

Is God double-minded?

The historical argument between Arminians and Calvinists chiefly rests upon certain Bible verses that appear to state contradictory things about God's desire. Some verses state that God has decreed reprobation (the eternal choice of some to condemnation) while others appear to suggest that God wants to save all men.

We must be careful what we say in this matter because our statements inevitably paint a picture of the God we worship. The two sides of the argument posit two completely different gods, one who desires to save all but fails in that desire; another who does not desire to save all but chooses only some to salvation as part of a specific plan. Thus the Arminian god is a god who is powerless to fulfil his earnest desires regarding his own creation; his hands are tied by the free will of the men he made. The Calvinist God is a supreme being who sovereignly determines who will be saved and who will be condemned from all eternity.

There are some who mistakenly try to unify these two opposing concepts by a number of confused and contradictory proposals. Most of these teachers are Amyraldian, a self-contradictory theological system that tried to unify Calvinism and Lutheran universalism dating back 400 years or so. The most common proposal is to suggest that God has two wills (in itself a blasphemy since it denies God's unity). Thus they teach that God has a secret will that predestines all men, but a revealed will that desires the salvation of all men. Scripture knows nothing of this contradiction. The key problem is that it suggests that God is double-minded, wanting something that he has decreed will not happen. Such weakness cannot be attributed to the God of the Bible.

The texts in view

We cannot look into all the verses relative to this argument, but will mention certain key texts.

Predestination of the reprobate

The LORD has made all for himself, yes, even the wicked for the day of doom. Prov 16:4

Everyone who is called by my name, whom I have created for my glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him. ... This people I have formed for myself; they shall declare my praise. Isa 43:7, 21

For the wicked are reserved for the day of doom; they shall be brought out on the day of wrath. Job 21:30

God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. Rm 9:22

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. 1 Pt 2:8

By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. ... the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment. 2 Pt 2:3, 9

For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation. Jude 1:4

There is no argument about this. These verses clearly reveal that the condemnation of the wicked was planned in eternity at an individual level; certain people were chosen for salvation in eternity (Eph 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13 etc.), the remainder were left in their sins for a demonstration of God's wrath and judgment. If you defend eternal election of those saved, a very clear scriptural doctrine, then logic insists that the remainder are not decreed to be saved. It is impossible to alter this conclusion without cutting many verses out of the Bible.

But this conclusion is necessary if we are to honour a sovereign God. The God of the Bible has a plan and purpose and is in control of all history and all men at all times. Any conception less than this demeans the God we are called to worship. If God does not control the destiny of all men, then he cannot control anything. A sovereign holy God, of necessity, predestines his creation and thus determines the future of all men from the beginning.

Supposed universalism

[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Tim 2:4

For to this *end* we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is *the* Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe. 1 Tim 4:10

The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. 2 Pt 3:9

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. 1 Jn 2:2

Notice the repercussions of the argument which states that these texts must mean that God loves all men and desires the salvation of all men:

- It makes Bible writers contradict themselves. Having said earlier that God reserves the unjust for condemnation (e.g. 2 Pt 2:9), it makes them say later that God desires the salvation of these same men (2 Pt 3:9). This is absurd.
- It ignores the context of what the writer has said. This context is the immediate verses, the rest of the book, the rest of this writer's works and the writer's theology. Where a writer, such as Paul, has clearly stated that the reprobate are created for condemnation (e.g. Rm 9:22), it makes him later say that God desires the salvation of these same condemned men (e.g. 1 Tim 2:4). This is absurd.
- It ignores the clear statements made by God that the reprobate are condemned from eternity. It thus makes scripture (and thus God) contradict itself.
- It damages the truth of the attributes of God and is thus blasphemous. For instance, if God saves all men, then why are all men not saved? Why has God failed to do what he says he will do? If God loves all men why are so many in hell? If God desires the salvation of all why did he only decree the salvation of a few (Matt 20:16, 22:14). If Jesus died for all, then he failed to save men that he died for and his blood was wasted. The false argument teaches contradiction, mutability and powerlessness in God.
- In most cases the argument goes too far. If the universalism is accepted in the disputed verses, it goes way beyond Biblical theology and teaches outright universalism proper – that there is no hell and all are saved. This is too much even for the disputants, but the problem is usually ignored.

What is the answer to the problem

The answer is very simple; where there is an apparent contradiction to previous verses or Biblical theology, the confusing verse must be very carefully exegeted. This is a basic rule of Biblical interpretation, but one that is constantly ignored by supposed teachers who proclaim popular heresies on the basis of very superficial reading.

Every single instance of a supposed universalism is easily understood if one takes some care to investigate the passage properly, checking the Greek meaning of words, Greek grammar and comparing the writer's context and purpose.

Conclusion

God is not double-minded. He is the sovereign, purposing, immutable God who predetermines all things according to his counsel and good pleasure. The verses that supposedly imply a universalism in God's decree do not mean this; if they did they would make God weak, confused, changeable and capricious. Those supposed Christians who embrace these notions of universalism need to realise that they are in danger of blasphemy, and certainly contradict clear scriptures which teach that God chooses the reprobate in eternity according to his purpose. While this may be uncomfortable to men, we have no option but to obey scripture and believe the truth. Anything less is idolatry, maintaining a false idea about God and lying about his plan.

For further information see:

- *Analysis of the universalistic texts.*
- *Does God have two wills.*

By the same author.

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