

# **PREDESTINATION – A CHRISTIAN’S HOPE OR GOD’S UNFAIRNESS?**

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## **Introduction**

This is God’s eternal purpose of deliverance of those He has chosen through Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of predestination is one that brings several questions to the minds of Christians. These questions sometimes affect our whole attitude to life and salvation, and towards our trust and joy in God. But the doctrine of predestination is simple to state. It is eternity. God has chosen some for salvation through Christ, but has left others to their own choice of rebellion against Him. On some, He has mercy, drawing them to Christ; others He has hardened, and blinded by Satan, whose plans they willingly fulfil. The basic concept of Christian faith is that God is gracious, as clearly revealed in the Old Testament (Ex 34:6-7). The love of God is the motive for salvation, since God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16).

The Bible teaches clearly, and common sense confirms, that God is sovereign over all aspects of His creation and their characteristics. He is also sovereign over death, so that He can bring back from death to life. We are, by nature, children of wrath, under God’s eternal condemnation of death. The dead cannot save themselves, but a way is open through Jesus Christ, so we must be born by God’s power of His Spirit. The doctrine of predestination is simply the consequence of man’s nature (death in trespasses and sins), and of God’s nature (His goodness and mercy). He exercises His sovereignty and power in choosing people, who are dead in their sins, to be His sons and daughters, according to His own wise, loving, and righteous will. Predestination is basically that God has chosen us to be His people, and confirmed the image of Jesus Christ in us (Rom 8:29-30).

## **How Could We Know of Predestination?**

There are very many passages in the scriptures that teach the doctrine of election and predestination. One illustration, which Paul wrote, is that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love, having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself according to the good pleasure of His will, to the end that we should be the praise of His glory, we who had before hoped in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:4-12). Paul also tells us in 2 Thess 2:13 that we ought always to thank God, because, from the beginning, God chose us to be saved, through the sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth. In Rom 8:28-29, Paul wrote, "All things work together for good, to them that are called according to God's purpose. For those whom He had already chosen, He also set apart to be conformed to the image of His Son." Paul wrote most fully on the doctrine of predestination in Romans 9. God's choice is not conditional upon anything in those who are predestined.

## **What is Human Understanding of Predestination?**

The doctrine of predestination gives two problems. One, an intellectual problem, and the other, an ethical problem. The intellectual problem is the relationship of our wills, which we know to be real wills, with the sovereign will of God, who chooses us for salvation. The ethical problem is the question of the fairness of God's choice: why choose one and not the other? Let us look at each problem separately to see the different problems.

### **1. The Intellectual Problem – Relationship of God's Will and Our Wills**

This problem of the relationship of the supreme will of Almighty God, and the real will of humans is a difficult one, as there is no parallel in our experience to help us understand it. Our imagination finds difficulty in working out how our human will claims to be a real and true will within God's sovereign will. For example, a faithful Christian prays, with complete confidence in God for guidance, through the intricacies of life, and so, in this, he follows numerous spiritual injunctions to commit his way to the

Lord, who will direct his paths. As the Christian looks back over his life, he can see clearly that God has fulfilled, and is fulfilling, His promise.

At no point is the Christian conscious that his own natural God-given faculties are suspended, in order that the guidance might be piped to him. Every step of the road is his step, every decision is his, through the particular gifts of intellectual reflection and decision, or, perhaps, through the influences of friends and their intellectual wisdom. God is sovereign, yet the reality of our nature and our free will is not infringed. The Lord gave and the Lord took away (Job 1:21). From the historical point of view, the crucifixion was just an ordinary event, not distinguishable from any other human event. But the Bible sees every detail as pre-ordained by God's determination. What is true of Calvary is true of every event, everywhere throughout human history.

The problem of the relationship of God's will to the created will is not solved by denying God's sovereignty, as though, through the creation of human wills and evil wills, He had delimited an area within His creation, over which He had given up control. God never limits Himself in any way at all. Even the Bible knows nothing of such an idea. We could be wrong to say that our own wills are free, because this will is God's natural will for us. We can't say our will is independent of God's will. We may think of Adam's sinning as rebelling against God to become sovereign himself, but no creature can ever become sovereign over against God the Creator. God retains sovereignty, humans remain true people, enslaved now to the devil, against our nature, instead of our true Master, the Lord. God controls His creation, and He remains in control. He is also recreating the will of man, and frees it from sin, according to His own decision and choice. God's sovereignty is only in accordance with the nature of His creation.

Most Christians don't differ from each other on God's real guidance and protection. There's a strong controversy about God's sovereignty, in the transformation of a rebellious sinner into a son of God, and to a new creation in Christ, and his perseverance to the end. We know that we could choose for ourselves such worldly desires at any time and fall away, and be lost eternally. But, by the grace of God, we don't, for the warnings are the way

by which God saves us from our sin, and continues the salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus, that we experience by obedience. Faith and obedience are the work of our own personality, but are also the work of God in the hearts of believers. When God calls His elect, and brings them to glory, He does not need to suspend our natures or overrule our will, but He accomplishes His purposes, determined before the creation of the world, through our free wills. We must, therefore, rely on His faithfulness to keep us to the end, according to His promises. The warning is true, and the promise is true.

