatical level, “The connection of this phrase with [chosen] makes plain that election proceeds from the love of God.”<sup>10</sup> In this instance, ἠγαπημένοι is a perfect, passive, participle, which emphasizes a *completed* action that happened in the past.<sup>11</sup> Hence, God loved them in the past by choosing them. Another nuance of the perfect tense is that the completed action still holds relevance for the present time.<sup>12</sup> God’s electing love, therefore, has an “enduring quality” extending from the past into the present and the future.<sup>13</sup> He loved the Thessalonian church in the past by choosing them, and the results of that love are evidenced in their own “work of faith and labor of love” (1 Thess 1:3). In this passage alone, we already see that the believer’s love is organically connected to God’s love in election. For now, however, we will continue to focus on God’s love.

Paul uses the same participle construction for “beloved” only one other time, which is in 2 Thessalonians 2:13.<sup>14</sup> In this instance, Paul emphasizes the same point as 1 Thess 1:4, namely, election as an act of God’s love. Calvin comments on this verse, “He calls them *beloved of the Lord*, for this reason, that they may better consider that the sole reason why they are exempted

---

<sup>9</sup> Robert J. Cara, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, EPSC (Grand Rapids: EP Books, 2009). 36.

<sup>10</sup> James Everett Frame, *Thessalonians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 78.

<sup>11</sup> Cara, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 37.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 246.

<sup>13</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, AB (New Haven: Yale, 2000), 110.

<sup>14</sup> Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 110.

from the almost universal overthrow of the world, was because God exercised towards them unmerited love" (emphasis original).<sup>15</sup> When did this election take place? Paul tells us in the same verse, "God chose you *from the beginning* to be saved," (emphasis added).<sup>16</sup> This electing love is not dependent upon anything in the believer, for it is before creation, nor is it a generic, universal love that applies to all mankind without exception; it is a particular love for a particular people, chosen "to be saved."<sup>17</sup> A similar phrase is found in Rom 1:7, "To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints." Hence, God's love is effectual, calling those who were chosen in the past to be saints in the present, without fail.

In the mind of Paul, we can already see that love and election are not opposed to each other. Rather, they are intimately connected. Ridderbos even points out that Paul uses the terms "beloved" and "elect" synonymously.<sup>18</sup> Some misrepresent election to depict an arbitrary God "who saves or damns people without rhyme or reason,"<sup>19</sup> but when this misconception is met with our Thessalonian passages, it simply cannot stand. Election is closely related to God's love, so much so, that Paul equates being loved by God to being chosen by him.

### REPROBATION IN LIGHT OF GOD'S LOVE: ROM 9:13

---

<sup>15</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 341.

<sup>16</sup> It is debated whether the original greek reading of this verse is 'from the beginning' (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς) or "firstfruits" (ἀπαρχὴν). There is manuscript evidence for both, and both are theologically possible. I have decided to read it as 'from the beginning.' For more on this reading, see Calvin, *Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 311-312; Cara, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 200, 282. Some Bible translations that prefer this reading are the KJV, NIV, NJB, RSV, NASB, and the NEB. For translations that choose "firstfruits," see NA28, ESV, NAB, NLT, and NRSV. It is worth noting that even if the correct reading of 2 Thess 2:13 is "firstfruits," Paul makes clear in other books that God's election happened before the world was created. See Eph 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9.

<sup>17</sup> William Barclay (*The Mind of St. Paul* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958], 48) writes, "Paul was sure that the purpose of God was not a generalized but an individualized purpose, that God's purpose was not so much the salvation of mankind, but the salvation of each individual man."

<sup>18</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard deWitt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 332.

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey A.D. Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 91.

When someone accepts the doctrine of divine election, the “dreadful decree” of reprobation logically follows.<sup>20</sup> Paul addresses this sobering reality head on in Rom 9. It is not my task to present and defend my view of Rom 9-11 as a whole, but for the sake of clarity, I believe Paul is discussing the election and reprobation of individuals unto salvation and damnation, not nations as a whole, nor individuals to a particular task.<sup>21</sup> Assuming that Paul is speaking of individual election and reprobation in Rom 9, I will continue to examine the relationship between love and predestination in this pericope.

I do not want to pretend as if God’s love and election held absolutely no tension in the mind of Paul, because we certainly see it in Rom 9. The thought of fellow Israelites perishing apart from Christ brings “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” to Paul’s heart (9:2). This anguish leads him to be as bold as to wish himself damned for the sake of his brothers, if that were even possible (9:3). He goes to great lengths to affirm the sincerity of his distress, for he is “speaking the truth in Christ,” (9:1).<sup>22</sup> He even reassures his audience that he is not lying, and that his conscience bears him witness in the Holy Spirit (9:1).

