

Predestination

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The question is sometimes asked, “*Do you believe in predestination?*” Some will say yes, and others no. However, all true Bible believers do believe in predestination, for the Bible teaches it. The question should not concern the *reality* of predestination, but its *nature*. The question should be, “*What is predestination?*”

Due to the widespread influence of Calvinism, many people automatically think of *individual pre election* when they think of predestination. They have the notion that God has arbitrarily chosen some people *by name* to eternal salvation and others to eternal damnation. This makes salvation wholly God’s doing. It is argued that if one has salvation there is nothing that he can do to lose it, and if one doesn’t have salvation there is nothing that he can do to obtain it. As we shall see, this concept is contrary to the nature of *God*, the nature of *man* and the nature of *salvation*.

The word “predestination” (or *foreordination*) is a translation of the Greek compound word “*proorizo*,” which means, “*to determine or mark out beforehand.*” Given the Bible’s use of this word, it is clear that God has *predetermined* something. The question is *what has He predetermined?* Has he predetermined certain individuals *by name* to either salvation or condemnation, regardless of their belief, character and conduct? Or is it something else? It is definitely something else, for predestination never violates human free agency: it actually *incorporates* free agency. The Bible uses the word Greek word *proorizo* in Acts 4:28, Romans 8:29,30, 1 Corinthians 2:7 and Ephesians 1:5,11. An examination of these passages will help us understand what predestination is and is not:

Acts 4:28 - In the prayer that the disciples offered to God it was said that the Jews and Gentiles had gathered against Christ, “*to do whatever your (God’s) hand and your (God’s) plan **predestined** to take place*” (Acts 4:27, 28). God’s will was for Christ to die, and to die in a certain way (John 3:14; 12:32,33). Did God force Judas to betray Christ? No. Judas betrayed Christ for 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15). Did God force the Jews to deliver Christ up to be crucified? No. The Jews delivered up Jesus because of *envy* (Matthew 27:18).

Did God force Pilate to crucify Christ? No. Pilate allowed Christ to be crucified because he wanted to “*satisfy the crowd*” (Mark 15:15). Jesus was “predestined” to die, but no one’s free agency was violated in the process. In God’s *foreknowledge* (kin to “foreordination,” but with emphasis upon pre *knowledge*, rather than pre *determination*), he took into consideration, in the execution of his plan, the decisions and actions of certain people. Like foreordination, foreknowledge in no way compromises human free moral agency.

Romans 8:29,30 – Paul said, “*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*” This passage is very helpful to our understanding of predestination. What God “predestinated” was the *character and conduct* of those whom he would save. God *predestined* that in order for people to be saved they must conform to the image of Christ. The word for “image” is “*eikon*” (icon). Christ is our icon. We are to mimic and obey him.

Though this would involve many different areas of attitudes and activities, one of the more obvious aspects of this conformity would be in our *service and obedience* to the Father. Jesus said, “*My food is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish the work*” (John 4:24; see also 8:29; *Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 5:8*). God predestined that in order for us to call him our “Father” and Christ our “brother” we must be obedient and holy, *as was Christ*.

1 Corinthians 2:7 – Paul said, “*But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God decreed before the ages for our glory.*” The word “decreed” is from *proorizo*, as is “predestinate.” Paul is describing God’s wisdom, specifically as it relates to the plan of salvation. The very next verse tells us that had the rulers of the world known (the true identity of Christ), they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. Like Acts 4:28, this passage emphasizes God’s role in planning and executing the scheme of redemption. Jesus said, “*This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes*” (Matthew 21:42).

Ephesians 1:4, 5, 11 – Perhaps this is the better known and most used of the *predestination* passages. Paul said, “*Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy*

and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the council of his will.” Failure to define terms and consider all related contexts has led many to conclude that Paul is here speaking of an *individual election by God* in which certain ones are had pre selected for salvation. This is not what Paul said. Paul said that a certain *character, conduct and class* had been *predestinated*. God predetermined that salvation would be ***in Christ***, for those who were ***adopted by God***, and who conducted themselves in a ***holy and blameless*** way. Any and all who fit these criteria are fit candidates for salvation. Like Romans 8:29, 30, this passage describes certain *conditions* as being what God has predestinated.

Let us consider some of the consequences of the position of *personal* and *individual* pre selection:

1. **The concept of individual pre-election violates free moral agency.** God has given humans the right and ability to choose salvation. God *invites* men to obtain salvation, but the “*water of life*” is reserved only for those who “*desire*” and “*take*” it (Revelation 22:17). Jesus lamented that though he had offered eternal life to members of the Jewish nation, they “*would not*” take it (Matthew 23:37; John 5:40). Salvation is a matter of *choice*: “*IF anyone wills to do his will... IF anyone abides in my word...*” (John 7:17; 8:31). The little word “*if*” represents huge possibilities. It suggests the right and ability of humans to make their own moral and spiritual choices.
2. **The concept of individual pre-election makes God a *respector of persons*.** The Bible depicts God as being fair and faithful. It would be unfair for God to arbitrarily select some individuals to eternal life and others to eternal damnation. Proponents of individual pre-election will say that we should not question these so-called “*methods*” of God. I agree that God’s methods must never be questioned by his creatures (Rom. 9:20, 21). But what is really being questioned? Is this really *God’s* method, or has it actually been *assigned* to God by misguided men? I affirm that it is the latter. The Bible repeatedly

affirms that “*God shows no partiality*” (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25). What should not be questioned is God’s own *impartial* nature. False versions of “predestination” misrepresent God’s very nature.

3. **The concept of individual pre-election violates the *conditional* nature of salvation.** If God arbitrarily pre-selects some people to eternal life and some to eternal damnation, then he does so on some other basis than the choices and actions of these people. This is an unbiblical view of salvation. The Bible teaches that salvation is available to people who meet God-given conditions. The Hebrew writer said, “*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him*” (Hebrews 11:6). One must *believe in*, and *seek* God if he wants to be saved. To go to heaven one must “do the will” of the Father who “*is in heaven*” (Matthew 7:21). One must be “*born again*” (John 3:3-5, 1 Peter 1:22, 23). To be forgiven of sin one must *believe* (John 8:24; Acts 2:41), *repent* (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 17:30), *confess* (Romans 10:9,10) and be *baptized* (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 2:38). To continue in salvation one must *continue in* Christ’s word (John 8:31, 32; 2 John 9).

Conclusion

The Bible nowhere teaches the concept of individual pre-election. Each person makes his own choice with respect to salvation. God has in the past *foreknown* the choices of certain individuals (Pharaoh, Cyrus, Judas), and factored those choices into his plans, but he has never forced men to do either good or evil. The “predestination” of the Bible has to do with God’s plans and preferences relating to man’s redemption. God has predestined that salvation is in Christ, and that all who wish to be saved will comply with his terms and conditions of salvation. All who refuse these terms and conditions will be lost. Men and women have the God-given right and ability to choose their eternal destiny. What about you? Have you chosen to be a part of God’s elect? If not, the above passages instruct you as to how to do so.

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