

Predestination

What does it mean to be predestined by God?

There are many groups who teach that they're the only ones going to heaven. Name just about any denomination or cult and you'll find each one believing themselves to be the One True Church. Calvinism—the belief that God chooses who is to be saved—is another doctrine that reinforces the “we're-the-only-ones” notion.

Until John Calvin came along, no one knew about this doctrine—it lay hidden for 1,800 years. Calvinists have no proof they've been chosen. When I've asked the question, “How do you know you've been chosen?” they say it's because they believed the gospel and were saved. “So did I,” I reply. “Great! Then you've been predestined!” I find this puzzling. In other words, someone who obeys the gospel was “predestined” to do so, and any who don't obey were also predestined to be lost.

Although the bible does teach predestination, it is a doctrine that has been grossly distorted.

- The biblical teaching: The sovereignty of God over man in such a way that the freedom of the human will is also preserved.
- The false teaching: The belief that God chooses who is to be saved and who is to be lost, apart from human desire.

Calvin deduced from the scriptures that men were dead, and dead men can *not* respond to the gospel message. He called this the doctrine of Total Depravity. We are unable to come to God on our own—He has to choose us. Calvin took things too far. True, we are spiritually cut-off from God—dead in sins and trespasses. But we still have a mind. We have understanding.

Predestination denies the cross of Jesus Christ

If God was going to arbitrarily pick and choose who to save and who to send to Hell, what possible purpose does Christ's suffering and death serve?

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:16-18) NIV

Who did God love? The world, not just a select few. Who shall not perish? Whoever believes, not those whom God “selected” apart from the cross. Why are others condemned? Because they don't believe in Christ, not because God decided eons ago to condemn them. Calvinists argue that “the world” and “whoever” don't refer to just anyone, but only those whom God “elects.” They take a plain verse like the one above, and weave an intricate web of doctrinal hogwash.

He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

This is plain language, not some web of logic. It was language written to fishermen, shepherds, and

other "ignorant" folk.

Predestination denies sin and faith

A just and holy God demands that sin be atoned and forgiven. That atonement is available to anyone through faith in Christ.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Rom 3:22-24) NIV

Note that it says "all have sinned," meaning you, me, everyone. *All* can become righteous through faith in Christ.

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (John 5:39-40)

Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees. They thought that by possessing and studying the scriptures, they would stand justified before God. But notice Jesus' words: "you refuse to come to me to have life." How could those men be saved? By coming to the Son. Their pride is what prevented them from being saved, not because God chose them to destruction before the world was formed.

Predestination denies accountability

A common thread throughout the bible is that of accountability.

A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. (John 5:28-29)

Who will live? Those who have done good, not those who God pre-selected. Who will be condemned? Those who have done evil.

It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (Heb 9:27-28) NAS

Notice it doesn't say Christ will appear to save those whom the Father predestined to be saved.

Scriptures Calvinists use to support predestination.

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matt 7:13-14)

This verse proves that it is the minority who are saved, but it does not say anything about God determining the outcome. One would think if God was picking and choosing, at least half would enter through the Narrow Gate and half would enter through the Wide Gate. Unfortunately, most will be lost.

Jesus is commanding, "Enter by the narrow gate." However, most will choose the easier, wider path. Very simple language. But what is the gate to which He's referring?

I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. (John 10:1-2; 7-9)

He's saying that if you try and get into heaven through any other means than by which God has provided (which is Jesus), you are trying to "break in," just as a thief would.

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:37; 44)

There is nothing in these verses nor in their context that suggest anything of a pre-selection by God. Calvinists have taken the phrase, "all that the Father gives Me" to mean those the Father predestined to be saved. All of us are sinners, and none deserve mercy, so God bestows salvation on whom He pleases through His grace. (Eph 2:8) But it is done *with* the person's knowledge, and requires their decision to *accept* that grace.

How do you "come to Christ"? The answer is found in scripture: *Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.* (Rom 10:17) Note the simple and straightforward language:

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Rom 10:9-13)

From this verse, how is a person justified before God? Heart-felt faith. From this verse, how is a person saved? Through confession. It says, *anyone* who trusts in Him will never be put to shame. It says there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him. It says everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Calvinists claiming that John 6:37; 44 is "proof" that God pre-selected those who would be saved just doesn't square with Romans 10. Note Jesus' plain words here:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Luke 11:9-10)

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies. (Rom 8:29-33)

Does this teach that God pre-selected certain people to be saved and others to be lost?

For whom He (God) foreknew...

The word 'foreknew' doesn't mean that God decreed who would be saved or lost. It means that God had specific knowledge that some would believe and others would not. Neither does this apply to everyone who has ever lived, but only those who were to be "conformed to the image of His Son."

He also predestined...

Unlike the word 'foreknew,' this word does mean 'to decree beforehand.' But predestined to what?

...to become conformed to the image of His Son

Not predetermined to be saved or lost, but decreed beforehand that those who chose Christ would literally be an exact copy of the Son.

What about the verse where it says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated"? They weren't even born yet! This proves that God chooses who to save and who to condemn.

