

What Does the Bible Teach About Predestination?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

Introduction:

- A. Are we locked into a life plan developed by the foreknowledge of God, or are we free to make spiritual choices that will impact our eternal future?
 1. Sweep away the detritus of error.
 2. Present what the scriptures teach.
 3. Examine Bible uses of election, predestination, foreordination.
 4. Answer the question of God's foreknowledge of one's future actions.
- B. Calvinism teaches that each individual was unconditionally predestined or foreordained by God's sovereign decree before the world began. This predestination or foreordination is unconditional in that it has nothing to do with the will, choice, obedience, or character of the individual. Those who are saved and destined to eternal life are said to be "elect."
 1. The alternative to unconditional election is free will or free moral agency, the doctrine that salvation is conditional and each individual has a choice whether or not to meet the conditions of forgiveness.
 2. Which one does the Bible teach?
- C. Quotes from the Westminster Confession of Faith:
 1. "God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: ... 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 is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto ... The rest of mankind God was pleased ... to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin ..." (Chap. III, p 1-7)
 2. "All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ ... This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein ... Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, ... yet they never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved ..." (Chap. X, p. 1-4)
 3. According to Calvinism, God unalterably decreed certain individuals to go to heaven and others to go to hell, without in any way considering the character, conduct, obedience, choice, attitudes, or desires of the individual. This denies that man has free will or free moral agency.
 4. Are election and predestination conditional or unconditional?

I. WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY?

- A. The Bible teaches that the elect have been predestined by God to eternal life.

1. Eph. 1:3-14; Rom. 8:29-30; 2Tim. 2:10; 1Peter 1:1-2; 2:9; 2Thes. 2:13
 2. However, the scriptures also teach that God offers salvation to all men, and then gives each individual the power to choose for himself whether to accept or reject that offer. This must be harmonized with the Biblical use of the word "elect."
- B. The Bible nowhere states that God chooses which individuals will be numbered among the elect.
1. All passages that speak of the elect, address the nature of the elect, not the individuals that constitute the elect.
 2. To suggest that the elect of scripture are selected and individually chosen from among all humankind is saying more than the scriptures.

II. THE SALVATION OF INDIVIDUALS IS OFFERED UNIVERSALLY

- A. Salvation is offered by God to everyone.
1. God desires everyone to be saved - 1Tim. 2:3-4; 2Peter 3:9
 - a. If God wills all people to be saved and none to perish, and if the decision is entirely up to Him (man has no choice), then all people will be saved and none will be lost. The necessary conclusion of unconditional election is universal salvation for everyone.
 - b. Yet we know only a few will be saved; most will be lost.
 - 1) Matt. 7:13-14, 22:14
 - c. Therefore, either God does not sincerely want everyone to be saved, or else everyone truly does have a choice in the matter of his salvation.
 2. God's grace is extended to everyone - Titus 2:11
 3. Jesus died to offer salvation to everyone.
 - a. 1Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9; John 3:16; Rom. 5:18-19
 - b. The intent of Jesus' death was to offer salvation to all men. If these passages are true, then either all men will be saved (which cannot be), or else there is something each man must do to determine whether he will receive the benefit of Jesus' death
 4. God's offer of salvation is preached in the Gospel to everyone.
 - a. 2Thes. 2:14; Mark 16:15-16
 - b. Calvinists respond to this by saying that the Gospel should be preached to all, however no one can respond to that call unless the Holy Spirit irresistibly works directly on their hearts to empower them to respond. But this makes the preaching of the gospel a pretense. If the Holy Spirit makes the choice for one unconditionally, why not doesn't the Spirit just lead the person to salvation and forget the preaching?
- B. It is accepted conditionally by those who exercise the free will to do so.

III. BIBLE REFERENCES TO ELECTION AND PREDESTINATION

- A. People are elect according to the will of God.
1. Eph. 1:5, 11 - We are predestined according to His will or purpose.
 - a. Rom. 8:28; 2Tim. 1:9; 1Cor. 2:7

