

# Objections to Calvinism - 7. the Heathen World

by Randolph S. Foster

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*The speaker objects to the Calvinistic view of the heathen world, which holds that they are inevitably and necessarily damned, and argues that this view is contrary to Scripture and has horrific consequences.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 92:15, Psalm 145:17, Isaiah 45:9, Romans 2:8, Romans 4:15, Romans 5:13, James 1:13

**Topics:** "Calvinism Critique", "Sovereignty Of God"

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## Description

Randolph S. Foster passionately denounces the Calvinistic view of the heathen world, particularly focusing on the doctrine of reprobation and infant damnation. He argues against the belief that God predestines certain individuals to damnation, emphasizing the revolting nature of such a doctrine and its implications on God's justice and goodness. Foster highlights the inconsistency of this belief with Scripture, reason, and common sense, pointing out the lack of evidence to support it. He challenges the notion that God's sovereignty can be used to justify teachings that contradict His righteous and merciful nature.

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## Transcript

THE CALVINISTIC VIEW OF the heathen world, as it is peculiar in itself, and most appalling in its consequences, deserves a brief separate notice. It is thus stated in the Confession of Faith:

Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit yet they never truly come to Christ, and, therefore, cannot be saved. Much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of that religion they do profess; and to assert and maintain that they may, is very pernicious and to be detested.

Those cannot be saved who are totally destitute of revelation. Though the invitation which nature gives to seek God, be sufficient to render those without excuse who do not comply with it, yet it is not sufficient, even objectively, for salvation; for it does not afford that lively hope which maketh not ashamed, for this is only revealed by the Gospel; whence the Gentiles are said to have been without hope in the world. It does not show the true way to the enjoyment of God, which is no other than faith in Christ. It does not sufficiently instruct us about the manner in which we ought to worship and please God, and do what is acceptable to him. In short, this call by nature never did, nor is it even possible that it ever can, bring any to the saving knowledge of God; the Gospel alone is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. We are persuaded there is no salvation without Christ; no communion of adult persons with

Christ, but by faith in him; no faith in Christ without the knowledge of him; no knowledge but by the preaching of the Gospel; no preaching of the Gospel in the works of nature.

From this quotation I learn that the Presbyterian Church believes in the reprobation, and inevitable damnation, of the wide heathen world. This they have, as above quoted, made an article of their creed. It is not to be wondered at, that this horrible dogma has been kept as much as possible out of view--only introduced as necessity required. It is, however, sufficiently avowed, to inextricably convict the system. Dr. Rice, I find, has committed himself to its support. He says, "Vast multitudes have lived and died in Pagan darkness. Now, of what avail is it to say, that Christ designed, by his atonement, to save all men, when the truth is, that to vast multitudes he has not given the means of availing themselves of the provisions?" This quotation, if its meaning is at all discernible, teaches that Christ did not die with a design to save all men, and that the heathen world were among the number of those to be excluded from the provisions of his atonement. They were first excluded from the death of Christ; and then, in proof thereof, they were denied the means of making it available. Thus they were reprobated to death, and the means were appointed to secure the end. I suppose there will be no need that additional authorities be referred to, or quotations increased. These are sufficient, and it remains simply that we offer our objections; if, indeed, the doctrine is not so horrible in itself, as need no formal statement of its consequences, to render it detestable to all.

I object to it, in general, that it is revolting to every sensibility of the soul--to every feeling of humanity--to all that is generous in religion and reason. Together with other elements of the Calvinistic faith, it dishonors, it demonizes the God of the universe! Look at it. The whole heathen world inevitably, necessarily damned! Have you pondered this fearful proposition? What a wholesale destruction is here! Two-thirds of the human race damned every thirty years without the possibility of salvation, not including the vast array of reprobates in Christian countries! Not less than seven hundred millions souls damned every generation! All reprobates! Behold that dreadful column marching forward to the unavoidable doom! Twenty-one hundred millions, twice the whole population of the globe every hundred years--damned! Consigned to the vengeance of eternal fire to endure the woes of hell forever. Behold them as that column sinks away into the mouth of the burning but ever supplied with new recruits at the further end and thus moving from age to age--filling the insatiable jaws of the yawning gulf!

