

# Supralapsarianism

Vincent Cheung

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PO Box 15662, Boston, MA 02215, USA

<http://www.vincentcheung.com>

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As for the purpose of man's creation, the Bible teaches that man was created by the will of God for the glory of God:

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and *by your will* they were created and have their being. (Revelation 4:11)

I will say to the north, "Give them up!" and to the south, "Do not hold them back." Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created *for my glory*, whom I formed and made. (Isaiah 43:6-7)

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be *for the praise of his glory*. (Ephesians 1:11-12)

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will *gain glory for myself* through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD. (Exodus 14:4)

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this *to make the riches of his glory known* to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (Romans 9:22-24)

Some people suggest that God's nature of love compelled him to create objects of affection to satisfy a need in him to express himself in fellowship, generosity, and sacrifice. However, it is heretical to say that God needs anything. As Paul says in Acts 17:25, "And he is not served by human hands, *as if he needed anything*, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." God is eternally self-existent, and therefore also self-sufficient. Since man is not eternal, but has a time of origin before which he did not exist, and since "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8), if ever God could exist without man, he could have continued to exist without man forever. Therefore, the creation of man was not due to any need in God. Moreover, even before the creation of man, God had already created the angels, and before that, the members of the Trinity loved one another. Even if love needs expression, God still did not need to create man.

Rather, as the above passages indicate, God created the elect and the reprobates because he willed to manifest himself and to be glorified through them. Although the reprobates

do not consciously glorify God, he glorifies himself through them by what he causes them to do and what he does with them. He is glorified by the elect in their salvation and by the reprobates in their damnation.

This leads us to consider the order of the eternal decrees. If the items in God's plan were to be set forth in the order in which he decided them, what would this order be? Of course, God is eternal and omniscient, so that there is not a point in his thinking when he does not know everything or when he has not decided everything; therefore, when we speak of order in the mind of God, we are referring to logical order and not chronological order.

The decree for God to be glorified comes first, and to achieve this, the decree is made that Christ would subdue all things and deliver them to be Father. In order to achieve this, the decree is made that Christ would save a chosen people out of fallen humanity to become his fellow heirs. In order to achieve this, the decree is made that fallen humanity would be divided into the elect and the reprobates. In order to achieve this, the decree is made that humanity would fall into sin. Then, in order to achieve this, the decree is made that God would create humanity. This is the order of purpose and design. The order is reversed in execution, so that it begins with creation and culminates in God's glory.

We can illustrate this with an analogy from human life. Suppose my purpose is to arrive at the office. In order to achieve this, the decision is made that I should drive my car toward that location. In order to achieve this, the decision is made that I should get into my car. In order to achieve this, the decision is made that I should get out of my house. In order to achieve this, the decision is made that I should get dressed. In order to achieve this, the decision is made that I should get out of bed. The final purpose comes first in the order of decisions, and the first thing that I must do in order to achieve this purpose comes last in the order. The order is reversed in execution, so that the last item in the order of purpose and design now becomes the first item. Thus I must first get out of bed, and then get dressed, and then get out of my house, and so on. The final result is that I arrive at the office, and my purpose is accomplished.

The nature of purpose and design necessitates a supralapsarian scheme of the eternal decrees, in which the decree of election and reprobation appears before the decree for the fall of humanity, and in which the decree for the fall of humanity appears before the decree for the creation of humanity. The infralapsarian scheme places the decree of election and reprobation after the decree for the fall of humanity. One reason for this is to arrange the decrees so that the decree for reprobation applies to actual sinners, whereas the supralapsarian would say that God decrees the fall of humanity so that he would accomplish the decree of reprobation.

Supralapsarianism is the biblical and rational order. Infralapsarianism confuses logical conception with historical execution, so that not only is it contrary to fact, but it makes nonsense of some of the divine decrees. For any given decree, it leaves the purpose of the decree unspecified until the next decree. But then there is no reason for the present one,

so that it becomes arbitrary. Thus infralapsarianism is blasphemous by implication, since it insults God's intelligence and denies his rationality.

Infralapsarians retort that supralapsarianism undermines God's justice, but to assert this they smuggle in a private and unbiblical standard of justice, one that rejects God's absolute sovereignty and violates strict logical inference, and then evaluate the eternal decrees by it. Their attempt to defend God's subservience to a human standard of justice turns out to be a subversion against his sovereign and divine justice, and a denial of even a simple ability for logical planning and arrangement in the mind of God. Hence their objection commits another act of blasphemy.

Louis Berkhof, in explaining some of the objections against supralapsarianism, writes, "Notwithstanding its seeming pretensions, it does not give a solution of the problem of sin. It would do this, if it dared to say that God decreed to bring sin into the world *by His own direct efficiency*."<sup>1</sup> But I dare say this. In fact, I dare not deny it, because if I do, I would be saying that some other power has the ability to generate and control sin by its own "direct efficiency." Handing over divine power to humans and demons, this is the blasphemy of dualism.