Why was Paul so solemn in these verses?<sup>23</sup> His heaviness of heart is likely due to the theological weight of the questions at hand: ‘Has the word of God failed?’ (9:1), ‘Is there

---

<sup>20</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.23.7. According to Berkhof (*Systematic Theology*, 116), “Reprobation may be defined as that eternal decree of God whereby He has determined to pass some men by with the operations of His special grace, and to punish them for their sins, to the manifestation of His justice.”

<sup>21</sup> For a defense of this view, see John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 56-73. Piper responds to opposing views on page 73 by concluding they must “ignore or distort the problem posed in Rom 9:1-5, the individualism of 9:6b, the vocabulary and logical structure of 9:6b—8, the closely analogous texts elsewhere in Paul, and the implications of 9:14-23. The position is exegetically untenable.” For further discussion on this debate, I recommend Cornelius P. Venema, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I Hated: Corporate or Individual Election in Paul’s Argument in Romans 9?,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 26 (2015): 7-58.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas R. Schriener, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 479.

<sup>23</sup> Cranfield is right in asking for an explanation. His conclusion is unsatisfactory, however as it is primarily concerned with Paul defending his Apostleship, and not actual grief in his heart. See C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 2, ICC (New York: T&T Clark, 1975), 453.

injustice on God's part?' (9:14), 'Why does he still find fault, for who can resist his will?' (9:19).<sup>24</sup> At the very least, Paul's solemn tone shows that he is not heartless in his doctrine of predestination, though he does not cower from defending divine reprobation (9:13-24).

It is in this discussion of reprobation that we find our explicit mention of love, "As it is written "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (9:13). Paul cites this phrase from Mal 1:2-3 as an OT example of God's election.<sup>25</sup> Both 'loved' (ἠγάπησα) and 'hated' (έμισησα) are in the aorist tense, which communicates a past tense setting of affections. "Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad," (9:11) God loved one and hated the other. This contrast is shocking. Some try to soften this blow by understanding ἐμίσησα not as 'hatred,' but rather 'to love less' based on an ancient near-eastern hyperbole.<sup>26</sup> Given the semantic range of 'hate' in the Bible, 'to love less' is a possible option.<sup>27</sup>

But is this the proper usage for the context of Romans 9:13? Cranfield believes not, but says 'loved' and 'hated' should denote election and rejection, respectively.<sup>28</sup> I agree with Cranfield in this argument. Schreiner also believes the 'loved less' option is doubtful in this context, but even if this option is correct, "it hardly lessens the problem, for the point of the text is that God set his affectionate love upon Jacob and withheld it from Esau."<sup>29</sup> Thus, the sting of

---

<sup>24</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 479.

<sup>25</sup> Paul quotes Mal 1:2-3 according to the LXX, except for a change of word order. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 563; Schreiner, *Romans*, 500; Cranfield, *Romans*, Vol. 2, 480.

<sup>26</sup> Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 563.

<sup>27</sup> Take these examples: In Genesis 29:30, Moses writes concerning Jacob, "he loved Rachel *more* than Leah," (emphasis added). But just one verse later, this appears to be synonymous with "the Lord saw that Leah was *hated*," (Gen 29:31, emphasis added). We can also compare Jesus' command to "hate" your own father and mother in Luke 14:26 with a similar passage in Matt 10:37. In Matthew, the sin is not loving your father and mother, but rather loving "father and mother more than me." Thus, the terms in *some* situations appear to be synonymous. See Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 563; Schreiner, *Romans*, 500.

<sup>28</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, Vol. 2, 480.

<sup>29</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 500-501.

the passage remains. The main point of Paul's argument, in Calvin's words, is "that God has a sufficiently just reason for electing and for reprobating, in his own will."<sup>30</sup> Thus Paul asks, rhetorically, "Has the potter no right over the clay?" (9:21).

Does reprobation make God a moral monster? Recall the first two points of Talbott's argument, "(1) God himself fails to love some of the very persons whom he has *commanded* us to love." Therefore, "(2) The very God who commands us to love *our* enemies fails to love his enemies."<sup>31</sup> If we are not to shy away from the problem, John Piper's response is helpful.