The scripture referred to is noted here. Let's examine the context:

...for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." (Rom 9:11-15)

This verse doesn't say that a person is saved against their will or sent to hell against their will. A solid understanding of the Old Testament is critical to understanding such passages. When Rebekah was pregnant, the twins in her womb were struggling, so she asked God about it. The Lord told her, "Two *nations* are in your womb, and two kinds of people shall be separated from your bowels. And the one people shall be stronger than the other people, the older shall serve the younger." (Gen 25:23)

God was describing a *national*, not a personal relationship. Taken in a personal sense this couldn't have been true. Scripture never says that all of Esau's posterity were condemned, nor were Jacob's posterity all elected. Esau the person, never did serve Jacob. Jacob never exercised any power over Esau, nor was Esau subject to Jacob. On the contrary, Jacob was subject to Esau, and was very afraid of him. Jacob personally acknowledged his brother to be his "lord," and himself to be his "servant" (Gen 32:4:33:8, 13). Many, if not the greatest part of Jacob's descendants were wicked, and thus rejected by God.

The scope of Paul's reasoning is to show that God is sovereign in His own way. He has a right to dispense His blessings as He chooses, to give salvation to mankind, not in the ways of their devising, but in a way suitable to His infinite wisdom and goodness.

So what does it mean when God said, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated”? That statement was made about 700 years *after* Jacob and Esau lived, and is found in the book of Malachi:

An oracle: The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. “I have loved you,” says the Lord. “But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’ Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” the Lord says. “Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.” (Mal 1:1-3)

Thus, the context, 700 years later, refers to God’s relationship with the *nation* of Israel, not to the *person* of Israel. (Jacob was renamed ‘Israel’ by God. Gen 32:28)

Malachi shows Israel/Jacob’s ingratitude towards God even though He loved them or showed them favor. The unthankful Jews had demanded of God, “when have You loved us?” (Mal 1:2-5)

Esau the man never said, “We are impoverished.” Neither were “his mountains laid waste.” In fact, Esau prospered quite a bit. Esau is not mentioned under any personal consideration, but only as the head of his posterity. They may now be called the “region of wickedness.” They have rejected the Lord that bought them, therefore bringing destruction upon themselves. No personal rejection of Esau can have been intended. He was reconciled to his brother, even though Jacob had used cunning and subterfuge to take his blessing. Esau’s inclinations were opposite those of Jacob’s—he was rough, married foreign women who caused his parents great grief, etc. God saw the future, and made His choice. Calvinism falsely uses these scriptures to prove that God chooses individuals for salvation.

If God had told Rebekah that Esau was to be “eternally damned, regardless,” she would have probably done something foolish. But the parents perfectly understood God, and didn’t understand it in that way. Predestination, as viewed through John Calvin’s eyes, has no spiritual advantage for mankind, but rather causes men to hate God. To conceive of God as having no care, no love, and no compassion towards the workmanship of his own hands, is evil. He’s not some unfeeling machine, grinding up souls in hell.

What about Pharaoh? God said He “raised Him up” to show His power, and eventually destroyed Pharaoh.

Here is the scripture that refers to Pharaoh:

So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate my power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.” (Rom 9:16-17)

In the book of Exodus, we find God’s proclamation to Pharaoh, to which Paul is referring:

For now I will stretch out My hand, that I may strike you and your people with plagues, and you shall be cut off from the earth. And for this I have made you stand, to make you see My power, to declare My name in all the land (Exo 9:15-16)

Pharaoh and the Egyptians were vessels of wrath—persons guilty before God. God put up with them for a long time. But they were obstinate—refused His grace, and took advantage of His goodness (Exo

8:32—Pharaoh hardened his heart)

As a result, they had fitted themselves for destruction, which brought God's wrath. The hardening of their hearts and their punishment were the consequences of their actions, not something predestined by God. The Jews of Jesus' and Paul's time had sinned in the same way of the Egyptians. They hardened their hearts and abused His goodness. After thousands of years of putting up with them, the Jews became vessels of wrath. They were ripe for punishment, which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

That power, which God was making known for their salvation, having been so long and so much abused and provoked, was now about to show itself in their destruction as a nation. But even in this case, Paul is not saying that they are damned for all eternity. Their *sins* were the cause of their punishment, not something handed down because God had decreed it. It is *sin* that decrees men are doomed for all eternity, not God's will.

The making or continuing of any of God's people is determined by the will and wisdom of God alone, not by the judgment, hopes, or wishes of men. To illustrate:

- Abraham concluded that the blessing might be given to Ishmael.
- Isaac also desired that his first-born, Esau, should have the blessing.
- Esau hoped that the blessing might be his. He ran off hunting for venison, hoping to have the blessing given to him. (Gen 27:4)

All three men were disappointed. Abraham and Isaac both willed, and Esau ran. God had originally intended that the blessing of being a great nation and distinguished people should, of His mere good pleasure, be given to Isaac and Jacob, and be confirmed in their posterity; and to them it was given. When they later forfeited this privilege through apostasy, it was not because of any prior obligation God was under, but His own sovereign mercy, which continued toward them.

The Bottom Line

Calvinists teach that man's free will has no part in the salvation process. It's all done by God. In fact, human beings are dead in their sins, and can't even reach out to God in that condition. They forget that the planted seed of the Word is what brings people to life.

Those who embrace this teaching believe themselves to be chosen by God. Does that include their spouse? Did God also choose them? What about the children? The whole family's been predestined for salvation.

Those are pretty good odds, I'd say.

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