

# Unconditional Reprobation and Active Hardening: A Study on Romans 9:11-22

The doctrine of reprobation is one of the most despised doctrines of the Christian faith. It is despised by the irreligious and unconcerned, and it is despised by most who come in the name of Christianity. In spite the common notion that there is a dichotomy between "Arminians" and "Calvinists," people in both of these camps hate the true doctrine of reprobation. Some will dismiss it out of hand, while others will try to explain it away or water it down. This article, which is based on sermons this author has preached from Romans 9:11-22, will present the biblical doctrine of reprobation that exalts God and abases man.

*"For [the children] not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of the [One] calling, it was said to her, The greater shall serve the lesser; even as it has been written, I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau" (Romans 9:11-13).*

According to Jewish tradition, the first-born son had the position of preeminence and privilege, including the birthright. Yet before Jacob and Esau were born, God told Rebekah that the elder would serve the younger (Gen. 25:23). The Greek word for "born" is a general word meaning "to procreate," "to produce," or "to conceive" - it is talking about the children's time of conception within their mother. The second phrase in verse 11 is *"nor having done any good or evil."* Obviously, before Jacob and Esau existed, they had not done anything good or bad, righteous or wicked. People who have not yet been conceived into the world have not yet done anything good or anything evil. In chapters 25 and 29 of Genesis, the Bible shows that Jacob was a conniver, a manipulator, and a deceiver who stopped at nothing to get what he wanted. He got what he wanted through his wicked scheming and deception. It is amazing how many commentaries make Jacob look better than he was, as if he somehow deserved the birthright and the blessing. This could not be further from the truth. In fact, Jacob's wickedness serves to accentuate that God's purpose according to election is not of works.

Romans 9:13 (which refers to Malachi 1:2-3) is a verse that most religionists cannot stand. Most of them will not come out and say they cannot stand it; instead, they will either reword it or try to explain it away. The most common way to reword it or explain it to make it less offensive to carnal minds is to say that the word "hated" really means "loved less." Thus, instead of God saying, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," they make God say, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I loved less." Kenneth Wuest, who was one of the translators of the New American Standard Version and has his own translation of the New Testament called the Wuest Expanded Translation, says the following in his *Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*: "The word 'hate' is *miseo*, 'to hate.' However, when it is used in contrast to 'love' here, it does not retain its original meaning of literal hatred, but of a lesser degree of love. God cannot be said to hate anyone. The idea is, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau, I loved less.'" This is astounding coming from a Bible translator who must be familiar with the many passages of Scripture in which God is said to hate certain people. But Wuest and many who hold to his heretical views believe that God does not hate all workers of iniquity (Psalm 5:5), God does not hate the wicked and the one

loving violence (Psalm 11:5), God does not hate liars (Psalm 5:6; Proverbs 12:22), God does not hate the perverse-hearted (Proverbs 3:32; 11:20), and God does not hate everyone proud in heart (Proverbs 16:5). Wuest says that since "hate" is contrasted with "love" in Romans 9:13, then hate does not retain its original meaning. According to Wuest, whenever "hate" is contrasted with "love," "hate" does not mean "hate" anymore. Any sensible person would see, by the very fact that "hate" is contrasted with "love," that hate is the exact opposite of love.

Let us put Wuest's notion to the test by looking at some passages in which "hate" and "love" are contrasted. John 15:18-19 says, *"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before [it has hated] you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you."* According to Wuest, since "hate" is contrasted with "love" in this passage, then "hate" must mean "love less." Here is the passage according to Wuest's interpretation: *"If the world loves you less, you know that it has loved Me less before [it has loved] you [less]. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world loves you less."* 1 John 3:13-15 says, *"Do not marvel, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brothers. The [one] not loving the brother remains in death. Everyone hating the brother is a murderer, and you know that every murderer does not have everlasting life abiding in him."* Notice that this passage not only contrasts "love" and "hate" but "loving the brothers" and "not loving the brother." Thus, "hate" is equivalent to "not love." Hebrews 1:9 says, *"You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; because of this God, Your God, has anointed You [with] the oil of gladness beside Your fellows."* According to Wuest, this passage would have to mean, *"You have loved righteousness and loved lawlessness less; because of this God, Your God, has anointed You [with] the oil of gladness beside Your fellows."* Thus, people like Kenneth Wuest would have to say that Jesus Christ does not hate, despise, and detest lawlessness, but He merely loves lawlessness less than He loves righteousness. This is unadulterated blasphemy.

When the beginning of Romans 9:11 is put together with the end of verse 13 as is grammatically and logically appropriate, the following is seen: *"for [the children] not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, ... I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau."* Before the children were born and had done anything good or evil, God loved Jacob and hated Esau. When did God first love Jacob and hate Esau? It was before they were born or conceived. But how long before they were born did God love Jacob and hate Esau? Was it a few days, a few weeks, a few years, or a few hundred years? It is clear from other passages of Scripture that election is something that happened before the world began. Thus, God loved Jacob and hated Esau from eternity past.

Why did God emphasize that He loved Jacob before Jacob had done anything good and hated Esau before Esau had done anything bad? Because He was showing that election and reprobation are both unconditional. They are not based on anything that Jacob or Esau did or did not do. Some false religionists say that God looked down through time and saw who would believe and then chose to save them, which is an utterly ridiculous and blasphemous notion. That makes salvation conditioned on what God foresaw man would do, and it would make God's choosing

merely an empty gesture, since it was man who chose his own destiny, and God just affirmed it. But the truth in this passage is undeniable. God's choosing - God's election to life and reprobation to death - is completely, absolutely, totally without precondition. God did not decide to save Jacob once He found out that Jacob would be a good person or would believe. God did not decide to damn Esau once He found out that Esau would be a bad person or would not believe. God's decision was based purely on His own sovereign will and had nothing to do with the will of the sinner.

It is a given that Arminians hate the doctrine of unconditional reprobation. But it might surprise the reader that most Calvinists hate this doctrine as well. They will claim to love unconditional election, yet when it comes to reprobation, they turn into conditionalists. They say that God reprobates a person based on something in the person. They say that God reprobated Esau based on something in Esau. And who better to represent and articulate this heretical notion than the most popular Calvinist himself, Charles H. Spurgeon? The following are quotes from Spurgeon's sermon entitled "Jacob and Esau":

"But now the second point of my subject is, WHY IS THIS? Why did God love Jacob? why did he hate Esau? Now, I am not going to undertake too much at once. You say to me, 'Why did God love Jacob? and why did he hate Esau?' We will take one question at a time; for the reason why some people get into a muddle in theology is, because they try to give an answer to two questions. Now, I shall not do that; I will tell you one thing at a time. I will tell you why God loved Jacob; and, then, I will tell you why he hated Esau. But I cannot give you the same reason for two contradictory things. That is wherein a great many have failed. They have sat down and seen these facts, that God loved Jacob and hated Esau, that God has an elect people, and that there are others who are not elect. If, then, they try to give the same reason for election and non-election, they make sad work of it. If they will pause and take one thing at a time, and look to God's Word, they will not go wrong. "The first question is, *why did God love Jacob?* I am not at all puzzled to answer this, because when I turn to the Word of God, I read this text;--'Not for your sakes, do I this saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways O house of Israel.' I am not at a loss to tell you that it could not be for any good thing in Jacob, that God loved him, because I am told that 'the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God, according to election might stand, not of works but of him that calleth.' I *can* tell you the reason why God loved Jacob; *It is sovereign grace. ...*

