

Predestination & Election¹

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First, some definitions:

WCF 3.3 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.

WCF 3.4 These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

WCF 3.5 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 mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perserverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of His glorious grace.

Merriam-Webster: “to destine, decree, determine, appoint, or settle beforehand”

R.C. Sproul: “From all eternity God decided to save some members of the human race and to let the rest of the human race perish.”²

J. I. Packer: “Where the Arminian will only say: ‘I could not have gained my salvation without Calvary,’ the Calvinist will say: ‘Christ gained my salvation for me at Calvary.’”³

Three Reasons to Believe in Predestination and Election

1. Predestination and election is *in God's Word*

[The word ‘predestined’ (προορίζω) occurs six times in the New Testament]

Acts 4:27-30 ²⁷ "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. ²⁹ "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, ³⁰ while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus."

Romans 8:28-31 ²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us?

¹Much of this lesson is based on chapter 7 (“God’s Sovereign Choice”) in *Grace Unknown: The Heart of Reformed Theology* by R.C. Sproul (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997) 139-161; subsequently published under a different title: *What is Reformed Theology? Understanding the Basics*.

² Sproul, 141.

³ Packer, Introductory Essay, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*.

1 Corinthians 2:6-9 ⁶ Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; ⁷ but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory; ⁸ *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; ⁹ but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."

Ephesians 1:3-12 ³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him ¹¹ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, ¹² to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

2. Predestination and election is *indicative of God's character*

[With respect to God's character, we have in mind here God's *sovereignty* and God's *grace*]

A. God's sovereignty

John 1:12-13 ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 6:43-44 ⁴³ Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

B. God' grace

Romans 11:5-7 ⁵ In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice. ⁶ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. ⁷ What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

Titus 3:4-7 ⁴ But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

C. God's sovereignty and mercy, together

Romans 9:13-24¹³ Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."¹⁴ What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!¹⁵ For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."¹⁶ So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.¹⁷ 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."¹⁸ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"²⁰ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?²¹ Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?²² What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?²³ And *He did so* to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,²⁴ *even* us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

3. Predestination and election is in the unbeliever's and believer's best interest

[With respect to the unbeliever's interest, we have in mind here humanity's utter lost-ness and inability as well as the necessity of God's redeeming power – without which we would have no hope. With respect to the believer's interest, we have in mind here the Christian's need for God's continued sovereignty over election, which is our only infallible hope in perseverance.]

A. Humanity's lost-ness and God's redeeming power

Ephesians 2:1-10¹ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

John 3:36³⁶ "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

B. Believer's only infallible hope in perseverance

Philippians 1:6⁶ *For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

C. Jesus: the 'author and perfecter' of faith

Hebrews 12:1-2¹ Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

[1] 1 Timothy 2:1-4

¹ *First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.*

- “All men” in verse 1 is defined in verse 2 as “kings and all who are in authority”
- “All men” is often used to speak of various classes of men, not necessarily every individual [as in Titus 2:11 where we are told that “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.” By the preceding verses, it is apparent that Paul means “all kinds of men (and women)” as he has just addressed older men, older women, younger women, younger men, and bond-slaves). Likewise, in Titus 3:2, Paul says that we should show “every consideration to all men.” Again, the context of the phrase helps to define “all men” as “all kinds of men” – (Titus 3:1-2) “¹ Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, ² to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.”]
- Thus, “all men” is quite often used as an inclusive term with respect to type or class, not necessarily as an inclusive term with respect to every individual.

[2] 2 Peter 3:9

⁹ *The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*

- First, we must understand the overall context of this entire chapter (2 Peter 3) is about the immanent and certain Second Coming of Christ.
- Second, when speaking of ‘mockers’ in verse 3, Peter speaks of them in the third person: ‘them.’ However, when addressing those to whom he is speaking in this letter, he calls them ‘beloved,’ and speaks in the second person (‘you’), as in verse 8.
- Thus, in the context, those toward whom God is patient (verse 9 - ‘you’) are the believers (or ‘beloved’) to whom Peter is writing.
- Thus, the last phrase of 2 Peter 3:9 should be understood in this sense – God does not wish for any [of you believers] to perish but for all [of you believers] to come to repentance.
- The address of this letter in 2 Peter 1:1 bears out this context: (2 Peter 1:1) “Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ”

[3] Matthew 23:37

³⁷ *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.*

The argument runs thus: If God’s grace is irresistible, then how can Jesus say that He wanted to gather the children of Jerusalem together, but that His will was thwarted by the will of the people?

In answer, first of all, the context is again key to understanding this passage. This statement by Jesus comes immediately following the ‘woes’ which He brings against the scribes and the Pharisees as He condemns them for leading people astray. Understanding that context then helps us to see that Jesus speaks about two different groups of people in this verse (Matthew 23:37). He wanted to gather the children, but was prevented by the leaders who kill and stone the messengers of God. Jesus is specifically talking about the Jewish leaders – the scribes and the Pharisees – who prevented Him from bringing the gospel to their children.