

When the two passages that use the word *predestine* are carefully considered, a clear summary of the Biblical teaching emerges.

THE PASSAGES

Ephesians 1:3-14

In the opening paragraph of Ephesians, Paul majestically expresses the goodness of God, *who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ* (v. 3). The passage describes God's work in our salvation. In verses 4-6, Paul writes:

*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having **predestinated** us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace . . .*

Romans 8:28-30

In this passage, Paul makes predestination the ground of the promise, *all things work together for good to them that love God . . .* (v. 28). Notice the **for** in v. 29:

***For** whom he did foreknow, he also did **predestinate** to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

Paul's argument is that we know all things are working for our good, because God determined from the beginning that we should be made into the image of Christ. The *good* in v. 28 equals *made into the image of Christ* in v. 29. God is producing Christ-likeness in us through the trials of life.

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

So what do these passages teach us about predestination?

God Predestined the Elect

According to Eph. 1:3-4, the objects of God's predestination are those He **chose**. Here the emphasis is on God's sovereign **will**. In other words, He sovereignly elected a particular people and gave them a certain end. This choice was not based on anything in the creature (Eph. 1:5b; Rom. 9:15-16).

According to Rom. 8:29, the objects of God's predestination are those He **foreknew**. Here the emphasis is on God's sovereign **love**. *Foreknew* in Rom. 8:29 is parallel to *in love* in Eph. 1:4. The choice and the predetermined end were based on, and are a manifestation of, God's love (Eph. 2:4-5).

God's choice of Israel provides a vivid example of predestination. God sovereignly chose them and set His love upon them, not because of anything good in them, but to show His glory. He therefore gave them a certain end, and He will bring it about (Deut. 7:6-8; Jer. 29:10-14; Ez. 36:22-38).

God Predestined the Elect from All Eternity

God's election and predestination are rooted in His eternal purposes. He chose us *before the foundation of the world* (Eph. 1:4). His purpose and grace were given to us *before the world began* (2 Tim. 1:9). Our names were written in the book of life *from the foundation of the world* (Rev. 17:8).

God Predestined the Elect to Be Sons

The end to which God predestined His elect can be summarized by a change in our standing, a change in our nature, and a change in our eternal destiny.

(1) **We were predestined to be adopted as His children** (Eph. 1:5). We were born as slaves of sin, children of the devil, enemies of God, and objects of His wrath. But God in His mercy determined to make us His children through forgiveness of our sins by faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

. . . being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).

Because we are sons of God, we are forever the objects of His infinite love and care.

(2) **We were predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son** (Rom. 8:29). We were also predestined to a change of nature, that is to be made like Christ. This conformation to Christ begins when we are born again through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, but is not completed until the Return of Christ (1 Jn. 3:2). We know it will be completed, because we were predestined to this end by God (cf. Phil. 1:6). The Holy Spirit was given to us as a pledge (Eph. 1:14).

Christ-likeness includes several things:

- **In regard to the Father's will** – we delight to do God's will, even as Jesus did (Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:29).

- In regard to our **character** – we are made holy, blameless, and pure in all our ways, as Christ was perfect in His ways (1 Pet. 2:22; Gal. 5:22-23).
- In regard to **others** - we love others as Christ did (Jn. 13:34-35; Eph. 5:2) and intercede for others as He intercedes for us (1 Jn. 2:1).
- In regard to **the world** - we become the objects of the world's hatred and scorn, as He was (Jn. 15:18). We are strangers in the world, just as He was (Jn. 17:16).
- In regard to **resurrection** - we shall put on an incorruptible body, as He did (Phil. 3:21).

The great evidence that we are the objects of God's predestinating love, is that we are increasingly being made like Christ. He accomplishes this transformation in us by the Holy Spirit, through faith in the Word of God, in the context of trials and tribulations (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2; James 1:2-4).

(3) **We were predestined to receive an eternal inheritance** (Eph. 1:11). Ultimately, God predestined His elect, not only to be perfected, but also to be co-inheritors with Christ (Rom. 8:17). We have an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled awaiting us in heaven (1 Pet. 1:4).

God Predestined the Elect for His Glory

Why did God predestine the elect? Three reasons are given in Scripture.

(1) **So that many would be saved.** In Rom. 8:29, Paul tells us that God predestined the elect so that Christ would be *the firstborn among many brethren*. This speaks of the salvation of many. If God would not have accomplished this through predestination, no one would have been saved.

(2) **So that Christ would be preeminent.** . . . *the firstborn among many brethren*. This means Christ is preeminent over the ones He redeemed (Col. 1:18; Heb. 12:23). The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ are all implied in Paul's statement (cf. Phil. 2:5-11), but predestination guaranteed the end result.

(3) **So that God would be glorified.** The ultimate purpose of predestination is given in Eph. 1:6 – *to the praise of the glory of His grace*. God is glorified because salvation is the result of His plan, His work, His grace, and His love. There is no boasting in heaven, because God predestined us in Christ. All glory belongs to the Triune God.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS DOCTRINE

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of this doctrine as it relates to the Christian life. Indeed, apart from predestination, we could have no full assurance of our salvation, nor could we be certain that everything in our lives is working together for our good. Many of God's promises depend on the truth of this doctrine and are virtually restatements of it (cf. Jer. 29:11; 1 Cor. 1:8-9; Phil. 1:6; 2:13; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 Pet. 5:10; 1 Jn. 3:1-2; Jude 24).

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The Biblical Doctrine of **PREDESTINATION**

By Dean Good

Although predestination has often been the cause of bitter controversy among Christians, this doctrine was revealed in Scripture to provide the believer with great comfort and encouragement. Paul, in Ephesians 1:3-14, makes it the foundation of all the spiritual blessings bestowed upon us by God. In Romans 8:28-30, he makes it the centerpiece of our salvation. In light of the Apostle's emphasis on predestination, we would do well to become diligent students of this Biblical doctrine.

WHAT IS PREDESTINATION?

The English word *predestinate*, or in some versions, *predestine*, appears four times in the Bible (Eph. 1:5,11; Rom. 8:29,30). In all four cases, the object is believers (i.e. believers are the ones predestined). The Greek word (προορίζω) appears six times in the NT (also in Acts 4:28; 1 Cor. 2:7), but in Acts and 1 Cor. the object is not believers. The word literally means **to determine or appoint before, to foreordain**. It is built on the Greek word *orizo* (ορίζω) which means to determine or appoint (Lk. 22:22; Acts 2:23; 10:42 et. al.). In both verbs, when God is the subject, sovereignty is in view. In relation to salvation, the emphasis of the word *predestine* is on the **foreordained end** of God's chosen people. Their ultimate redemption and perfection are certain because God ordained it to be so.