"Now, the next question is a different one: *Why did God hate Esau?* I am not going to mix this question up with the other, they are entirely distinct, and I intend to keep them so, one answer will not do for two questions, they must be taken separately, and then can be answered satisfactorily. Why does God hate any man? I defy anyone to give any answer but this, because that man deserves it; no reply but that can ever be true. There are some who answer, divine sovereignty; but I challenge them to look that doctrine in the face. Do you believe that God created man and arbitrarily, sovereignly--it is the same thing--created that man, with no other intention, than that of damning him? Made him, and yet, for no other reason than that of

destroying him for ever? Well, if you can believe it, I pity you, that is all I can say: you deserve pity, that you should think so meanly of God, whose mercy endureth for ever. You are quite right when you say the reason why God loves a man, is because God does do so; there is no reason in the man. But do not give the same answer as to why God hates a man. If God deals with any man severely, it is because that man deserves all he gets. In hell there will not be a solitary soul that will say to God, O Lord, thou hast treated me worse than I deserve! But every lost spirit will be made to feel that he has got his deserts, that his destruction lies at his own door and not at the door of God; that God had nothing to do with his condemnation, except as the Judge condemns the criminal, but that he himself brought damnation upon his own head, as the result of his own evil works. Justice is that which damns a man; it is mercy, it is free grace, that saves; sovereignty holds the scale of love; it is justice holds the other scale. Who can put that into the hand of sovereignty? That were to libel God and to dishonour him;

"Now, let us look at Esau's character, says one, 'did he deserve that God should cast him away?' I answer, he did. What we know of Esau's character, clearly proves it. Esau lost his birthright. Do not sit down and weep about that, and blame God. Esau sold it himself; he sold it for a mess of pottage. Oh, Esau, it is in vain for thee to say, 'I lost my birthright by decree.' No, no. Jacob got it by decree, but you lost it because you sold it yourself--didn't you? Was it not your own bargain? Did you not take the mess of red pottage of your own voluntary will, in lieu of the birthright? Your destruction lies at your own door, because you sold your own soul at your own bargain, and you did it yourself. Did God influence Esau to do that? God forbid, God is not the author of sin. Esau voluntarily gave up his own birthright. And the doctrine is, that every man who loses heaven gives it up himself. Every man who loses everlasting life rejects it himself. God denies it not to him--he will not come that he may have life. Why is it that a man remains ungodly and does not fear God? It is because he says, 'I like this drink, I like this pleasure, I like this sabbath-breaking, better than I do the things of God.' No man is saved by his own free-will, but every man is damned by it that is damned. He does it of his own will; no one constrains him."

According to Spurgeon, Esau was damned based on his own character, deserving that God should cast him away because of what he did during his life of his own free will. The astute reader would ask how Spurgeon reconciled this view with verse 11. Spurgeon used verse 11 to show that Jacob was loved before he had done anything good or evil, but he conveniently failed to mention verse 11 when speaking of Esau. Verse 11 is talking about both children. Before Jacob or Esau had done anything good or evil, God loved Jacob and hated Esau. Spurgeon said that God loved Jacob not based on anything good in Jacob, using verse 11 to do so. He then said that God hated Esau based on the evil that Esau had done during his life. What a fool he was. And what a fool any other Calvinist is who swallows this nonsense. How plain can it be? Before the children had done anything good or evil, God loved Jacob and hated Esau. The truth is simpler than the heresy! People like Spurgeon have to go through theological contortions to wriggle out of what the Bible plainly says. And if Spurgeon and his ilk were correct in their interpretation, there would not even be a need for a verse 14 answering the objection that there is unrighteousness with God:

*"What then shall we say? [Is there] not unrighteousness with God? Let it not be!" (Romans 9:14).*

What would be the most common objection to the truth that before Jacob had done anything good, God loved Jacob, and before Esau had done anything bad, God hated Esau? It would be that God is being unfair or unjust. People who want a god who is like them, who is in their own image, want a god who will love and hate people based on what these people do. They do not want their god to love or hate anyone until those people did something good or something bad, or at least until their god looked down through time and saw that those people did something good or something bad. To just "arbitrarily" love one person and hate another person not based on anything good or bad these people did is, to them, unfair and unjust.

Suppose Paul had said in verses 11-13 that God loved Jacob because He knew that Jacob would believe in Him and would be a good person who did good things, and God hated Esau because He knew Esau would not believe in Him and would be a bad person who would do bad things. Would there be an objection that God was not being fair or just? Of course not. In this scheme, God loved Jacob because Jacob deserved to be loved, and God hated Esau because Esau deserved to be hated. The objection would be totally meaningless. Thus, it is certain that this is not what Paul was saying in verses 11-13.

Now suppose Paul had said the following in verses 11-13: God loved Jacob because of His sovereign grace, not because of anything in Jacob, and God hated Esau for the same reason He hates any man - because Esau deserved it. God did not hate Esau unconditionally from before the foundation of the world and did not cause or even influence Esau to sin; instead, God's hatred of Esau was because Esau was a sinner. Would there be an objection that God was not being fair or just? Absolutely not. The objection would be totally meaningless. Thus, it is certain that this is not what Paul was saying in verses 11-13. Yet most Calvinists would espouse such a view.

Not only would most Calvinists espouse such a view, but they would actually be the objectors in verse 14! Paul puts forth the objection that the heretics would bring, and Spurgeon, with like-minded Calvinists who were before and after him, along with the Arminians and the open-theists and even the agnostics and atheists, are heading the charge against the true and living God. According to Spurgeon and his ilk, if one says that God hated Esau - unconditionally reprobated Esau before Esau had done anything bad - then this would be to think meanly of God, to libel God, and to dishonor God. Why? Because it would make God to be unfair, unjust, and unrighteous, which is exactly the objection that Paul addressed. The objectors say, "Paul, if this is true that God loved Jacob and hated Esau before they had been born, not yet having done any good or evil, then God is unrighteous! Your God is unjust, because you put a man's damnation into the hand of God's sovereignty!" As Spurgeon said, "God's sovereignty is just on the side of love; His sovereignty is not on the side of hatred." The truth is that a partially sovereign god is not sovereign at all. Either one has God who sovereignly loves and hates, or one does not have God. The objectors do not have God. They say that to believe that God sovereignly loves and hates is to think meanly of God and to libel and dishonor Him. They say that Paul, inspired by the

Holy Spirit, libels and dishonors God. This is damnable blasphemy.

The end of verse 14 says, "*Let it not be!*" This is the phrase *me ginomai*, which is the strongest of negations. Let it not be - may it never be - that there is any unrighteousness with God! God is the very essence of righteousness, justice, and equity. But He is not the essence of what natural man thinks is righteousness, justice, and equity.

*"For He said to Moses, I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will pity whomever I will pity" (Romans 9:15).*

This is a continuation of the answer to the objection, clearly showing that the sovereign God of the universe, who accomplishes everything He wants to accomplish (Job 23:13; Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 46:9-11), will have mercy on whomever He wants to have mercy and will pity whomever He wants to pity. God had mercy on and pitied Jacob, and He did not have mercy on and did not pity Esau, and both of these were unconditional, based purely on the sovereign will of God. "*So, then, [it is] not of the [one] willing, nor of the [one] running, but of the [One] showing mercy, of God" (Romans 9:16).*

This sentence is a crucial and fundamental bedrock of the Christian view of God's sovereignty and man's will. It absolutely smashes the idol of free-will into fine powder and blows it away, so there is nothing left of it. Romans 9:16 is one of the distinguishing marks of true Christianity and exposes most of professing Christianity as false. Most people who profess to be Christians believe that every fallen, unsaved man has free will to choose good or evil, to choose to believe in the true God or to believe in a false god, to choose to believe in Christ or reject Christ, to choose to believe the true gospel or a false gospel, to choose their own destiny. Some will say that this is with the so-called "assisting grace of God" or "prevenient grace" or some form of resistible grace, while others think it is just inherent in natural man without grace. But it does not matter. It is damnable heresy. The word "willing" in Romans 9:16 means determining, choosing, or preferring; it involves thinking. The word "running" is an action. What God is saying here through Paul is that favor with God, including salvation, does not depend on a person's thoughts (specifically wanting or willing or choosing good or to come to Christ) or a person's actions (specifically doing good works). Yet all throughout the world, most of what is being preached is that favor with God, including salvation, is conditioned on willing and/or running, rather than on God's sovereign mercy.