Piper states that in order for this criticism to be true, we must assume that "the love we are commanded to show our neighbor is *identical* with the love God fails to show him." In objection to this assumption, he confirms that we are commanded to show kindness, patience, to call men to repentance, and to do all manner of good deeds. God always shows *this* kind of love to all men, but "we are never commanded to dispense *electing* love." Therefore, "in one sense God does love his enemies and in one sense he does not. In the sense that he does, so should we. In the sense that he does not, we are now in no position to follow as mere creatures. The potter has rights which the pots do not have."<sup>32</sup>

Thus, God's electing love is shown to be much higher than human forms of love. It is a love that is always effectual (Rom 8:30) and dispensed with divine prerogative (9:13). God's special love for his Church will always produce a love for him in return (8:28), but this human love, though wrought by the Holy Spirit, does not live up to the divine love from which it came.

---

<sup>30</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 350.

<sup>31</sup> Talbott, "On Predestination," 13, (emphasis added).

<sup>32</sup> Piper, "How Does a Sovereign God Love?," 10.

## OUR LOVE OR GOD'S LOVE? EPHESIANS 1:3-6

Another explicit linkage between love and predestination is in Eph 1:4-5, but to gain a better grasp on what Paul is saying, we will start with verse 3. Immediately following his introductory remarks, Paul blesses God the Father because he has “blessed us” (Eph 1:3). God is indeed blessing believers on earth now, both spiritually and physically, but Paul is emphasizing “spiritual blessing[s] in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3). What does it mean to be blessed in the heavenly places? The key to understanding heavenly blessing is understanding what it means to be blessed “in Christ.”

To be “in Christ,” simply put, is to be united with Christ.<sup>33</sup> In one sense, we are in Christ as he is in heaven *now*. Hence, “God raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,” (Eph 2:6, cf. 1:20). Notice that “blessed” (*εὐλογήσας*) is in the aorist tense in 1:4, just as “raised” (*ἐγείρας*) and “seated” (*καθίσας*) are in 1:20 (referring to Christ) and 2:6 (referring to us). Therefore, when Christ rose, we rose. When he ascended, we ascended. As Christ is in heaven now, we are there with him. These blessings, which were given in the past, exist both “already and not yet.”<sup>34</sup>

As Paul’s logic of being “in Christ” develops over the next few verses, he reveals that our union with Christ began not only after his ascension, but “before the foundation of the world,” (1:4). The elect have therefore been “in Christ” in heaven since before the world began.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Ephesians*, REC (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009) 20-21. Ridderbos (*Paul*, 59) elaborates on this, saying that “in Christ” does not denote “a sense of communion that becomes reality only in certain sublime moments, but rather of an abiding reality determinative for the whole of Christian life, to which appeal can be made at all times...with respect to the whole Church without distinction.”

<sup>34</sup> Chapell, *Ephesians*, 21. The concept of “already and not yet” is described by Ridderbos (*Paul*, 51) in the following manner, “Paul’s eschatology is entirely determined by the realized and still-to-be-realized redemptive work of God *in Christ*” (emphasis original).

<sup>35</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*, 213.

Hence, all of God's redemptive acts in history were initiated in our declared union with the pre-existent Christ in heaven. Ridderbos summarizes this truth by emphasizing that the pre-existent Christ is "the object of God's election (Eph 1:4), and as such the one in whom the grace of God has been given to the church before times eternal."<sup>36</sup> This grandiose proclamation of election in Christ is related to "in love" in 1:4, but the relationship between the two is not without grammatical debate.

There is disagreement as to whether the phrase "in love" ( $\text{ἐν ἀγάπῃ}$ ) relates to the end of 1:4 or the beginning of 1:5. Some take it to qualify 1:5, "in love, he predestined us," but others relate it to the end of 1:4, "that we should be holy and blameless before him, in love." The question then arises, who's love is being referenced here? Is it God's love towards us in election, or is it man's love towards God in holy conduct? Both options are theologically possible, but we must make a decision on what Paul is referring to in this specific passage.

I believe 'in love' is qualifying the end of 1:4, therefore it is referring to man's love. The same phrase  $\text{ἐν ἀγάπῃ}$  is also used in 3:17, 4:2, and 4:16. In these instances, it is *always* used at the end of a sentence, thus qualifying what preceded it.<sup>37</sup> Using this evidence, many scholars argue that the phrase is connected to verse four because it is unlikely that "in love" would qualify "he predestined," which follows it.<sup>38</sup> Thus, Paul's doctrine of election is concerned not only with God's love, but also our love. He chose us to "holy and blameless...in love" (Eph 1:4).

---

<sup>36</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*, 69.

<sup>37</sup> Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1974), 79.

<sup>38</sup> For more in-depth discussions on the placement of  $\text{ἐν ἀγάπῃ}$  see Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 50, Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 17, and Barth, *Ephesians*, 79-80.

