

Passages we wish we could ignore: Predestination

BY STEPHEN MOORE

*Why do you go to church?
Why are you a follower of
Jesus? Why are you “a
believer”?*

According to the Bible, it's not because of anything good in you, but simply because God decided to set his love on you, and chose you to be his. Before the foundation of the world, *God chose you*. Individually, and personally, he decided to make use his own. It wasn't because of something good in you. It wasn't because you had a tendency to believe. It wasn't because you were nice when you were a kid.

This is what we call the doctrine of “predestination”. And there are a lot of passages in the Bible that talk about “predestination”, “election”, God “choosing”, “ordaining”, or “writing our names in the book of life”.¹ It's a hard doctrine to miss as you read the Bible.

The usual Greek word behind the English “predestined” is the word *proorizo*, which carries the meaning of “determine beforehand,” “ordain,” “to decide upon ahead of time.” So, predestination is God determining certain things to occur ahead of time.

Romans 8:29-30 tells us,

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Ephesians 1:5, 11 declare,

He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will ... In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

According to Romans 8, God predetermined that certain individuals would be conformed to the likeness of His Son, to be called, justified, and glorified. These passages of course, raise many questions.

Firstly, how does the New Testament present predestination?

As a comfort. Romans 8:28 begins

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

As a reason to praise God. In Ephesians 1, Paul says,

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world.

As an encouragement to evangelism. In 2 Timothy 2, Paul concludes his pleading to work hard at evangelism with,

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

Is predestination unfair? Why would God choose certain individuals and not others?

The important thing to remember is that no one deserves to be saved. We have all sinned (Romans 3:23), and all deserve eternal punishment (Romans 6:23). As a result, God would be perfectly just in allowing all of us to spend eternity in hell. However, in his grace and mercy, God chooses to save some of us.

The New Testament presents predestination as a comfort to Christians, a reason for us to praise God and to continue in evangelism.

Does God make us sin?

James 1:13 says, "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone." As with many other parts of the Bible, James is clear that God is not responsible for our sin, we are.



If God has chosen who is saved, doesn't that undermine our free will to choose to believe in Christ?

The Bible says that we have a choice— all who choose to believe in Jesus Christ will be saved (John 3:16; Romans 10:9-10). The Bible never describes God as rejecting someone who believes in Him or turning away someone who seeks Him (Deuteronomy 4:29). Somehow, in the mystery of God, predestination works hand-in-hand with a person being drawn by God (John 6:44) yet also believing unto salvation (Romans 1:16).² God predestines who will be saved, and we must choose to believe in Christ in order to be saved. Both

facts are equally true. Romans 11:33 proclaims,

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!”

Do we really wish we could ignore the topic of predestination?

I hope not. Because the doctrine of predestination is a source of great encouragement and assurance.

What if I'm confused and have questions?

This is a difficult issue and it's wise to take your time to prayerfully and biblically study it. If you want to look further into the topic of predestination, check out <http://marshill.com/media/religionsaves/predestination> for a great video sermon. Alternatively, come along to *Disciple-Making Disciples* on Sunday 24 June, as we'll be discussing it from 12:45-2:45pm. ☞

ENDNOTES:

¹ Matthew 24:22, 31; Mark 13:20, 27; Romans 8:33; 9:11; 11:5-7, 28; Ephesians 1:11; Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Timothy 5:21; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2:9; 2 Peter 1:10... Just to name a few!

² This is what is commonly called “compatibilism.” More specifically, God is completely sovereign over everything, but humans are still entirely responsible.