An important distinction must be made here. Most Calvinists would agree that natural man does not have the free will to choose good, to choose the true God, and to choose to believe the true gospel. They will even say that God must cause a person to choose good, to choose the true God, and to choose to believe the true gospel. But when it comes to natural man's ability to choose what kind of evil to commit, they will say that natural man does have free will and that God does not cause a person to sin (see the above Spurgeon quote). This will be addressed in more detail below.

*"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, For this very thing I raised you up, so that I might display*

*My power in you, and so that My name might be publicized in all the earth" (Romans 9:17).*

Paul turns to Pharaoh as another example of a reprobate whom God hated and did not pity and on whom God did not have mercy. In Exodus 4:21, God said that Moses would do all the wonders before Pharaoh, and He would harden Pharaoh's heart so Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go. God hardened Pharaoh's understanding and judgment in order to continue to show His wondrous power through the plagues. After each of the first nine plagues, God caused Pharaoh's heart to be hardened. Did Pharaoh have "free will" to obey God's command to let the people go after the first nine plagues? Of course he did not. It was God's eternal plan that Pharaoh not let the people go, so He would show the world all ten plagues; thus, it was not possible that Pharaoh would have let the people go after any of the first nine plagues. Had Pharaoh let the people go after one of the first nine plagues, then there would not have been the Passover! The Passover was the culmination of the plagues and pointed to the gospel of salvation conditioned solely on the work of the coming Messiah. God hardened Pharaoh's heart again in Exodus 14 to make him change his mind about letting the Israelites go and to get him and his men to get into chariots and chase after the Israelites toward the sea in order to destroy them. God raised this Pharaoh up at this particular time and hardened his heart in order that His power be displayed and His name be publicized in all the earth (Exodus 9:16; 10:1-2; 14:17-18,31). God caused Pharaoh to sin for His glory.

*"So, then, to whom He desires, He shows mercy. And to whom He desires, He hardens" (Romans 9:18).*

Compare verse 18 with verse 15. Both say that God has mercy on whomever He wants. Verse 18 gives additional information that verse 15 did not give - namely, that God hardens whomever He wants to harden. God made Pharaoh not want to let the Israelites go, and, as an extension of this, God made Pharaoh not let the Israelites go. God made Pharaoh disobey.

Scriptures abound that show God's active control of men's sins. God caused Joseph's brothers to sin specific sins in order to save life, put a remnant in the land, and to keep alive for them a great deliverance (Genesis 45:4-8; 50:20). God caused Sihon to refuse to let Israel pass through so his cities would be destroyed and Israel would take his land, and the peoples of the earth would dread and fear the Israelites for the glory of God (Deuteronomy 2:24-34). God caused the kings to come against Israel in battle, so that they would have no favor and that He would destroy them (Joshua 11:18-20). God caused Eli's sons to not listen to their father in order to kill them (1 Samuel 2:22-25). God caused Absalom to follow the bad counsel of Hushai instead of the good counsel of Ahithophel in order to kill Absalom (2 Samuel 17:1-14). God caused Rehoboam to forsake the good counsel of the elders and turn to the bad counsel of his friends in order to fulfill the prophecy of Ahijah to Jeroboam, that the kingdom would be torn apart (1 Kings 11:31; 12:1-15). 1 Chronicles 5:26, 2 Chronicles 21:16-17, 2 Chronicles 36:22-23, and Isaiah 13:17 speak of God's "stirring up" or "awakening" the spirit of wicked people to think and then do certain wicked things.

Proverbs 21:1 says, "[As] streams of waters, the king's heart [is] in the hand of Jehovah; He turns it wherever He desires." God turns the king's heart by causing the king to think certain things. This includes thinking and devising evil things, as other Scriptures have shown.

If all the above Scriptures are not enough to convince the reader that God actively hardens people's hearts and causes them to sin, the following is one Scripture passage that is so clear that it cannot be refuted by anyone with a sound mind: "He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal craftily with His servants" (Psalm 105:25). God turned their heart to hate His people and to deal craftily with His servants. Is it sin, is it wicked, to hate and deal craftily with God's people? Of course it is. Thus, God turned their heart to sin. What does it mean to turn someone's heart? In Hebrew, it is an active bending, making, fashioning, forging, causing, and producing. There is no getting around what this verse is saying. God actively made their hearts to think wicked things and then made them do wicked things. And God did not just "leave" them or "permit" them to think and do anything. He made them think and do particular things, particular sins. As seen later in the Psalm, He did this to show forth His power in His wondrous and marvelous works so He would get all the praise and the glory and so His people would worship Him and obey Him.

The reader might think that anyone who professes belief in the absolute sovereignty of God would easily embrace the truth that God actively hardens people and actively causes sin. After all, a God who does not control all actions and events, including the sins of men and angels, is not God. But most who say they believe in the absolute sovereignty of God do not believe this. They will say that God is in control of everything, but not that He controls everything, and they concoct all kinds of theories in order to justify their view of their god who does not cause everything while remaining sovereign. They use high-sounding catch-phrases such as: "God withholds His restraining grace," "God withdraws His gracious influences," and "God leaves men to their natural blindness, to the hardness and unrestrained tendencies of their hearts, to the corruptions of their nature, to their own depraved wills and desires so they are free to act according to their own inclinations and the free exercise of their evil dispositions." These might sound good in Satanic seminaries and pulpits, but they have absolutely no basis in God's Word. The following are some quotes that show the lengths to which some God-haters go to keep their god from being absolutely sovereign and thus enable man to keep some sovereignty for himself:

"... 'Whom he will he hardeneth', Romans 9:18, this he does not by any positive act, by infusing hardness and blindness into the hearts of men; which is contrary to his purity and holiness, and would make him the author of sin; but by leaving men to their natural blindness and hardness of heart; for the understanding is naturally darkened; and there is a natural blindness, hardness, and callousness of heart, through the corruption of nature, and which is increased by habits of sinning; men are in darkness, and choose to walk in it; and therefore God, as he decreed, gives them up to their own wills and desires. ... and also God may be said to harden and blind, by denying them that grace which can only cure them of their hardness and blindness ... not that God infuses any delusion or deceit into them, but ... he suffers their corruptions to break forth and prevail, not giving restraining grace to them ..." (John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*).

"It is said, that 'this text [John 12:37-40 -ed.] is cited to prove the decree of reprobation, or preterition; and that the inference made from it, contains this strange and uncomfortable doctrine, viz. That the infidelity of God's own people is to be resolved, not into the perverseness of their wills, or the evil dispositions of their hearts, but into the divine predictions, or into a judicial blindness and obduration, wrought by God upon them; which renders it, though not naturally, yet, morally impossible for them to believe.' But, I do not find that these words are cited by any of our writers to prove the decree of reprobation, or preterition, or any eternal purpose of God to blind the eyes, and harden the hearts of men, by any positive act of his, with a view to hinder their conversion, and that this decree of condemnation might take place. ... It is certain, that the impossibility of their after believing, is to be resolved into the judicial blindness and hardness of their hearts, to which they were justly left, having contemned both the doctrines and miracles of Christ. ... Since God, or Christ, blind and harden, not by any positive act, or putting in blindness or hardness, but by leaving and giving men up to the blindness and hardness of their hearts, and denying them grace ... All which is consistent with God's command, and Christ's exhortations to them to believe, which were antecedent to the judicial blindness and hardness of their hearts, and were, with the miracles and doctrines of Christ, aggravations of their unbelief; and therefore, they might be justly objected to them by the evangelist as their great crime, as it certainly was; being owing to the perverseness of their wills, and the evil dispositions of their hearts" (John Gill, *The Cause of God & Truth*).

