

Predestination: Was Calvin Right?

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 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. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

Romans 8:28-30

Introduction:

A debate that has raged amongst theologians for centuries concerns the question, “Does God choose that some people will go to Hell, and that others will go to Heaven?” The subject matter of this question is the doctrine of predestination. This doctrine is very important because it has many moral, ethical and practical implications. For example, if God has already decided who will go to Heaven, and will force them to get saved, then why bother to go soul winning and endure rejection? Why spend thousands of dollars to support missionaries? Why weep over the lost in prayer? The truth is that many churches excuse their coldness, deadness and laziness by using the teachings of John Calvin, claiming that if God wants to convert the unsaved, He will do so in His time, and He will not need the help of believers. A veil of intellectual theology is thus used to cloak a heart of selfishness and carelessness concerning the lost.

The Swiss reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) expressed the doctrine of Calvinism, proposing that God ordains some to Hell and some to Heaven. His doctrine was noted for its heavy emphasis on predestination and the sovereignty of God. Calvin stated, “Not all men are created with a similar destiny. Eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others. Every man therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say he is predestined either to life or death.” (Institutes, Book III, chapter 23).

Is this what the Bible teaches about predestination? Does the Bible support Calvin’s doctrine interpretation of election and predestination? Let us examine the Scriptures.

What Predestination Is Not.

The predestination taught by Calvinism is not the predestination taught by the Bible. Calvinism teaches that:

God does not want all to be saved.
Christ did not die as a ransom for all men.
God wants most people to go to Hell.

The five-point outline of Calvinism (TULIP) is as follows:

- 1. Total Depravity of Man**
- 2. Unconditional Election**
- 3. Limited Atonement**
- 4. Irresistible Grace**
- 5. Perseverance of the Saints**

Let me explain what these terms mean:

1. Total Depravity of Man.

This means that man is totally unable to believe on Christ or call on Christ to save him unless he is foreordained or predestined to do so. It implies that man has no choice or will concerning his salvation. Man does not remain unsaved because he will not get saved, but because he cannot get saved.

It is true that without the enabling of God, no one can be saved. However, God offers every man that enabling, and so gives every man the choice of receiving Christ. Man is lost because he chooses to remain so; he is unsaved because he chooses to reject God's free gift of eternal life.

Scriptures that refute this belief include:

John 5:40 "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."

Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

Revelation 22:17 "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

John 7:37 "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."

2. Unconditional Election.

"God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely on His sovereign will. His choice of certain sinners was not based on any foreseen response or obedience on their part, such as faith or repentance. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected. Those whom God sovereignly elected, He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ. Thus, God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice of Christ, is the ultimate cause of salvation." (Calvin)

Scriptures that refute this belief include:

2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

1 Timothy 2:4-6 "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

Revelation 22:17 "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

John 12:32 "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

3. Limited Atonement.

Calvinists believe that Christ died only for the elect (those chosen for Heaven); He did not die for all men.

Scriptures that refute this belief include:

1 John 2:2 “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

John 3:16, 17 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”

1 Timothy 2:5, 6 “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”

John 4:42 “And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.”

4. Irresistible Grace.

This doctrine teaches that God’s saving grace, when presented by the Holy Spirit, is such that it is impossible for the sinner to resist or refuse salvation. The elect of God cannot refuse the gift of eternal life.

Scriptures that refute this belief include:

Acts 7:51 “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.”

John 16:8 “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:”

Matthew 23:37 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”

John 12:32 “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”

5. Perseverance of the Saints.

The perseverance of the saints is, “Their certain continuance in a state of grace. Once justified and regenerated, the believer can neither totally nor finally fall away from grace, but will certainly persevere therein and attain everlasting life.”

Although the basic teaching of this doctrine is true, the wording is misleading. The Bible teaches that the saved Christian can never lose his salvation, and can never be damned to Hell. But, it is more correct to say that the saints are preserved in Christ, and kept by the power of God, rather than to say that they will persevere:

Jude 1:1 “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:”

1 Peter 1:4, 5 “To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Philippians 1:6 “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:”

What Predestination Is.