God did not only elect us out of love (2 Thess 2:13), he elected us unto love (Eph 1:4).

Ridderbos comments on this, writing, “This divine love works itself out in the love of those known by him. Therefore the love of the church is the gift of God.”<sup>39</sup> It is through the Church’s expression of love that she shows herself to be chosen by God.<sup>40</sup>

#### OUR LOVE AND GOD’S ELECTION: ROM 8:28-30

The relationship between our love and God’s election is made even more clear in Rom 8:28-30. In the latter end of what is perhaps the most encouraging chapter of the Bible, Paul writes, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good” (Rom 8:28). This promise is made in light of our adoption as sons and heirs of Christ (8:15-17). Being an heir has a cost, namely, suffering with Christ (8:17), but these present day sufferings are not worth comparing to our future glory with him (8:18). This truth works itself out practically by confessing, “all things work together for good” (8:28).

In Romans, Paul writes a lot about God’s love for believers (1:7, 5:5, 5:8, 8:35, 8:37, 8:39, 9:13, 15:30) as well as the believers’ love for each other (12:9, 13:8-10, 14:15) but this time, Paul is speaking about the believer’s love for God. This is extremely rare in Romans, as well as Paul’s writings as a whole.<sup>41</sup> The phrase is not invented out of thin air, though. The phrase “those who love God” (*τοῖς ἀγαπῶσι τὸν θεόν*) actually has a rich OT background. For example, in the second commandment, God proclaims that he is a jealous God, judging those who hate him, “but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who *love* me and keep my

---

<sup>39</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*, 294.

<sup>40</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*, 294.

<sup>41</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) 355. Paul’s other references to believers’ love for God are rare, consisting of 1 Cor 2:9; 8:3; Eph 6:24. See Schreiner, *Romans*, 450.

commandments” (Ex 20:5-6, emphasis added).<sup>42</sup> Paul is likely alluding to the continuity between OT and NT covenant communities as “those who love God.” Is the Christian’s confidence then, built on their own ability to love God, thus assuring that all events in their life will work for good? Not at all. Fitzmyer responds to that question, “the reason that all things work together for good is not found in Christians themselves, but in God, who takes the initiative and sees that all things will work for good.”<sup>43</sup> This is where our two concepts meet, as Paul connects predestination with the believer’s love for God (Rom 8:30).

“Those who love God” is parallel with “for those who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). The ‘calling’ in this verse is not referencing predestination in eternity past, but rather God’s “effectual call,” that is, his work in history by which he “summons through the gospel some to himself.”<sup>44</sup> This calling is brought up again in relation to God’s predestination (8:30), which has already been linked to God’s foreknowledge (8:29). Thus, those who love God are the very ones whom God loved, and thereby chose, first.

The word “foreknew” (*προγνώσκω*) in 8:29 has caused considerable debate. Is this word implying God only chose those whom he *foresaw* would choose him? Pelagius, Origen, and present day Arminians certainly think so.<sup>45</sup> This view is attractive because it seemingly takes away the theological ‘problem’ of reprobation, but it is not logical when weighed against what

---

<sup>42</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, Vol. 1, 424. Other OT references to a believer’s love for God include Deut 5:10; 6:5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20; Josh 22:5; 1 Kgs 3:3; Neh 1:5, Ps 31:23 (LXX: 30:24); 97:10 (LXX: 96:10); 116:1 (LXX: 114:1); 145:20 (LXX: 144:20); Dan 9:4.

<sup>43</sup> Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 522.

<sup>44</sup> Schriener, *Romans*, 154. See also WCF 10.1; Cranfield, *Romans*, 432; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 575.

<sup>45</sup> See Pelagius, *Pelagius’s Commentary on St Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: Translated with Introduction and Notes*, trans. T. de Bruyn, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford, Clarendon, 1993) 112; P. Gorday, *Principles of Patristic Exegesis: Romans 9-11 in Origen, John Chrysostom, Augustine*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 4 (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1983), 75; T. Fahy, “Romans 8:29,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 23, 410-12; R. C. Sproul, *The Gospel of God: An Exposition of Romans* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1994), 149.