"But I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go; that is, not directly, not for some time, not until all the wonders are wrought, and plagues inflicted to bring him to it: he first hardening his own heart against God, and all remonstrances made unto him, it was but a righteous thing in God to give him up to the hardness of his heart, to deny him his grace, which only could soften it, and to leave him to the corruptions of his nature, and the temptations of Satan; and by leaving him to strong delusions, to believe the lying miracles of his magicians: this the Lord thought fit to acquaint Moses with, lest he should be discouraged by his refusal to dismiss Israel" (John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*).

"And whom He will He hardeneth. -- If God hath mercy on whom He will, He hardeneth whom He will. In hardening men, God does no injustice, nor does He act in any degree contrary to the perfection of His character. He does not communicate hardness or perversity to the hearts of men by any positive internal act, as when He communicates His grace. ... Wicked men are not restrained by the holy influences of grace, but by the different restraints under which they are placed by Providence. They are hardened when these restraints are removed, and when they are left free to act according to the depraved inclinations of their own hearts, to which the Lord gives them up ... When a man is entirely left to himself, the commands, the warnings, the judgments, the deliverances, and all the truths of Scripture become causes of hardness, of insensibility, of pride, and presumption. ... God ... is infinitely just in ... placing them in situations in which, in the free exercise of their evil dispositions, they will do what the Lord has appointed for His own glory. Thus God orders events in such a manner, that, as in the passages above quoted, the sin will, through the wickedness of men: certainly be committed, while He is not the author of evil, but, on the contrary, of good. ... That God does not harden any man in such a way as to be the

author of sin, is most certain. But there must be a sense in which He hardens sinners, or the thing would not be asserted. From His conduct with respect to Pharaoh, it is obvious that sinners are hardened by the providence of God bringing them into situations that manifest and excite their corruptions. ... God hardened Pharaoh's heart, as He declared from the beginning of the history He would do; but did not put evil into his mind. There was no need for this, for he was previously wicked like all mankind. God has no occasion to put evil into the heart of any, in order to their destruction, for in consequence of the curse of the broken law (from which God's people alone are delivered), there is in no natural man anything good towards God, Romans 8:7. While He thus punished Pharaoh's wickedness no more than his iniquity deserved, God, in doing so, displayed to His people Israel their security under His protection" (Robert Haldane, *Commentary on Romans*).

"It must be remembered, however, that the purpose of God with respect to the sinful acts of men and wicked angels is in no degree to cause the evil, nor to approve it, but only to permit the wicked agent to perform it, and then to overrule it for his own most wise and holy ends. The same infinitely perfect and self-consistent decree ordains the moral law which forbids and punishes all sin, and at the same time permits its occurrence, limiting and determining the precise channel to which it shall be confined, the precise end to which it shall be directed, and overruling its consequences for good" (A.A. Hodge, *Commentary on the Westminster Confession*).

"In what sense is God said to harden men? See Romans 9:18, and John 12:40. This is doubtless a judicial act wherein God withdraws from sinful men, whom he has not elected to life, for the just punishment of their sins, all gracious influences, and leaves them to the unrestrained tendencies of their own hearts, and to the uncounteracted influences of the world and the devil" (A.A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*).

"All events embraced in the purpose of God are equally certain, whether He has determined to bring them to pass by his own power, or simply to permit their occurrence through the agency of his creatures. It was no less certain from eternity that Satan would tempt our first parents, and that they would fall, than that God would send his Son to die for sinners. The distinction in question has reference only to the relation which events bear to the efficiency of God. Some things He purposes to do, others He decrees to permit to be done. He effects good, He permits evil. He is the author of the one, but not of the other. ... The effects produced by common grace, or this influence of the Spirit common to all men, are most important to the individual and to the world. What the external world would be if left to the blind operation of physical causes, without the restraining and guiding influence of God's providential efficiency, that would the world of mind be, in all its moral and religious manifestations, without the restraints and guidance of the Holy Spirit. There are two ways in which we may learn what the effect would be of the withholding the Spirit from the minds of men. The first is, the consideration of the effects of reprobation, as taught in Scripture and by experience, in the case of individual men. Such men have a seared conscience. They are reckless and indifferent, and entirely under the control of the evil passions of their nature. This state is consistent with external decorum and polish. Men may be as whitened sepulchres. But this is a restraint which a wise regard to their greatest selfish

gratification places on the evil principles which control them. ... the Scriptures reveal the effect of the entire withdrawal of the Holy Spirit from the control of rational creatures, in the account which they give of the state of the lost, both men and angels. Heaven is a place and state in which the Spirit reigns with absolute control. Hell is a place and state in which the Spirit no longer restrains and controls. The presence or absence of the Spirit makes all the difference between heaven and hell" (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*).

Where, in any of these quotes, is there the truth that God sovereignly, actively causes people to sin certain sins? It cannot be found. Instead, there is the lie that God leaves men to their natural blindness, to the hardness and unrestrained tendencies of their hearts, to the corruptions of their nature, to their own wills and desires, by removing restraints, withdrawing gracious influences, and leaving them to themselves so they are free to act according to their own depraved inclinations and the free exercise of their evil dispositions. None of these ideas are found in the Bible, either expressed or implied. These Calvinists only deny free will when it comes to a wicked person's inability to do good. When their god removes some of his "restraining grace," he does not cause them to act in any particular way; instead, he just leaves them to their own wills and desires so they are free to act according to their own evil hearts.

Consider the above quotes in light of the passages previously mentioned that show God's actively causing people to sin in certain ways. According to the Calvinists above, God did not actively cause any of these people to sin in these specific ways; instead, God just withdrew some restraints from these people and left them to their own depraved desires, to be free to do whatever their desires led them to do. If one subjects these quotes to a rational analysis, one will find them severely wanting, notwithstanding the high-sounding rhetoric. How does the concept of "withdrawing restraints" make sense when talking about people sinning specific sins? Take Pharaoh as an example. If God just "withdrew restraints" and let Pharaoh's depraved will have control, then what is to guarantee that Pharaoh would sin in the specific way that was needed? What if, when God "withdrew restraints," Pharaoh decided to kill Moses and Aaron, or even something less heinous? That would have messed up the whole plan. What if, when God "withdrew the restraints" of Joseph's brothers, they decided not to follow Reuben's advice? The "what ifs" are endless. But with the Sovereign God of the Bible, His plan is sure and certain, to the minutest detail, because He actively causes His plan to come to pass by actively causing all actions and events, including the sins of men and angels. It cannot be any other way. If God merely lets an independent power have more or less control, then He is not the Sovereign God of the Bible who can and does carry out His perfect will. What the advocates of the "restraining grace" heresy say is that the degrees of wickedness in the world is evidence for degrees of restraining grace: the more God restrains, the better the behavior; the less God restrains, the worse the behavior. But what is wrong with this picture? Does the concept of more and less restraining make any sense in light of the fact that God actively controls everything? How could God restrain sin more or less if He already controls sin? This kind of restraint can only come into the picture if there is some kind of force outside of God that needs restraining. Consider restraint in relation to control. In the Calvinist heresy, the more God restrains, the more He actively controls, and the less He restrains, the less He actively controls. Thus, as God withdraws His

restraints more and more, the more the unbeliever controls his own thoughts, words, and actions. To those who believe the God of the Bible, it is absurd to think of a god who "leaves" a wicked person in control of his own thoughts and actions or "permits" or "lets" a wicked person control his own thoughts and actions. Then God would not be God. He would be giving up His sovereignty - His very Godhood. There would be people in the world whose wicked actions are outside of God's active control. Thus, events would be taking place that are controlled by something or someone other than God. If God "lets" something happen that He does not cause, then He is letting some other force be in control. There is some other power that is independent of God's power. The heretics can say that God is still in control because this independent power can be increased or decreased by God, but that does not resolve the issue that there is still an independent power. The whole concept of restraining grace is blasphemous, not only because it is a "common grace," but also because it denies God's absolute sovereignty.