It is clear that the Calvinistic interpretation of predestination and election are unscriptural. What, then, is the proper teaching of predestination?

A) The Definition of Predestination.

“Predestinate” = G4309 - προορίζω - *proorizo*
= to limit in advance, that is, (figuratively) predetermine; to determine or decree before, ordain, predestinate.

The Greek word προορίζω occurs in six verse of the New Testament: Acts 4:28; Romans 8:29-30; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:5 and 1:11. For example, consider how the word is used in Acts chapter 4:

Acts 4:27, 28 “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined (προορίζω) before to be done.”

The word προορίζω is used here to explain how the crucifixion of Jesus was ordained and decreed by the Father according to His eternal plan of redemption. Jesus Christ was predestined to be crucified.

B) The Meaning of Predestination.

How can we understand the doctrine of predestination? Simply put, we are predestined according to God’s foreknowledge:

“God elects to eternal life, and predestines to glory, all those whom He foreknows will choose Christ to be their Saviour. God wants all men to be saved and has provided sufficient redemption for all men to be saved. This includes: free will, a condition of election, and unlimited atonement. If men go to Hell, it is because they rejected Christ.” (Pastor Keith Piper)

The doctrine of predestination can be explained as follows:

God knew before time began who would respond to the Gospel message and receive Christ. (1 Peter 1:2)

God chose to be the elect (those who would be saved) those sinners that would choose Him. He set them apart (sanctified) for Himself. (1 Peter 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 1:4)

God predestined, ordained and decreed that the elect (according to foreknowledge) would be conformed to the image of Christ by the work of the Spirit. He foreordained the good works and the holiness of the believers. (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:4)

God called the elect to Himself by His Word and His Spirit. (Romans 8:30)

God justified the elect when they received Christ of their own free will, just as God always knew they would. He saved them and made them His children. (Romans 8:30; Ephesians 1:5)

He glorifies the saved when they become sinless in heaven, and will give them a glorified body at the appearing of Christ. (Romans 8:30)

Scriptures referred to above:

1 Peter 1:2 “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”

Romans 8:29, 30 “²⁹For 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. ³⁰Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

2 Thessalonians 2:13 “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:”

Ephesians 1:3-6 “³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: ⁴According 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: ⁵Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

Conclusion:

The true doctrine of predestination gives the believer a tremendous amount of security. The Lord knew before time began that we would call on Christ and be saved. He worked in our heart and drew us to Himself, and He will never let us go. He foreordained that we should be conformed to the image of Christ, and walk in good works. We have a home in Heaven set us aside for us by the eternal decree of God, and no power in Heaven or earth can stop us from reaching that bright shore.

Philippians 1:6, 2:13 “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

Appendix: Eternal Security and Armenianism

Many times the Calvinist accuses the non-Calvinist of being Armenian in his doctrine. That is, he proposes that we stress the free will of man above all things, thus implying that we believe that a true Christian may lose his or her salvation. It is important to understand that being against the teachings of Calvin concerning election and predestination does not mean that we embrace Armenianism, particularly on the subject of eternal security. Therefore, let us look at a few Scriptures on the all-important subject of the security of the believer:

1) We cannot lose our salvation because it is dependent on the love of Christ.

Romans 8:35,38,39 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

2) We cannot lose our salvation because we are sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 1:13 "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,"

Ephesians 4:30 "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

3) We cannot lose our salvation because we didn't earn it in the first place.

How were you saved? Was it by keeping the law? Through religion? NO! Then why would failure to keep the law or observe religion make you lost? You never earned or deserved your salvation in your first place!

Titus 3:5 "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;"

4) We cannot lose our salvation because we are kept by God's power, not our own.

If God can save you by His power, He can keep you by His power.

1 Peter 1:3-5 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

5) We cannot lose our salvation because we become a child of God when we get saved.

John 1:12,13 "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

6) We cannot lose our salvation because we are now citizens of heaven.

Ephesians 2:4-6 "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:"

7) We cannot lose our salvation because God owns us.

1 Corinthians 6:19,20 "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."