

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #28: PREDESTINATION (PART ONE)

By John Temples

Well, some of my readers are still trying to pronounce “anthropomorphism,” and here we are tackling another “five-dollar word”: predestination! This is a Bible topic, and it is misunderstood by multitudes of people; so it is worthy of our study.

We want to study this subject under four headings:

- What is predestination?
- Does the Bible teach predestination?
- What do theologians think predestination means?
- What does predestination actually mean?

WHAT IS PREDESTINATION?

The word comes from the prefix *pre*, meaning “before or ahead of time,” and *destine*, to fix or determine an outcome. Hence, “predestination” means to ordain, fix, or establish an outcome before it happens. (Note: a related Biblical term is *foreknowledge*, meaning “to know ahead of time.” There is a difference in the two terms, however. Predestination means to ordain a predetermined outcome; foreknowledge means only to know an outcome ahead of time. You might look at the radar or the clouds and know ahead of time that it is going to rain, but you do not make it rain.)

As Christians, we are mainly concerned with God’s foreknowledge and/or predestination of events or states of being.

DOES THE BIBLE TEACH PREDESTINATION?

Yes, it certainly does. Consider these Scriptures:

- Ephesians 1:4,5—“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having

predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the pleasure of His will."

- Romans 8:29,30—"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."
- 2 Thess 2:13-15--"But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

A synonym for predestination is *election*, and one Biblical name for the saved is "the elect." Some representative Scriptures:

- "Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:5).
- "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble" (2 Peter 1:10).
- "To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...." (1 Peter 1:1,2).
- "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do" (Colossians 3:12,13).

No doubt, there is a predestination taught in these Bible verses. But what exactly is this predestination?

WHAT THEOLOGIANS THINK PREDESTINATION MEANS

Here are some dictionary definitions of predestination:

- “Predestination, in theology, is the doctrine that all events have been willed by God, usually with reference to the eventual fate of the individual soul.” (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predestination>)
- “In religious terms, predestination is the belief that everything that happens has already been determined by God — He's got a master plan, and there's no deviating from it.” (<https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/predestination>)
- “Predestination is the biblical doctrine that God in His sovereignty chooses certain individuals to be saved.” (<https://www.gotquestions.org/predestination.html>)

It means, say many theologians, that before the creation of the world, God chose which individuals would be saved and which would be lost. He pre-ordained all situations and the destinies of all people. They attribute this predestination to God's “sovereignty”--His power to do whatever He sees fit to do. Here are some representative statements of this doctrine:

- The Westminster Confession of Faith (subscribed to by the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church, and others) says, “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.”
- The Primitive Baptist Church Articles of Faith states, “We believe in the doctrine of eternal and particular election of a definite number of the human race chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.... We believe that all the saints of God justified by the righteousness of Christ shall preserve in grace, and none of them finally fall away so as to be lost.” (<http://www.npbconvention.org/home/articles-of-faith-what-we-believe/>)

Notice that an essential element of this doctrine is that once God elects an individual to salvation, that individual cannot be lost--his salvation is guaranteed.

Sam Morris, a (now deceased) Baptist preacher from Texas, was a believer in predestination; and unlike many others, he was not afraid to state the inevitable

result of subscribing to this doctrine. He wrote, "We take the position that a *Christian's sins do not damn his soul*. The way a Christian lives, what he says, his character, his conduct, or his attitude toward other people have *nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul...* All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to, all the services he may attend, all the sermons he may practice, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit from idolatry to murder will not make his soul in any more danger... *The way a man lives has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul...*" (Sam Morris, Do a Christian's Sins Damn His Soul?, quoted at <http://lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVarticles/IsOnceSavedAlwaysSavedABibleDoctrine.html>., emphasis mine JT)

While many who believe 'once saved, always saved' would not agree with such jarring statements, they cannot deny that their doctrine leads to this conclusion.

So here are the highlights of the doctrine of predestination (the theologians' version): (1) Your eternal destiny has already been chosen for you--your ticket has been punched. (2) If you are one of the elect, you can't be lost, even if you try; and if you're not one of the elect, you can't be saved, no matter how hard you try.

But now the all-important question:

WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL TRUTH ABOUT PREDESTINATION?

As you might suspect, there are a few Biblical problems with the human theological view of individual predestination.

First, it makes void and pointless any Biblical commands and invitations to come to God, to be saved, or to live an upright moral life. Picture a lovely young girl chained to a tree. Jesus stands before her and says, "Come to Me and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). You think, "How ridiculous...Jesus is inviting this girl to come to Him when it is impossible for her to do so, being chained to a tree." This is the dilemma of predestination.

Second, it negates the Great Commission, which tells us to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15,16). I once asked my uncle, a Primitive Baptist preacher, why this command, if everybody is already saved or lost? His answer was that the only purpose of such evangelism is to seek out those who are already saved and quicken their hearts to the knowledge of their salvation.

Third, it renders pointless any Biblical statements or commands relating to freedom of choice. Some examples:

- Joshua 24:15—"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...."
- Rev 22:17—"And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely."
- John 3:16—"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (This doctrine pretty well makes a mockery of the word *whoever*.)

Fourth, it impugns the nature of God and makes Him a respecter of persons. Peter said, "[God] is *not willing that any should perish*, but that *all* should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Acts 10:34,35 says, "Then Peter opened his mouth and said, 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality [is no respecter of persons, KJV]. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.'"

Fifth, it denies, nullifies, or calls into question many lofty Bible concepts as the sacrifice of Christ, faith, repentance, baptism, the necessity of living a righteous life, and even the church. After all, why even attend church if your eternal destiny is locked in?

So what is the explanation?

THE BIBLICAL TRUTH ON PREDESTINATION

Does the Bible teach predestination? Indeed it does. Do the Scriptures teach that God chose the elect before the creation of the world? Yes, it does.

But the predestination, the election, is not of INDIVIDUALS, but of a CLASS. Predestination is corporate or collective, not individual. Steve Higginbotham, writing in *The World Evangelist*, October 1990, said: "God did not predetermine that certain 'individuals' would be saved or lost, but He did predetermine that a certain 'CLASS' of people would be saved or lost.... The CLASS of people that God has predetermined to be saved eternally is the church. And the 'class' of people that God has predetermined to be lost eternally is all who are outside the church."

God knew beforehand that there would be a body of believers, and He determined to make that body His elect; but it does not say that He limited the membership of that body to a specific number. Each of us can CHOOSE to be a part of the elect by obeying the plan of salvation and remaining faithful until death.

AN ILLUSTRATION:

Suppose that prior to the beginning of a school year, a teacher looks at the list of those who will be her students, and then arbitrarily pre-assigns each of them a grade, passing some and failing others even before the class begins. Unfair, right?

But suppose the teacher, prior to the school term, predetermines that every student who turns in all homework and whose ending grade point average is above 90 will get an A, and every student who is below 70 will get an F. Is that fair and just? Yes. Any student can make an A if he or she chooses.

And that is essentially the Biblical doctrine of predestination. --John Temples

POSTSCRIPT: Just a few weeks before this article was due to be mailed, I was asked by a brother at church about the apparent clash between God's predestination and man's free will. This question has no doubt been asked many times before: if God pre-ordains something to be done, how can He judge or hold responsible those who carry out His will? Accordingly, there will be a second part to this article next week dealing with this subject.