What about the issue of "judicial hardening" in which God only hardens people in response to their first hardening themselves? Think about what kind of sense this makes even in the heretics' own scheme. Remember that their view of hardening is a passive leaving them to the hardness of their own hearts by withdrawing restraints. In this scheme, how does a person first harden himself? After all, there is a supposed self-hardening that happens before God responds. According to their scheme, it has to be that a person first hardens himself when God withdraws restraint and leaves him to the hardness of his own heart. Thus, God withdraws restraint and leaves him to the hardness of his own heart in response to God's withdrawing restraint and leaving him to the hardness of his own heart. It makes absolutely no sense.

What about the work of Jesus Christ on the cross? Was it God's plan from before the foundation of the world that Jesus Christ be crucified? Of course it was - it is the focal point of world history. This is the reason why God created the world, why God caused Adam and Eve to fall, why God caused everything in history up to this point, and why He caused and continues to cause everything in history beyond this point. Could puny man stop this event from happening? Of course not. Did Judas sin by betraying Jesus to the chief priests and elders? Did the high priest, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders sin when they looked for false testimony against Jesus and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate and incited the crowd to call for His crucifixion? Did the false witnesses sin in bringing charges against Jesus? Did the servants and officers of the high priest sin when they spat in His face, beat Him with their fists, and slapped Him? Did the Jews sin when they called for His crucifixion? Did Pontius Pilate sin when he sent Jesus to Herod? Did Herod sin when he sent Jesus back to Pilate? Did Pilate sin when he set Barabbas free and delivered Jesus to be flogged and crucified? Did the soldiers of the governor sin when they stripped Him, smashed a crown of thorns down on His head, mocked Him, spat on him, and struck Him? Did the soldiers sin by nailing Him to a cross to die? Were these not heinous, wicked things? Were not these things against the commands of God? Yet who would dare say that even one of these specific wicked actions was not decreed from before the foundation of the world and absolutely controlled and actively caused by God Almighty? Would anyone dare say that God did not control the events of the crucifixion, including all of the thoughts and actions of these wicked people? Would anyone dare say that God just "removed restraints" and "left them to

their own wicked inclinations" instead of actively causing these specific wicked actions? Without the crucifixion, there is no atonement. Without the atonement, there is no salvation. Yet the crucifixion was, in and of itself, a wicked thing that people did to Jesus Christ. But it was absolutely necessary. It was absolutely controlled and caused by God Almighty, to show His glory in the salvation of sinners. Would anyone dare deny this?

Here is one who would dare deny this essential truth. It is the Calvinist W.G.T. Shedd, in his book entitled *Calvinism: Pure & Mixed: A Defence of the Westminster Standards*, published by the Banner of Truth, which is one of the biggest publishers of Calvinist materials: "When God predetermined from eternity not to restrain and prevent 'Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and all the people of Israel', from crucifying his beloved Son, but to leave them to their own wicked inclination and voluntary action in the case, he made this crucifixion a certainty, but not a necessity as is evinced by the 'woe' pronounced upon them by the Son of God. Luke 22:22. Men with hearts and dispositions full of hatred toward the Saviour of the world, if left to themselves are infallibly certain to cry, 'Crucify him; crucify him'. John 19:6-15."

Shedd says that the crucifixion of Christ was "a certainty, but not a necessity." This is nothing more than double-talk. He says that God did not restrain or prevent them from crucifying Christ but left them to their own wicked inclination and voluntary action. How, then, was the crucifixion a certainty? Shedd answers this by saying that "[men] with hearts and dispositions full of hatred toward [Christ], if left to themselves are infallibly certain" to want Christ to be crucified. What about the people who tried to stone Christ to death in John chapters 8 and 10? Is wanting to stone someone to death evidence of "more restraining grace" than wanting to crucify someone to death? This is just so patently stupid, it defies description. Calvinists like Shedd cannot bring themselves to say that God actively caused any specific wicked action, including the crucifixion of Christ. Why is it so hard for them to admit what is so obvious from Scripture? On the surface, they want to protect God from being the so-called "author of sin." But what it really shows is that they believe in a god who is like them, who must conform to their own extra-biblical standards of what is just and right.

Contrary to the blasphemy of Shedd and those who agree with him, Scripture is clear about God's absolute control over all actions in everything leading up to and including the crucifixion of Christ:

*"But, behold, the hand of My betrayer on the table with Me! And, indeed, the Son of Man goes according as was determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" (Luke 22:21-22).* Here Jesus says that the betrayer, who is Judas, is at the table with him, and indeed, He, Jesus, *"goes according as what is determined."* This shows that all events leading up to and including the crucifixion were determined beforehand by God, including Judas's sin.

*"So Pilate said to Him, Do You not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to crucify You, and I have authority to release You? Jesus answered, You would have no authority against Me, not any, if it were not given to you from above. Because of this, the one delivering*

*Me to you has a greater sin" (John 19:10-11). Jesus Christ told Pilate that God gave Pilate authority against Jesus.*

*"Men, Israelites, hear these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a Man from God, having been approved among you by works of power and wonders and [miraculous] signs, which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know, this One given [to you] by the before-determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, [you] having taken by lawless hands, having crucified [Him], you killed [Him]" (Acts 2:22-23). Jesus Christ was given or delivered to be crucified by the before-determined purpose and foreknowledge of God. This was no accident or chance event; it was purposeful. This passage says that lawless, wicked hands crucified and killed Jesus Christ. And yet it was caused by God.*

*"For truly both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the nations and [the] peoples of Israel, were assembled against Your holy child Jesus, whom You anointed, to do whatever Your hand and Your counsel before-determined to be done" (Acts 4:27-28). This passage says that Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Jews, and the Gentiles were all assembled against Jesus Christ to do the wicked things that have already been mentioned, including crucifying Jesus Christ. Yet every single one of these wicked things was determined by the hand and the counsel of God Almighty. The counsel of God is what God determined to happen before the foundation of the world. The hand of God is what actually caused these things to happen. It was the power of God. God caused these wicked things to happen by His sovereign power. As Joseph said to his brothers, "You intended evil, but God meant it for good." Those who were involved in the crucifixion of Christ were doing evil. Yet God caused them to do this evil so that the greatest good in all the history of the universe would come to pass, which is the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Causing all things is the way God keeps His promises. If God does not cause all things, including evil, then He cannot keep His promises. And if He cannot keep His promises, then there is no gospel. Thank God that He caused wicked people to think and act wickedly so that His Son would be crucified. Thank God that He blinded these people's minds to the fact that Jesus Christ was the Lord of glory, or else they would not have crucified Him, according to 1 Corinthians 2:8. Without God's active control of wicked people, then there would have been no atonement. But we who are believers know that God actively controlled all the thoughts and actions of the wicked people so that it was guaranteed that Jesus Christ would be crucified and would make an atonement for His people.*

There is a translation of Romans 9:18 that says this: *"So, then, upon whom he wishes he has mercy, but whom he wishes he lets become obstinate."* That is the translation that the Spurgeons and Dabneys and Shedd's and Hodges and Gills and Haldanes of the world would love, would they not? That is actually how they interpret God's hardening - that God lets people become obstinate. The translation is called the New World Translation, and it is the Bible of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The translation "lets become obstinate" has no basis in the original Greek, but why should that stop them?

*"You will then say to me, Why does He yet find fault? For who has resisted His will?" (Romans 9:19).*

What would be the most common objection to the doctrine that God actively hardens people by causing them to sin? It would be that God could not find fault with the people whom He causes to sin. The objection follows from the doctrine, just like the objection in verse 14. If the doctrine that was just put forth were anything less than God's active hardening, God's active causation of sin, then the objection would make no sense. (And the answer to the objection in verses 20 and 21 would make no sense either, as will be proven later.)