And, as you see that column move, and hear the roar of the devouring abyss, into whose flaming jaws they plunge, ask the question, why are all these damned? And you shall be answered by the Calvinist of the nineteenth century--by Dr. Rice, whom you may imagine as standing upon the verge of the devouring crater--it is the good pleasure of God--they are reprobates! They are damned, not because they are heathen--this is their misfortune, not their crime--but they are reprobates. They are damned, not because they are heathen--this their misfortune, not their crime--but they are reprobates. If they are damned at all, there never was a time, since God passed his eternal decree, when they might have been saved; for then their doom was fixed, according to the good pleasure of God! Do you ask for a reason for this appalling opinion? you are met with the satisfactory reply, "Who art thou that repliest against God?"

Add to this melancholy, dreadful procession all the descendants of Abraham and all the reprobates in nominally Christian countries. Stay until your vision takes in the utmost of the slowly-moving column of souls. Behold the cataract of immortal spirits dashing on perpetually down the steeps of the ever-yawning and insatiable abyss! Lo! that river as it stretches away through ages and generations--a river of immortal beings swallowed up in hell!

And now, pause and consider again, who are these? what is that hell into which they plunge? and why are they so damned? These are God's creatures, made and fashioned by himself! That abyss into which they are cast is the place of eternal torment! Stop--take in the thought, eternal. Eternal! No end! A million years are gone--they suffer on! As many millions of ages as there are grains of sand in the solid globe have passed--they suffer still! And still, as many myriads more as atoms in the universe, multiplied by every second that had passed before--and now, their woe is just begun! Not a second, compared with their eternal years, is passed!

And now, behold their woe--their death of deaths! To them there is no hope! No light will ever dawn upon their dungeon--no mercy will ever speak peace to their troubled spirits! Stay yet a moment--let us alight on yonder burning crag! And now, I ask, why these woes--why all these lost? I hear the answer; it comes from the Calvinists of the nineteenth century--it comes from Dr. Rice--they are reprobates--they were made for these flames! There never was a time when they had power to escape them! They dwell amid these waves of eternal wrath, not for any avoidable fault of theirs, but to the praise of God's glorious power! My spirit alternately shivers and burns at the horrid imputation! What has God done, that his rational creatures should so foully slander his adorable character? Pardon me; every power of my soul mutinies at the blasphemy.

Presbyterians, do you believe this? It is in your Confession, but is it in your hearts? Do you believe that God is such a being as this? Such a sentiment, if it were true, it seems to me, is sufficient to shroud the universe in endless mourning and pervade all intelligences with consternation and dread. To state it, is to execrate it. Reason, humanity, religion, turn from it with disgust and detestation.

1. But, particularly, I object to this doctrine; it is nowhere taught in the Scriptures. Not a single passage can be found, warranting even its inference upon correct principles of interpretation. This taken in connection with its horrid import, renders its belief, if not a crime against God, a reproach alike to humanity and Christianity.

2. I object to this doctrine, that it is absolutely contrary to express revelation--to its principles, and its direct teaching.

(1.) It is contrary to the principle that is laid down in the parable of the talents, "Where no law is, there is no transgression." (Romans 4:t5) "Sin is not imputed where there is no law." (Romans 5:13)

(2.) To express teaching. "For as many as have sinned without law shall, also, perish without law," &c. (Romans 2:8)

3. I object to the doctrine: if the whole heathen world are inevitably and necessarily damned, then they are damned without any fault of their own, or they are punished unavoidably--they are placed in circumstances where such damnation is the consequence of that over which they have not, and never did have, any control.

Are they damned for being heathen? But they are not responsible for this. They certainly had no part in electing whether they would be heathen or not. Is a man to be damned because he has the misfortune to be born in one region of the earth--not in another? Is such the law by which men are finally to be judged--such the principle upon which the momentous question of eternal destiny is to be fixed?

Are they to be damned because they have never been favored with the light of revelation? Are they responsible for this? Is it a sufficient reason for casting a man into hell, that he never heard of the existence of a Bible? Is this the ground upon which the God worshipped by Christians determines the fate of his creatures?

Are they to be damned because they have not exercised faith in the Son of God? Could they exercise faith in a being of whom they never heard? Had they power to believe on one they never knew? Is it sin in a man not to believe in Jesus, if he never heard of any such being--did not, and could not, know anything respecting him?

