

6. "This doctrine destroys free will, and teaches a fatalism in human history and human destiny."

This objection is reminiscent of the views of James Moffat of Glasgow, as excerpted earlier in these Class Notes. Four times he represents the Reformed doctrine of predestination as "fatalistic" or as a "fatalism". But what is "fatalism"?

Charles Hodge, in his discussion of the Decrees of God, draws an important series of distinctions between fatalism and foreordination. He states:

"It is objected, in the fourth place, that the doctrine of decrees amounts to the heathen doctrine of fate. There is only one point of agreement between these doctrines. They both assume absolute certainty in the sequence of all events. They differ, however, not only as to the ground of that certainty, the nature of the influence by which it is secured, and the ends therein contemplated, but also in their natural effects on the reason and conscience of men.

"The word Fatalism has been applied to different systems, some of which admit, while others deny or ignore the existence of a supreme intelligence. But in common usage it designates the doctrine that all events come to pass under the operation of a blind necessity. This system differs from the Scriptural doctrine of foreordination, (1.) In that it excludes the idea of final causes. There is no end to which all things tend, and for the accomplishment of which they exist. According to the Scriptural doctrine, all things are ordained and controlled to accomplish the highest conceivable or possible good. (2.) In that according to Fatalism the sequence of events is determined by an unintelligent concatenation of causes and effects. According to the doctrine of decrees, that sequence is determined by infinite wisdom and goodness. (3.) Fatalism admits of no distinction between necessary and free causes. The acts of rational agents are as much determined by a necessity out of themselves as the operations of nature. According to the Scriptures, the freedom and responsibility of man are fully preserved. The two systems differ, therefore, as much as a machine differs from a man; or as the actions of infinite intelligence, power, and love differ from the law of gravitation. (4.) The one system, therefore, leads to the denial of all moral distinctions, and to stolid insensibility or despair. The other to a sedulous regard to the will of an infinitely wise and good ruler, all whose acts are determined by a sufficient reason; and to filial confidence and submission."

-- *Systematic Theology* Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952 [reprint of 1871 edition]), pp. 548-549.

But what about the charge that this doctrine destroys free will?

This charge raises an obvious prior question: what does the objector mean by the term "free will"? This question is of such enormous scope that in this context we must limit our response. A few quotations may serve to concentrate our thinking, however. Charles Hodge, for example, makes some important distinctions between "free will" and free agency in