Paul has to say about election elsewhere (1 Thess 1:4; Rom 9:11). Paul may also be speaking of something more specific than God's general foreknowledge. To 'know beforehand' is the primary usage of *προγινώσκω* in classical Greek literature and the LXX, but a word's primary usage does not necessarily pinpoint Paul's usage.<sup>46</sup>

Paul certainly believes in God's general foreknowledge as a concept, but he may have been using it with an OT background in mind. For example, for God to 'know' (*γινώσκω* / *עָדָה*) in the OT often refers to his covenantal love, that is, his setting of affection on those he has chosen.<sup>47</sup> Hence, God says to Israel, "you only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). Silva and Schriener both agree that in Rom 8:29, Paul's use of *προγινώσκω* alludes to covenantal love, hence he writes later, "God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew" (Rom 11:2).<sup>48</sup> An amplified reading helps clear up the confusion, "For those whom he [set his covenantal love upon], he predestined to be conformed to the image of his son." Some may ask, if foreknowledge is the same as predestination, why does Paul use two different terms within just a couple of verses? This objection, however, is misunderstood. The two terms have more than enough nuance to justify their distinct usages. The verb, 'to predestine' (*προορίζω*) emphasizes the preordained plan of God, while 'to foreknow' (*προγινώσκω*) emphasizes God's covenantal love and affection.<sup>49</sup> Thus, God's foreknowledge in this context can be understood as God's 'fore-love' in relation to his predestination.

---

<sup>46</sup> *NIDNTTE*, 138; *BDAG*, 866.

<sup>47</sup> Schriener, *Romans*, 452; Gen 18:19; Exod 33:17; 1 Sam 2:12; Ps 18:43; Prov 9:10; Jer 1:5; Hos 13:5. I do not know Hebrew yet, but am trusting Schriener's judgement in connecting *γινώσκω* to *yada*.

<sup>48</sup> *NIDNTTE*, 139; Schriener, *Romans*, 452.

<sup>49</sup> Schriener, *Romans*, 453.

Therefore, the ones whom God “foreknew” and “predestined” in eternity past are revealed to be the ones “called” in history (8:30). These ‘called ones’ are consequentially the ones who love God in the present (8:28). Thus, God’s love in election produces the Christian’s love for God in Romans 8:28-30. Cranfield effectively summarizes this double-movement of love, commenting, “The love [for] God, which is commanded in Scripture, is nothing less than the response of a man in the totality of his being to the prior love of God.”<sup>50</sup> Fitzmyer further synthesizes this, “In effect, ‘those who love God’ becomes a Pauline definition of a Christian.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, says Calvin, “loving God includes the whole of true religion.”<sup>52</sup>

Throughout Romans, Paul describes man’s affections as seriously misplaced. Mankind has “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images” (1:23), and “worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (1:25). This love for creature manifests itself in every fallen human as a love for sin (3:9-18). When our depraved affections are taken into account, we see that being able to love God truly is a gift!

#### CONCLUSION & APPLICATIONS

According to Talbott, it is impossible to love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself while simultaneously believing the Reformed doctrine of predestination.<sup>53</sup> If my exegesis above is correct, however, our love for God and neighbor is impossible apart from the truthfulness of this doctrine. In fact, not even the slightest love for God is possible without his sovereign choice, for love is both the nature out of which and the response unto which God peculiarly elects his believers. Thankfully, a Christian does not have to believe this particular

---

<sup>50</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, Vol. 1, 424-425.

<sup>51</sup> Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 522.

<sup>52</sup> Calvin, *Romans*, 315.

<sup>53</sup> Talbott, “On Predestination,” 11.

doctrine in order to love God, he must simply believe the Gospel and be born again by the Spirit of God.

Unfortunately, many Reformed Christians have been accused of being ‘the frozen chosen’ due to an impractical obsession with predestination, thus killing their motivation to live out the great commission (Matt 28:18-20). This is unfortunate because the very evidence of a Christian’s election is their “work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope” (1 Thess 1:3). Christians are commanded to make disciples (Matt 28:19) and to love God and neighbor (Matt 22:37). Furthermore, those that are lost are commanded to believe the Gospel (Mark 1:15). Paul was aware of this reality: “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Rom 10:14). Even when Paul speaks of the Church’s election in 2 Thess 2:13, he doesn’t exclude the means of salvation, “through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”<sup>54</sup> The power of God in predestination ought to melt the ice off of ‘frozen’ Christians, propelling them into action with the confidence that God’s purposes will not fail.

When teaching predestination to others, we should emphasize the love of God, as Paul did! It is tempting for budding theologians to get caught up in all of the technicalities, which are important, but in doing so they toss God’s love to the side. In my judgement, Reformed predestination carries the reputation of a cold, hard doctrine, but when accurately represented, it is the doctrine of how a sovereign God loves. It is in the light of Reformed predestination that God’s love is the most unconditional, most gracious, and most glorifying to himself. May all

---

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity), 239.

Christians everywhere grow in an increasing love for Christ, “because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).