If for none of these, for what are the heathen all necessarily damned? Because they did not live up to the light they had? But can this be shown, that no heathen ever acted according to his best light? But when the condemnation of the heathen is placed upon the ground that they willfully transgressed the law they have, it abandons the whole Calvinian assumption of their unavoidable damnation; for, if they willfully transgressed, they might have obeyed; then they would have been saved, and so their damnation is not unavoidable.

Is not the reason of their damnation, according to Calvinism, simply this--they are reprobates? Before they were born, they were assigned their fate: not, indeed, from any foresight of anything in them; but because it was the sovereign pleasure of God that they should be damned! For some cause, sufficient to infinite Wisdom, but which he has not thought necessary to reveal to the human race, he saw that it would be best that they should be damned, and he, therefore, made them to this end. But, that he might seem to have an excuse for such monstrous cruelty, he first caused the parents of these reprobates to become depraved, and then, for this depravity, consigned them to destruction; but left them in the world long enough for them to manifest their depravity, and then, for this outward manifestation, executes upon them the vengeance of eternal fire.

And, that the outward manifestation might be infallibly secured, and so the excuse be certain, and the corresponding punishment inflicted, he consigned them to heathenism--a state, in which the Christian virtues were impossible, but in which they might, nay, certainly would, work all manner of uncleanness with greediness, and indulge in the utmost excess of vice; and so heathenism would be the means to justify damnation, as the end purposed of God from eternity. What admirable machinery is this! How infinite Malevolence arranged and contrived all, to the accomplishment of the appalling aim and end! Eternal damnation of an immortal and unoffending intelligence, the supreme, ultimate object! To secure this, as a next step, the fall of the first man, and so the corruption of his race. Then, all being corrupt, the reprobation of a large number on account thereof. Then, to justify the sentence of reprobation upon these, their consignment to heathenism, that they might, unavoidably, become personally vicious and sinful, that the universe might suppose their damnation to be on account of their sins and so God escape the odium of cruelty, at the same time that it was all fixed and executed according to his will. Horrid! horrid! Heathenism, in order to previously appointed damnation!

4. If this doctrine be true, there is neither justice nor goodness in God. We assert this awful consequence without qualification--without timidity. With us, no proposition can be more certainly true than this. We must learn to believe black is white and white is black, when we can believe that God is a just being at the same time consigning millions of beings to the flames of hell for that over which they never had, and never could have, any control--for that which was absolutely unavoidable. When I can believe that a God of goodness is capable of such conduct, I shall be prepared to embrace any absurdity, any contradiction

however revolting. No language can express my horror, my detestation of such a sentiment.

Yet such is the inevitable consequences of the Calvinistic theory--a consequence like a horrid ghost, haunting it at every turn. It flows from reprobation--from limited atonement---from the sinner's inability--from the unavoidable damnation of the heathen world. With each, with all of them, the justice and greatness of God is in eternal conflict, if it is unjust and unmerciful to damn a being forever, for not performing impossibilities; which, who, that has the feelings of humanity, not to say the benevolence of a Christian, can doubt? If this doctrine be true, why, then, shall I doubt the damnation of idiots and infants? Is the one more repulsive than the other? If a heathen may justly be damned for not having faith in Christ, of whom he never heard, why may not my innocent, unconscious babe be damned, by the same Moloch, for a similar reason; the injustice, the fiendish cruelty, in the one case would be no greater than in the other.

5. I object to this doctrine, that it claims our belief, not only against evidence the most convincing--evidence derived from the Word and principles of revelation, as well as from the reason and common sense of mankind--but, also, without a shadow of proof to support it derived from any quarter. It ought not to be believed if there were no evidence to the contrary, because there is none in its support; but to ask for it the credence of reasonable and Christian men, under these circumstances, when reason and Christianity equally and absolutely condemn it, and nothing supports it, can be little short of madness; it is preposterous in the extreme. If there was conflicting evidence--if anything could be said in its favor--if any solitary reason could be urged in its support---but to ask of men to believe one of the most revolting and blasphemous dogmas that falsehood and fanaticism ever invented, without any reason, and in opposition to the spontaneous judgment of the race, and to the Word of God, and to the nature and fitness of things is a species of boldness which scarcely knows a parallel.

