

LECTURE 3:
Solutions that limit God's attributes (Part 2): divine *omnipotence*

Introduction

- I. Baseline definition of 'omnipotence':
- II. The limitations on God's omnipotence most relevant to this debate:
 - A. Limits on the pretemporal decree:
 - B. Limits on the temporal execution of the decree, i.e., providence:
- III. Augustinian/Calvinistic doctrine, summarized in two assertions:
- IV. The Arminian doctrine, which we may define negatively as a denial of both claims, rests precisely on the belief that creaturely freedom *would* be destroyed, and that sin, or moral evil, *would* be ascribable to God:
- V. The Arminians resolve this tension, not by denying foreknowledge of creaturely freedom (as do Socinians), but by *basing God's decree upon his foreknowledge*:
- VI. The chief contention of this lecture:
- VII. Why this seeming digression into the Arminianism/Calvinism debate is necessary for tackling the problem of evil:

The Augustinian/Calvinistic Doctrine of the Decree—Defended

Part 1: The General Decree

- I. Distinction between general and saving decree:
- II. Explicit textual evidence for the priority of God's general decree to human choice
- III. Explicit textual evidence for the comprehensive scope of the general decree:
- IV. There is also a necessary inference, from the comprehensive extent providence, to the comprehensive scope of the general decree:

Part 2: The Saving Decree (i.e., Predestination)

- I. Arminian theories of predestination:
- II. Refutation of "prevenient grace," which is the logical lynchpin of the Arminian theory of predestination:
 - A. First, prevenient grace is incoherent, since it does not accomplish the very thing it is supposed to accomplish: Consider this dilemma:
 - B. Secondly, the proponent of prevenient grace *should* accept either (1) universalism or (2) the Pelagian theory of the will as being in *equilibrio*:
 - C. Prevenient grace is *explicitly* contradicted by Scripture.
 1. Scripture teaches that the unregenerate are incapable of understanding and responding to God's revealed will for them:

- a) Romans 8:5-9)
- b) First Corinthians 2:14)
- c) Second Corinthians 4:3-4)
- d) Second Corinthians 3:14-15)
- e) John 12:37-40)
- f) Acts 28:25-27)

2. Scripture teaches, therefore, that God must resort to a special enabling, whereby the unregenerate man can both understand and accept what is outwardly offered to them:

- a) John 6:44, also v.65)
- b) Matthew 11:25-27)
- c) John 12:14-16)
- d) Acts 16:14)
- e) First Corinthians 2:6-16)

6 Yet we do speak wisdom [concerning the cross] among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9 but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." 10 For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. 16 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

III. Having established the doctrine of natural inability, Calvinistic predestination should be seen as a necessary inference:

IV. More importantly, Calvinistic predestination is explicitly taught in scripture

A. Men are elected unto salvation, not because they have believed, but because they have been *appointed* by God to believe:

- 1. Acts 13:48)
- 2. John 6:37,39)

B. And they were appointed on the basis of God's *prior purpose*, not in reaction to their foreseen faith:

- 1. Second Timothy 1:9)
- 2. Ephesians 1:11)

3. Romans 9)

“For this is the word of promise: “AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON.” And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born and *had not done anything* good or bad, so that *God’s purpose according to His choice* would stand, *not because of works* but *because of Him who calls*, it was said to her, “THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER.” Just as it is written, “JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED.” What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, “I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION.” So then it *does not depend on the man who wills* or the man who runs, *but on God* who has mercy.”

a) Arminian interpretations of Romans 9:

b) Proof of the Calvinistic reading:

(i) Paul has *salvation* in view:

(ii) Paul has the salvation of *individuals* in view:

- V. Does the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination impugn God’s justice?
VI. The Arminian theory of predestination was invented for the impossible goal of residing between Socinianism and Augustinianism/Calvinism, when, in truth, there is no middle ground:

Conclusion

- I. Even if true, Arminianism does not solve the Problem of Evil
A.
II. But two questions still remains:
A. Does Calvinism undermine human freedom and responsibility?
B. Does Calvinism make God the author of evil?