Berkhof continues, "Some Supralapsarians, it is true, do represent the decree as the efficient cause of sin, but yet do not want this to be interpreted in such a way that God becomes the author of sin."<sup>2</sup> But I do affirm that God is the sovereign and righteous author of sin, for the same reason that I just stated. To deny that God is the author of sin necessarily implies some form of dualism, and this amounts to a rejection of biblical theism. The result, again, is blasphemy.

But Berkhof persists: "It is pointed out that the supralapsarian scheme is illogical in that it makes the decree of election and preterition refer to non-entities, that is, to men who do not exist, except as bare possibilities, even in the mind of God; who do not yet exist in the divine decree and are therefore not contemplated as created, but only as creatable."<sup>3</sup> This is a perplexingly stupid objection. In a logical arrangement, the final purpose is first conceived, and then each succeeding decree is made to accomplish the one that comes before. Thus of course the decree that concerns the creation of men would be preceded by a decree that requires the creation of men to accomplish but still represents men as bare possibilities. A woman can decide to put on a beautiful dress for her high school reunion before she buys the dress. In fact, it is because she decides to wear a beautiful dress to the reunion that she then decides to buy one.

Infralapsarianism confuses the order of purpose and design with the order of execution. It complains that in supralapsarianism, God decrees the identities of the reprobates without a view to their sinfulness. However, the Bible explicitly asserts this view, that reprobation is unconditional, and that God created some people for salvation and all others for

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 2003), p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

damnation "out of the same lump" (Romans 9:21). The reprobates did not create themselves; God created them, and created them as reprobates.

Under infralapsarianism, since the decree of election and reprobation comes after the decree for the fall of humanity, this means that at the point when God decrees the fall of humanity, he does so without knowing why he decrees it or what he would do about it. If he has redemption in mind, and thus the distinction between the saved and the damned, so that he knows why he is decreeing the fall of humanity, then at that point he has already decided on redemption, and thus this becomes supralapsarianism. This means that under infralapsarianism, at the point when God decrees the fall of humanity, he does it just so he wishes humanity to fall.

Infralapsarians hide behind their human standard of justice, that God must designate as reprobates only those who are already guilty, but is it better for God to decree that all of humanity should fall into sin without any reason for it and without any thought of redemption? On the other hand, although supralapsarians would say that God could indeed decree the fall of humanity just because he wishes it, in their scheme, God decrees the fall of humanity so that there would be sinners for him to save and to damn.

The major objection against the supralapsarian scheme amounts to an opposition to the idea that God could designate the identities of the reprobates before he decrees their fall into sin. In supralapsarianism, God first decrees that there would be reprobates, and then he decrees the fall *so that* these reprobates could materialize. Again, the objection is against unconditional reprobation. To put it another way, the objection is against God's absolute sovereignty, or the fact that God is God.

Then, the objection against unconditional reprobation is that it is unjust – that is, not according to any standard stated in Scripture, but according to man's sinful intuition. He is uncomfortable with the idea! In any case, by the time God *executes* punishment upon the reprobates, they have already fallen into sin, so that God does not in fact punish anyone who is sinless and innocent, that is, except when he caused the suffering of Christ. Even then, the punishment inflicted was just in God's mind because Christ was bearing the guilt of the chosen ones (Isaiah 53:10).

Again, the objection against supralapsarianism really amounts to a denial that God is God, and that he is not a man or a mere creature. Some people say they believe in God, but they do not in fact believe. This is a major culprit behind false theological systems such as Liberalism, Arminianism, and inconsistent Calvinism. There is in fact no biblical or rational objection against supralapsarianism. People simply do not wish to allow God total sovereignty over his own creation. Once we abandon false and man-centered assumptions, the offense of absolute divine sovereignty vanishes. Whether we will abandon these assumptions is another question. The work of the Spirit in sanctification is needed for us to relinquish all sense of human autonomy and man-centered thinking, including the relative and illusory type of "freedom" that appears so frequently in the popular form of Calvinism.

As with many such controversies, the real question in this disagreement between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism is whether we are willing to "let" God be God *on his own terms*.<sup>4</sup> A consistent supralapsarianism is the only position that honors God, Scripture, and logic. And it is the only God-centered position. One of the things that we learn from the doctrine is that God actively decreed and caused the fall of humanity as one of the steps by which he would fulfill his eternal plan. Sin was not an accident, and redemption was not a mere reaction on the part of God. As the Scripture says, "The LORD works out *everything* for his own ends – even the wicked for a day of disaster" (Proverbs 16:4). Thus supralapsarianism results in praise and reverence toward God.

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<sup>4</sup> Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Commentary on Ephesians, The Author of Sin, and Blasphemy and Mystery*. Also, Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1998), p. 479-502.