6. If this doctrine is true, involving as it does the justice and goodness of God and clothing him in the opposite and dreaded character of cruelty and maliciousness, it must unsettle the confidence of the universe in him and cause him only to be hated and loathed by every rational being. Let such a sentiment once prevail, let the idea obtain that the Almighty sways such a government and is actuated by such attributes, and heaven and hell will differ but in name. Dismay and despair mingled with rage and detestation will be the universal and only consciousness. Angels will join their curses with devils, and mute nature if possible would reverberate the merited anathema from sphere to sphere.

Such a conviction must overwhelm creation in anarchy; for it removes the only basis of order---confidence in the great Parent and Sovereign of all, and persuasion that his government is established in justice and truth. Let this be removed, and what remains but curses and death? Who could reverence and love--who could adore and worship such a God? None but devils and fiends, who should recognize in his hated and baleful character their own abhorred attributes infinitely surpassed. Thus, the doctrine would unavoidably anarchize and subvert the whole government of God. The fact itself would be entirely competent to such a result, but, much more so, the principles upon which it is founded, or from which it emanated. Let anyone be at the pains to study the philosophy of his own nature--of his own mind--and he will not fail to come to the same conclusion. He will see that such a result is legitimate to such a cause with respect to himself, and so with respect to all other beings similarly constituted.

But why shall I add reasons upon this point? Is it possible that humanity can be so perverted as to require it? Is it not so manifestly detestable, that at its bare mention all nature spontaneously rises up to curse it? Where in the universe will it find an argument--an advocate? Let it be stripped naked and stand forth in its

own true character without meretricious drapery, without mask or veil of any kind. And who shall come from heaven, or earth, or hell, to plead its cause? Who but the father of lies, who lives to blaspheme, and who might dare to assert even this as the very climax of his infernal blasphemies?

But, Presbyterians, you do not believe this. It is in your creed, but you have abandoned it. I charge not the dreadful blasphemy upon you; if any of you still cling to it, it is without understanding consequences. What I charge you with is, inconsistency in holding on to and supporting such a creed, and so propagating such sentiments. Be careful how you do this; you see--you cannot but see--the appalling consequences. I have named them in candor, with all plainness, but in love. Do consider them in the same spirit--do not take offense at their frightful and dreadful import but simply ask, are they true? and then decide accordingly. And will the Lord help you, and finally bring us where truth will shine as the day, and error disappear forever!

Infant Damnation.--It is deemed proper, in connection with the foregoing, to say something on the subject of infant damnation. This horrible doctrine has, from time immemorial, been charged upon Calvinists, and, certainly, not without abundant evidence. But it is now so universally disclaimed, that, we suppose, a reformation has been wrought upon this point. This much good has come of the manner in which our fathers exposed the horrors of the system; and, as we delight to see error renounced, we congratulate our friends on so much evidence of their conversion. All dying infants belong to the elect! This is what I suppose them now to believe. But I cannot, to save me, tell how, or why, they believe this; unless it be to escape the odium of avowing an opposite sentiment.

But, now, what I want to bring out distinctly is this, that, in renouncing the doctrine of infant damnation, they have not relieved the system a particle. It still labors under an odium, as horrid and detestable, as though it professed the old dogma. Though it now believes that no infants are damned it still believes in what is precisely the same! Nay, it believes what is transcendently worse and more horrible! Its difficulties are not diminished, they still press it with unabated force.

They believe that those who shall finally perish, were reprobated, from eternity, to destruction--that they were passed by in the decree of election, and, as a consequence, consigned to eternal damnation. Now, mark: this reprobation took place long ages before they were born. It excluded them from heaven; it consigned them to hell--irrevocably, unchangeably! This, millions of years before they had an existence. As soon as they were conceived, they were damned; when born, they were under irreversible sentence--they were virtually destroyed!

And, now, observe, further: the cause of this reprobation and consequent damnation, was their simple, inherited corruption. It was what belonged to them in their conception--what was engendered in the womb--what was given to them when being was given to them. They were not reprobated for what they would be and do, as foreseen of God; but he passed them by, or reprobated them, for their inherited corruption alone, or what he saw them to be in Adam. Thus they were reprobated without any actual personal sin. That is, they were consigned to damnation when they were not a span long--unborn infants--and for what belonged to them as such, without reference to what they would be. Is not this infant damnation? Does it not show that every reprobate was damned, in the purpose of God, and inevitably, when, as yet he was an unborn infant, and for what he was at that period? What else is infant damnation? Can anyone tell me? In what does this differ from actually casting an infant, gasping its first breath, into the eternal gulf? But this, as abundantly shown, all Calvinists are bound to believe; they cannot escape it.