- b. Calvinists assume God wills to choose each individual unconditionally. But where is the scripture that states this?
 - 2. The will of God regarding our salvation is revealed in the Scriptures. We have already proved by Scripture that it is God's will to offer salvation to all, and then to let each individual choose whether he will respond.
 - B. People are elect in Christ - Eph. 1:4 - God chose us "in Him" (Christ).
 - 1. But how does an individual come into Christ?
 - a. Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 6:3-4 - We are baptized into Christ.
 - b. Again, salvation is conditional.
 - C. People are elect in Christ's spiritual body, the church.
 - 1. Eph. 1:3-14 - Clearly the church is the elect, those destined to be saved
 - 2. But how does one enter the church?
 - a. 1Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:38, 41, 47
 - 3. From eternity, God knew there would be people willing to obey Him.
 - a. He purposed to establish the church (Eph. 3:10-11) as the body that would contain all saved people (5:23-25).
 - b. These would be His special people, the elect (1:3-14).
 - c. He decreed this body to be destined for eternal glory (1:3-14).
 - 4. However, each individual has been given by God the power to choose to meet the conditions to enter that body or not enter.
 - a. Once in the body, each has the power to continue faithful and receive the reward or to fall away and be lost (these will be removed from the body before it enters glory).
 - b. Matt. 13:41-43; Rev. 17:14; 2Peter 1:10
 - D. The New Testament unquestionably refers to election and predestination.
 - 1. Calvinists often quote these passages as though the mere mention of the words proves their particular interpretation of predestination.
 - 2. We all agree that God has chosen (elected) certain people, and that the elect have been foreordained to eternal life. The question is: What does God mean when He uses these words in His book?
 - 3. The Bible doctrine of predestination teaches that God has chosen the body of obedient believers to be saved, but each individual has the power to choose whether or not to be in that body.
 - 4. To illustrate, consider a country with voluntary military service. The president chooses the Marines for a mission. The General calls the Marines a select body because the President chose them for this mission. But the President did not choose each individual. He chose the body, but each individual decides whether or not to be in that body.
 - 5. God's elect is just another name for the faithful members of the church. God predestined the faithful obedient to be saved, but each individual decides whether or not he will be among the faithful obedient.

IV. GOD DOES NOT FORE-ORDINATE THE FUTURE OF ANY PERSON

- A. It has been established from the scriptures that God does not fore ordinate the eternal destination of anyone, but that He has granted to humankind the choice to accept or reject His grace.

- B. If God does not choose for us in the vital matter of salvation, then also He does not choose for us in lesser matters of life.
1. We want to believe that we are victims of the circumstances of an inevitable and inexorable plan that we are incapable of resisting, tossed about like a leaf driven by powerful winds. It helps us to explain and bear with the unfair nature of life under the sun in a fallen world.
 2. While we may not have power over the circumstances of our lives, we have always had the power to choose how we will react to and what we will do with those circumstances.
 3. Isa. 10:5-7, 66:3; 2Sam. 24:12; Phil. 1:21-26; 1Sam. 8:18, 12:13
 4. Psalm 119:30, 173; Prov. 22:1; 1Kings 18:21; Joshua 24:22; Acts 9:4-6

VI. "DOES GOD KNOW EVERYTHING I AM GOING TO DO BEFORE I DO IT?"

- A. God does not force people against their will to be good or bad, but He can foreknow what choices they will make.
1. Judas was already evil before He betrayed Jesus - John 12:6.
 2. Pharaoh was evil before God hardened his heart - Ex. 8:15, 32, 9:12.
 3. God did not make these men evil. He simply foreknew what choice they would make; then, He used them accordingly.
 4. If foreknowing and prophesying a thing means that God decreed it must be so such that men have no choice, then since the men sinned, it must be that God decreed them to commit sin.
 5. This violates His righteous character - James 1:13
- B. Jesus' death was also foreknown and prophesied.
1. Isa. 53; John 3:14; 12:27; Matt. 16:21
 2. Nevertheless, Matt. 26:53 shows that Jesus had the power to stop it. He had a choice in spite of the fact the matter had been prophesied.
 3. God foreordained that Jesus would die.
 - a. 1Peter 1:20; Acts 2:23, 4:28; Luke 22:22
 - b. This involved sins committed by those who killed Him. If this means it was decreed so that men had no choice, then again God decreed that men must commit sin.
- C. Though God foreknew what some would do, that does not prove that He foreknows all the acts of everyone.
1. God has power to foreknow all things, but at times He chooses not to exercise that power. His power to foreknow is based on His power to do all things. But He does not do everything He has power to do.
 - a. I may have the power to carry a 100 lb. feed sack on my back, but I choose not to exercise that power.
 2. God may choose to know your future, but you must prove that He always chooses to exercise that power, because scriptures do not.
 3. Gen. 11:5-6, 18:20-21, 22:12; 1Kings 19:16, 20-21, 28; Psalm 14:2
 4. Isa. 59:1-2; Micah 3:4; Zech. 7:12-13

Conclusion:

- A. Salvation is offered to all of humankind, so any one can receive it. But each individual must choose for himself whether or not to respond, and each one is capable of so choosing.

1. Illustration: Suppose a man is drowning, but a sailor throws him a life preserver attached to a rope. The drowning man by himself is powerless to be saved. The sailor is his savior. But the man still has to choose to take hold and grip tightly until he is in the boat.
2. So God is the source and provider of salvation. Salvation is by God's grace. But He has decreed that each individual must choose for Himself whether or not to accept the grace of salvation offered, and remain saved after obeying the Gospel by living faithfully.