The objection is in the form of two connected questions that could be put into this one question: "Why does God yet find fault, since no one can resist His will?" It could also be put into this one statement: "God would be unfair and unjust to find fault, since no one can resist His will." The objector looks at the fact that God unconditionally, actively hardens certain people by causing them to sin, and then God finds fault with, is displeased with, this sin, and punishes these people for their sin. What could be more natural to an ungodly man than to say, "It is unfair and unjust for God to find fault with people whom God caused to sin. How could a just God cause someone to sin and then punish that person for the sin He caused?" In the objector's mind, the only way in which God would be fair and just in finding fault and punishing sin would be if the sinner were totally free to sin however he wanted to sin. Then, and only then, would the objector be satisfied that God's finding fault and punishing people would be fair and just. Consider the previous quote from Spurgeon again. This summarizes the objection. Spurgeon said that God would only be just if Esau were free to sin however he wanted to sin. Spurgeon believed that the reprobate have uninfluenced, unconstrained free will to sin and are damned based on the sin they perform out of their own free will. He believed that if it were any other way, then this would be to make God the unjust author of sin.

Who, then, is the wicked objector of verse 19? Why, it is Charles Spurgeon himself, just like he was the wicked objector of verse 14! Here he is again, shaking his fist at God in verse 19! This really shows how utterly evil Charles Spurgeon was. His teaching was in direct opposition to the truth of God's sovereignty. Using Spurgeon as the prime example of who the objector would be shows that the vast majority of Calvinists are also the wicked objectors, because they are aligned with the views of Charles Spurgeon. One way that part of this objection comes up in conversation is that if God causes everything, then men are nothing but robots or puppets, with God controlling the robots or pulling the strings of the puppets. However, the concept of God being a roboteer or a puppeteer makes God much too weak. People who are controlling a robot or a puppet are not in full control of all aspects of the robot or puppet. They are limited in what they can do, and things can go wrong. But with God, He controls every electron, every neutron, every atom, every protein, every cell - everything. The objectors who bring up robots and puppets use this to accuse believers of being too deterministic, but the believers' response is that the robots and puppets illustration is not deterministic enough! God actively determines and controls His creation to the minutest particle! If there is anything, even the tiniest thing, that is outside of God's control, then God would not be God.

It is absolutely true that no one resists God's will. Many commentators want to say that the question "For who has resisted His will?" shows that the objector misunderstood what Paul had

said beforehand. If that were the case, not only would it be pointless for Paul to include this objection, but the answer to the objection would bear this out. However, Paul's answer shows without a shadow of a doubt that the objector understood what Paul was saying about active hardening and then made an erroneous conclusion. If the objector would have had a wrong understanding of the premise, Paul would have corrected this wrong understanding in his answer. Instead, he acknowledged that the objector correctly understood the premise, and he responded to the wrong conclusion that the objector made.

Paul's answer to the objector is so telling, so clear, so confirming of the truth of God's sovereign, unconditional, active election and reprobation, that it completely shuts the mouths of the objectors. It absolutely confirms the correct interpretation of verses 18 and 19:

*"Yes, rather, O man, who are you answering against God? Shall the thing formed say to the [One] forming [it], Why did You make me like this? Or does not the potter have authority over the clay, out of the one lump to make one vessel to honor, and one to dishonor? But if God, desiring to demonstrate His wrath, and to make His power known, endured in much long-suffering vessels of wrath having been fitted out for destruction" (Romans 9:20-22).*

Did Paul answer the objector by saying, "Well, my brother, you are just confused about what I said about God's hardening whomever He desires. If I explain it a little further, I think I can clear up your misunderstanding"? No - instead he says, "Who do you think you are to object to God?" This shows without a doubt that the objector did not misunderstand what Paul was saying in verse 18. The objector knew that Paul was putting forth the doctrine of absolute, unconditional, active reprobation, hardening, and causation of sin, the end of which is punishment. It was not the objector's misunderstanding of unconditional reprobation and causation of sin to which Paul replies; it is the objector's objection to unconditional reprobation and causation of sin to which Paul replies. Instead of bowing to God's sovereignty, the objector says, "Well, then, God cannot find fault with anyone who sins, because no one resists God's causing them to sin. That makes God a monster, a devil, a tyrant, an evil puppeteer who makes people do things and then destroys them for doing what he made them do." The answer comes back from God the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul: *"Yes, rather, O man, who are you answering against God?"* Who are you shaking your fist at God, saying that this makes God unfair and unjust? Just who do you think you are to talk back to God?

Paul then goes on to compare the objector to a pot and God to a potter: *"Shall the thing formed say to the [One] forming [it], Why did You make me like this? Or does not the potter have authority over the clay, out of the one lump to make one vessel to honor, and one to dishonor?"* Where is Paul's exposition of "judicial hardening" in which he says that God only hardens people who first harden themselves? Where is his answer that "God withholds His restraining grace" or that "God withdraws His gracious influences" or that "God leaves men to their natural blindness, to the hardness and unrestrained tendencies of their hearts, to the corruptions of their nature, to their own depraved wills and desires so they are free to act according to their own inclinations and the free exercise of their evil dispositions"? There is something wrong with Paul's response,

if you would believe Calvinists like the ones quoted above and all who agree with them. If there were one place in the Bible for the Holy Spirit through Paul to put forth these doctrines, this would be it. After all, the objector has just said that God cannot find fault if He causes the sin. Now would be the time to say that God does not cause the sin but merely permits it to happen by withdrawing restraints and leaving men to their own depraved free wills. Why is it not here? Why does Paul respond by saying that the thing formed has no business asking the one who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" and that the potter has authority to make one vessel to honor and one to dishonor, instead of saying that the vessel to dishonor makes himself that way and fits himself out for destruction when God withdraws restraining grace or judicially hardens him?

According to the Calvinists quoted above, Paul should have responded in the following way: "The reason God can find fault is because God did not make you like this. Had He made you like this, you would be right - He could not find fault. But God did not make you like this - you made yourself like this. You made yourself into a vessel of dishonor, and thus God can find fault, because He did not actively do anything to make you this way. He was just letting you do what you are naturally inclined to do, of your own free will." To these Calvinists, that would sound much more kind to God. Not only would they say that it would sound much more kind to God, they would say that anyone who believes that God actually made people into vessels of dishonor thinks meanly of God, libels and dishonors Him, and even blasphemes Him. The following is another quote from Spurgeon's sermon, "Jacob and Esau":

"It is your own choice--keep it. Your damnation is your own election, not God's; you richly deserve it. ... And I say, if Esau sold his birthright he did deserve to lose it; and, therefore, am I not right in saying, that if God hated Esau, it was because he deserved to be hated. Do you observe how Scripture always guards this conclusion? Turn to the ninth chapter of Romans, where we have selected our text, see how careful the Holy Spirit is here, in the 22nd verse. 'What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.' But it does not say anything about fitting men for destruction; they fitted themselves. They did that: God had nothing to do with it. But when men are saved, God fits them for that. All the glory to God in salvation; all the blame to men in damnation. ... My soul revolts at the idea of a doctrine that lays the blood of man's soul at God's door. I cannot conceive how any human mind, at least any Christian mind, can hold any such blasphemy as that. I delight to preach this blessed truth--salvation of God, from first to last--the Alpha and the Omega; but when I come to preach damnation, I say, damnation of man, not of God; and if you perish, at your own hands must your blood be required. There is another passage. At the last great day, when all the world shall come before Jesus to be judged, have you noticed, when the righteous go on the right side, Jesus says, 'Come, ye blessed of my father,'--('of my father,' mark,)--'inherit the kingdom prepared'--(mark the next word)--'for you, from before the foundation of the world.' What does he say to those on the left? 'Depart, ye cursed.' He does not say, 'ye cursed of my father, but, ye cursed.' And what else does he say? 'into everlasting fire, prepared'--(not for you, but)--'for the devil and his angels.' Do you

see how it is guarded, here is the salvation side of the question. It is all of God. 'Come, ye blessed of my father.' It is a kingdom prepared for them. There you have election, free grace in all its length and breadth. But, on the other hand, you have nothing said about the father--nothing about that at all. 'Depart, ye cursed.' Even the flames are said not to be prepared for sinners, but for the devil and his angels. There is no language that I can possibly conceive that could more forcibly express this idea, supposing it to be the mind of the Holy Spirit, that the glory should be to God, and that the blame should be laid at man's door."