But I have said this is worse, in connection with other points of the system, than simple infant damnation. I repeat it. A moment's attention will show you the correctness of the position. The doctrine is that certain persons were reprobated to certain and unavoidable damnation when they were born--before it. Well, now, observe, further: they believe that every actual sin will increase the torments of the damned--that for every abuse of mercies enjoyed, blessings offered, their punishment will be enhanced and increased.

Look for a moment, if you have the moral nerve, at the compound horrors of the system in the light of these points. Every sin will magnify the torments of the damned. Now, why were they permitted to live to commit personal sins and thus increase their torments? Why? Not that they might repent; not that they might turn and live. This was eternally impossible. Why, then, were they permitted to live? For this--read it with dismay--that they might have an opportunity to increase their damnation a million-fold--that they might prepare for themselves a deeper, hotter, more awful hell! It could have been a mercy in God to have sent them to hell when they breathed their first sweet breath upon a mother's bosom! Monster of cruelty that he was, why did he not then send them out of life to a mitigated perdition? Why did he offer them mercies when he knew they could not accept them? Why did he strive with them early and late? Why did he invite them to life, when he knew it was absolutely impossible for them to comply, and when he also knew that for every such offer rejected their damnation would be greatly magnified? Why this? Was it not cruel in the extreme? Would it not have been an act of transcendent generosity, Godlike compassion, to have actually, as he did in his purpose, sent them all to hell in their infancy?

Thus it appears, that the doctrine of actual infant damnation would greatly relieve, instead of increase the horrors of Calvinism. Is there any possible escape from this conclusion? If there is, I cannot see it. I wish I could. Dear reader, do not turn in anger away from this fearful imputation. Ponder it; see if it is not true. I know it is most dreadful and terrific. I tremble to write it. When I reflect what it makes of the character of God, I shudder! Ye angels, who dwell in light, and see with open vision, is the God of your rapturous worship such a being as this? Nay, would not such an imputation cover your heavens with dismay, and fill your seraphic bosoms with consternation and dread? Does not the universe, from the seraphim to the womb, pronounce it false and blasphemous?

Sovereignty of God.--This subject, though of sufficient importance to claim a separate and distinct notice, must, for the present, be disposed of by a brief notice, in connection with the foregoing.

In Calvinism, all things are resolved into sovereignty. No difficulty so great, but the sovereignty of God explains it. No absurdity, or contradiction, or blasphemy so appalling, but here is its defense: "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight." "Who art thou that repliest against God?" "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?"

That God is sovereign, no one disputes. That he has a right to rule and does rule in heaven and earth is not even questioned. But we protest, in the name of reason and religion and for the honor of God, against appealing to his sovereignty for the purpose of propagating slanders against his character--against so understanding and construing it as to bring it in conflict with his justice and other attributes of his nature. He has no rights inconsistent with his own glorious nature--he has no sovereignty that can act adversely to his glorious perfections. He is a sovereign. But he is a sovereign God, not a sovereign devil. His is not an irresponsible, blind, capricious sovereignty. His rights and his rule are not resolvable into mere arbitrary acts of will. He rules in righteousness, and wisdom, and truth. And what conflicts with these, God claims no right to--he has no right to; to say to the contrary would be to dishonor him.

The sovereignty of God, therefore, never should be quoted in support of, or excuse for, what is manifestly contrary to these. He has no such sovereignty. When anything is charged to him which requires such a supposition, it is false and slanderous to God. Here is where Calvinism commits one of its greatest practical blunders--a misapprehension of the nature of sovereignty! It assumes that such and such things are so--revealed in the Bible; and, it matters not how horrible the assumption, it holds itself under no obligation to consider the consequences, however glaringly false, and inconsistent, and dreadful. It is all referred to God's sovereignty. It is all answered in a breath: "Even so, Father!" Shame on such trifling and profanation of holy things! Suppose ye that the God of the universe feels himself honored with such sacrifice? Does he esteem such a defense--a defense which demonizes his character to illustrate his sovereignty? No, no, it is a mistake! God's sovereignty explains no principle that is manifestly wrong--sanctions no fact that is inconsistent with justice. "The Judge of the whole earth will do right;" he cannot do wrong. His sovereignty gives him no such power.

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