Christian perseverance rests on the character of God. The assurance of our salvation rests on that character being known to us through God's promises of faithfulness. Christians misunderstand that full assurance of final perseverance is complete. It is also a mistake to believe that the will is free against its own Creator. There are attitudes of rebellion in man, but these are not true in reality, because we can't be free against our God, nor should we wish it. As sinners, we are far from free in this respect, and are enslaved to our passions, and led captive by evil. Restoration in Christ is where we become free in the only way a creature can be free – that is, free to follow its God-given nature, and not free against the *Giver*, when truly responding to the grace of God.

## **2. The Ethical Problem –Questions of Fairness of God's Choice**

The ethical problem with the doctrine of predestination arises from our God-given sense of fairness. Fairness, righteousness, and justice are the bases for all our relationships with one another. If God is to be fair and just to rebels, we all deserve to receive punishment. But mercy intervenes, and mercy is apart from the realm of justice. Mercy is that which is held out, and given to, those who have absolutely no claim on it. Mercy is also in a completely different category from justice. The Bible constantly testifies that salvation and eternal life are God's gift. A gift is at the complete disposal of the *giver*, that he may give, or he need not give. The same is true of mercy. It is completely at the disposal of the merciful. The giver may give it, or he may not. If salvation is deserved, it ceases to be a gift, then it becomes entirely a reward, from the beginning to the end. The character of

salvation, as a gift, and the merciful provision of salvation, are bound up with the doctrine of God's complete freedom in election and predestination.

To understand the doctrine of predestination correctly, we should stand out, from the standpoint of a Christian, who is experiencing and enjoying fellowship with His heavenly Father in the Holy Spirit, through the forgiveness of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing in ourselves which deserves God's favour, but only God's condemnation. Our relationship to God is God's gift, and it springs entirely from God's initiative. Jesus said to His disciples, you didn't choose Me, but I chose you (John 15:16). God chose us from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification by the Spirit, and belief in the truth (2 Thess 2:13). As Christians, we can experience our status as adopted sons of God, yet all the glory and the thankfulness of this state of things must be given to God.

One clear illustration of God's sovereignty in salvation is in the life of the apostle Paul. He was a man totally immersed in his prejudices. He arrested and imprisoned believers. He didn't seem a bright prospect for conversion, but his conversion resulted from an extraordinary intervention by God on his behalf. He was converted, because the risen Lord Himself chose him to be "a chosen vessel" (Acts 9:15). The initiative is wholly with God. This must be so, because, in ourselves, we are blinded, and cannot see the truth. For when a man is in Christ, Paul says, he is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). The Bible frequently says that "repentance is the gift of God". So, if anyone repents, it is God's gift to him, and we Christians must know this. The doctrine of predestination is full of comfort, because it is a natural thing from God. The scriptures teach that, for anyone who holds his belief firmly, it has an effect in releasing his spirit from anxiety and stress. People, who believe and receive salvation, reconciliation, adoption, and the Holy Spirit's indwelling, are made inheritors of God's Kingdom, for God is righteous, wise, loving, and has mercy on whom He wills.

Although there are those who do not accept God's message, or gospel, and who reject and rebel against the offer of salvation, yet the offer of salvation for unbelievers is still from God, because He is merciful. We can weep over them when they don't listen to our preaching, but God's

predestination remains. However, we, as the Lord's servants and messengers, must gather His people (Acts 18:10), that is, Christ's elect (Matt 24:31), according to God's eternal purpose, which the scriptures reveal to be an infinite blessing to the world.

The Bible teaches the doctrine of predestination, and so the Christian ought to embrace it without hesitation, for it is true, and we should adjust our attitude in conformity with it. Rom 8:28-30 is a wonderful passage, "and we know that in all things God works together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose". We can notice the *golden chain of blessing*: those whom He predestined He also called, those whom He called, He also justified, and, having justified them, He also glorified them. Nothing is missing, no link is broken, all attain glory.

When considering the doctrine of predestination, we must exclude from our thoughts any concept that God's predestination is based upon merit. Our salvation is the result of God's mercy, and mercy is always unmerited. We must remember that we have no claim on God, because we were created by Him in the first place. God is dealing with a sinful and rebellious race, but He is characterised by wisdom, love, mercy, and righteousness. God chooses. God is free in choosing whomever He will have mercy upon. God's foreordination, and decisions, are based only on Himself, and on His goodness and mercy, and His wisdom and will.

### **How Does He Do This?**

This question is answered in detail from the main ideas in the body of the paper, but, basically, God does it by His own will. He chooses us sinners, and makes us, or conforms us, to be His sons and daughters, in the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. He does it His own way, and in His own exciting timing. His foreordination and decision are exercised through the doctrine and process of predestination, through sinners hearing and responding to the preaching of the gospel.

### **Conclusion**

Because a loving and merciful God chose us by His own will and plan before the foundation of the world that we be predestined, through the

salvation of Jesus Christ, we must make this the prime object of our lives, to conform ourselves to the image of His Son. It is also an important aspect of the doctrine of predestination that God will be faithful, and that we may rest in this faithfulness. He will keep His promises, for He is faithful and will do it (1 Thess 5:23-24; 1 Cor 1:8-9).

**For Further Reading**

Hodge, C., *Romans*, Geneva Commentary, Edinburgh UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972.

Knox, D. B., *The Everlasting God*, Welwyn UK: Evangelical Press, 1982.