Aside from the blatant damnable heresy, this once again shows what an exegetical ignoramus Spurgeon was. According to him, the fact that Christ did not say "ye cursed of my Father" proves that God does not curse the reprobate, but the reprobate curse themselves (in spite all the other passages in the Bible that talk of God's cursing the reprobate). Spurgeon used this to say that damnation is not of God. Using this vacuous logic, the passages that say that the elect are blessed but do not directly mention who does the blessing prove that God does not bless the elect, but the elect bless themselves. It is just mind-blowingly asinine. This kind of ridiculous exegesis can be found throughout Spurgeon's sermons. (Look for more exegetical Spurgeonism below.) Now consider the main heresy in the quote from Spurgeon. His words fly directly in the face of God's Word. Of course Spurgeon says some correct things, like fallen man deserves to be damned. But Spurgeon and all who agree with him twist this passage so much that they once again show themselves to be the objectors. They insert the exact opposite meaning into the passage. This passage is talking about God's absolute, divine sovereignty in both election and reprobation; yet when it comes to the reprobation side of things, Spurgeon and company say that if unconditional reprobation and hardening were true, then God cannot find fault with someone whom He caused to sin, and the thing formed can say to the one forming it, "Why did you make me like this?" They believe that the Divine Potter does not have authority to unconditionally make a vessel to dishonor, and they believe that the vessels of wrath fit themselves out for destruction. Spurgeon and most Calvinists cannot stand the truth that is put forth in this passage. In fact, Spurgeon said that his soul revolts at this idea that Paul is putting forward. Of course, he would not have openly said this about Paul; instead, he not only twisted Paul to say something that Paul did not say, but he turned what Paul said right on its head and said that Paul was saying the exact opposite of what Paul really said about the sovereignty of God in reprobation. It is amazing how anyone could not see right through this; it is a witness to the power of spiritual blindness. People can look right at a clear passage such as this and yet can make it say the opposite of what it clearly says, all to fit with their wicked notions of their god. They are truly making a god in their own image. They are counting the potter as the clay, as Isaiah 29:16 says. Thus, believers can say to Spurgeon and all who agree with him: WHO ARE YOU, O MAN, ANSWERING AGAINST GOD? Who do you think you are, Charles Spurgeon, to tell God that He would be unjust to unconditionally harden the reprobate for destruction? Who do you think you are, all you Calvinists and Arminians all over the world, to shake your fist at God and tell Him that He cannot do whatever He wants with His creation? YOU are the blasphemers. YOU are the ones who libel and dishonor God. YOU are the God-haters.

Paul exposes the absurdity of the thing formed complaining to the one who formed it, "*Why did*

*You make me like this?"* This is the created man answering against God the creator. Notice that this man is complaining that God made him "like this" - made him to be someone He hardens - a reprobate. This reprobate is asking God, "Why do You find fault with me? After all, You are the one who made me like this. It is Your fault, not mine. I am not to blame. You are." God answers that this man has as much business complaining about God's making him like this as the pot has complaining about the potter's making it like this. Note that Paul does not say anything about this reprobation being conditional. In this rhetorical question, he again establishes God's sovereign right to make a person a reprobate. How would Spurgeon and his brothers answer that question? They would say, "You do not understand. God did not make you like this. You made yourself like this."

In case anyone still thinks that the objector is mistaken or confused when he believes that God made him a reprobate, verse 21 uses the verb "make" again: *"Or does not the potter have authority over the clay, out of the one lump to make one vessel to honor, and one to dishonor?"*

How much clearer can it get? Here is a rhetorical question that has to do with God's authority. The potter has the authority to make one vessel to honor and to make one vessel to dishonor out of the same lump of clay. "Vessel to honor" means a vessel or pot that is made for noble purposes, and "vessel to dishonor" means a vessel or pot that is made for base purposes. There is absolutely no sense in which this means or implies that the potter has the authority to "allow" the clay to make itself into a vessel of honor or to "allow" the clay to make itself into a vessel of dishonor. Yet some would say that the potter makes some of the clay into a vessel of honor, and the potter allows the rest of the clay to make itself into a vessel of dishonor. Oh the lengths of absurdity to which heretics will go to maintain their heresy! This is part of an absurd heresy that is the most common interpretation of this verse. This heresy maintains that "one lump" must refer to the lump of sinful humanity. According to this heresy, out of this lump of sinful humanity, there is something special in making sinful humanity into a vessel of honor, but to make sinful humanity into a vessel of dishonor is just to let sinful humanity go its own sinful way - to let this sinful lump, which is already dishonorable, either make itself into a vessel of dishonor, or judicially harden this sinful lump because it already hardened itself - "leaving men to their natural blindness, to the hardness and unrestrained tendencies of their hearts, to the corruptions of their nature, to their own depraved wills and desires so they are free to act according to their own inclinations and the free exercise of their evil dispositions." As Spurgeon said, God fits the elect for glory, but the reprobate fit themselves for destruction.

Consider the gymnastics these people have to go through in order to hold to their view of the lump as sinful man. If the lump is sinful man, then what is the difference between the lump and vessels of dishonor? Are they not both sinful man? They would have to say that out of the lump of sinful man, God made sinful man. This fits with their view of God as less than sovereign, because then they can say that there was already sinful man, and God did not need to actively do anything to make sinful man into a vessel of dishonor, since he was already sinful. What this really means is that God would only need to actively make one kind of vessel - the vessel of honor - because the vessel of dishonor would already make itself to be such, either by God's

withholding restraining grace or intervening to judicially passively harden sinful man who had already hardened himself or some such nonsense.

The truth is that God, the Sovereign Potter, has the authority, the jurisdiction, the liberty, the power, the right, the strength, to make honorable vessels and dishonorable vessels out of the same lump of clay. In this picture of the potter, there is a lump of clay before the vessels are made. The potter does not have some bad clay that, if left to itself, would form itself into a bad pot. There is no precondition in the clay that would make the potter form it for either honorable use or dishonorable use. It is all the same clay. Thus, this is talking about the exact opposite of the views of the "sinful lump" camp when it comes to reprobation. Making a vessel of dishonor out of a lump of clay that would not become a dishonorable vessel on its own is talking about unconditional reprobation. And making a vessel of honor out of a lump of clay that would not become an honorable vessel on its own is talking about unconditional election.

The vessels that were created to dishonor in verse 21 are called "vessels of wrath having been fitted out for destruction" in verse 22. These are vessels that God, the Sovereign Potter, made to be objects of His everlasting wrath. They are objects of His wrath while they are living, and they are objects of His wrath when He punishes them eternally in hell. They have been the objects of His wrath from before the foundation of the world, when He unconditionally chose them to be reprobates. In time, He unconditionally hardens them, and then He damns them for their sin, all in His righteous, holy, and just plan.

Spurgeon's pseudo-exegesis still runs rampant today. Believe it or not, people say that since "fitted" in verse 22 is in the passive voice, then this means God did not do the fitting out for destruction, but the vessels of wrath fitted themselves out for destruction. It is true that *katertismena* (from the verb *katartizo*) is in the passive voice. But to conclude from this that God did not do the fitting shows that the concluder has no clue as to what the passive voice means. Another place where there is the passive voice that talks about reprobation is 1 Peter 2:7-8: *"Then to you who believe [belongs] the preciousness. But to disobeying ones, [He is the] Stone which those building rejected; this One became [the] Head of the Corner, and a Stone-of-stumbling, and a Rock-of-offense to the [ones] stumbling, being disobedient to the Word, to which they were also appointed."* The verb "to appoint" is *tithemi*, which means "to place," "to make," "to constitute," "to ordain," or "to purpose." These disobeying ones were ordained, were purposed, were constituted, were made to stumble and to be disobedient to the Word. The particular form of the verb is *etethesan*, which is in the passive voice. Just like in the response to Romans 9:22, some people say, "See, it says that they were appointed. That is in the passive voice, so it means that God did not do it." One can already see how ridiculous that is. Of course it is passive - and that is a strong argument against what they are trying to prove. In the active voice, the subject does the action, and in the passive voice, the subject is acted upon. In Romans 9:22, the vessels of wrath "were fitted" for destruction, and in 1 Peter 2:7-8, the disobeying ones "were appointed" to stumble and to be disobedient to the Word. Whenever one sees something in the passive voice (which means that the subject is being acted upon), one must ask, "who is the one doing the acting?" In Romans 9:22, the question is, "Who is the one doing

the fitting?" And in 1 Peter 2:8, the question is, "Who is the one doing the appointing?" Two obvious possibilities are the wicked men themselves or God. Consider the first possibility, which is that the wicked men fitted themselves for destruction and appointed themselves to stumble and be disobedient to the Word. Is that what the passive voice implies? No - it actually implies the opposite. For example, in the phrase, "the ball was thrown," it would be foolish to think that this could be talking about the ball throwing itself. And even when there is a phrase or sentence about people, such as "the man was hit" or "the woman was fined" or "the boy was ridiculed," it would be laughable to think that, in any of these phrases, the person himself or herself actually did the acting, like "the man hit himself," "the woman fined herself," or "the boy ridiculed himself." Does "the ball was thrown" or "the man was hit" imply that the ball threw itself or the man hit himself? No, it is actually the opposite - it affirms that someone or something other than the ball threw the ball and that someone or something other than the man hit the man. Thus, when the Bible says that people were fitted out for destruction or were appointed to stumble and be disobedient to the Word, it affirms that someone or something other than the wicked people themselves fitted them out for destruction and appointed them to stumble and be disobedient to the Word.

If Spurgeon and other fools were consistent, they would have to say that every time the passive voice is used in the Bible (or even, according to Spurgeon, if the causer of the action is not specified), then it shows that God did not do it, but man did it to himself. Thus, if they see passages in which the Bible says that people "are blessed," (e.g., Matthew 13:6; Luke 1:28; Galatians 3:8-9; 1 Peter 4:14), then they must say that these passages mean that God did not bless them but that they blessed themselves. Or in Romans 11:7, when it says that you "were grafted in," they must say that it means that you grafted yourself in. Or in 1 Corinthians 6:11, when it says, "but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified," they must say that it means that you washed and sanctified and justified yourself. Or in 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 1 Corinthians 7:23, when it says, "You were bought with a price" and "You were redeemed with a price," they must say that it means that you bought and redeemed yourself. Or in Ephesians 4:4 when it says, "you also were called," they must say that it means that you called yourself. Add to this that Romans 9:22 is in the context of God actively hardening the reprobate in verse 18 and actively making a vessel to dishonor in verse 21, which are both active verbs, and we see that there can only be one conclusion: God, the Sovereign Potter who does what He wants with the clay, is the one who has fitted out the dishonorable vessels of wrath for destruction. Proverbs 16:4 says, "*Jehovah has made all for His purpose, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.*" "Has made" is an active form of the verb. To put it passively, the wicked "have been made" for the day of evil. It does not say that the wicked "have made themselves" for the day of evil.

In spite of all this evidence, most Calvinist commentators will still say that the reprobate fit themselves for destruction. They believe that God does not actively harden people but passively lets people harden themselves, like the Jehovah's Witness translation says. They believe that God lets the clay make itself into a vessel of dishonor. It is amazing that those who claim to believe in the sovereignty of God can take such clear passages and twist them beyond recognition. In not believing that God actively causes sin, these Calvinists encourage and promote the boast of the

King of Assyria and all like him:

*"Woe [to] Assyria, the rod of My anger! And My fury is the staff in their hand. I will send him against an ungodly nation, and against the people of My wrath. I will command him to plunder, and to strip off spoil, and to trample them like the mud of the streets. Yet he does not purpose this, nor does his heart think so. For it [is] in his heart to destroy, and to cut off not a few nations. For he says, [Are] not my commanders all like kings? [Is] not Calno like Carchemish? [Is] Hamath not like Arpad? [Is] Samaria not like Damascus? As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols (for their carved images [excelled] Jerusalem's and Samaria's); shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols as I have done to Samaria and her idols? And it will be, when the Lord has broken off all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will visit on the fruit of the proud heart of the king of Assyria, and on the glory of his lofty eyes. For he says, I have worked by the strength of my hand and by my wisdom; for I am wise. And I take away the borders of peoples, and have robbed their treasures. And like a mighty one, I put down [ones] living [in it]. And my hand has found the riches of the people. Like a nest, I also have gathered all the earth, as forsaken eggs [are] gathered. And there was not one moving a wing, or opening a mouth, or one chirping. Shall the axe glorify itself over him chopping with it? Or shall the saw magnify itself over him moving it? As [if] a rod [could] wave those who lift it. As [if] a staff [could] raise [what is] not wood!" (Isaiah 10:5-15).*

These Calvinists would agree with the King of Assyria that he worked by the strength of his own hand and by his own wisdom. They would say that there has never been a single wicked person who has been caused by God to perform wicked acts. They, along with the wicked people with whom they agree, would rob God of the glory that He alone deserves, glorifying the axe over the one chopping with it, the saw over the one sawing with it, and the rod over the one lifting it. On the other side, God's people do not endure him who has lofty eyes and a proud heart (Psalm 101:5). They agree with God that He caused the King of Assyria (and causes all wicked people) to do wicked things as surely as the woodsman causes the axe to chop, the sawyer causes the saw to move, and as one with a staff causes the staff to be lifted.

In Romans 9:11-22, the Holy Spirit through Paul appeals to God's absolute sovereignty, not some blasphemous standard of justice that man imposes on God. God can do whatever He wants with His creation, including making some people vessels of His blessing and making other people vessels of His wrath. It is really that simple. Jacob was a vessel of God's blessing, and Esau was a vessel of God's wrath. Moses was a vessel of God's blessing, and Pharaoh was a vessel of God's wrath. God made Jacob and Moses vessels of His blessing not based on anything they did, and He made Esau and Pharaoh vessels of His wrath not based on anything they did. Both election and reprobation are unconditional. If either were conditional, then God would not be sovereign. God would not be God. In addition, and just as importantly, if God did not actively cause all actions and events, including the sin of men and angels, then God would not be God. If anyone has a problem with that, like the Spurgeons and Hodges of the world, who say that God would be unjust to find fault with those who have not resisted His will, God's people say with Paul, WHO ARE YOU ANSWERING AGAINST GOD? WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE,

to talk back to and shake your fist at God? Shall the pot say to the potter, Why did you make me like this? Or does not the potter have authority over the clay, out of the one lump to make one pot to honor, and one to dishonor? Bow before the sovereign creator, the Lord of the universe, and confess that God is the Sovereign Potter who does whatever He pleases.

*"I [am] Jehovah, and [there is] none else; there is no God except Me. I will clothe you, though you do not know Me, that they may know from the rising of the sun, and to its going down, that [there is] none besides Me; I am Jehovah, and there is none else; forming light, and creating darkness; making peace, and creating evil. I, Jehovah, do all these things. Drop down from above, O heavens; and let the clouds pour down righteousness. Let the earth open and let salvation bear fruit; and let righteousness spring up together. I, Jehovah have created it. Woe [to] him who fights with the One who formed him! A potsherd among the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to its former, What are you making? Or does your work say, He [has] no hands? Woe to him who says to a father, What are you fathering? Or to the woman, What are you laboring over? So says Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, and the One who formed him, Do you ask Me of the things to come? Do you give command to Me about My sons, and about the work of My hands?" (Isaiah 45:5-11)*

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