

INTRODUCTION

“On Predestination”:

If all things succeed as already agreed,
 And immutable impulses rule us;
To preach and to pray, is but time thrown away,
 And our teachers do nothing but fool us.
If we're driven by fate, either this way or that,
 As the carman whips his horses,
Then no man can stray—all go the right way,
 As the stars are fix'd on their courses.
But if by free will, we can go or stand still,
 As best suits the present occasion;
Then fill up the glass, and confirm him an [donkey],
 That depends upon Predestination.

Two weeks later another poem appeared in *The Continental Journal*:

If an all perfect mind rules over mankind,
 With infinite wisdom and power;
Sure he may decree, and yet the will be free,
 The deeds and events of each hour.
If Scripture affirms in the plainest of terms,
 The doctrine of Predestination;
We ought to believe it, and humbly receive it,
 As the truth of divine revelation.
If all things advance with the force of mere chance,
 Or by human free will are directed;
To preach and to pray, will be time thrown away,
 Our teachers may well be rejected. . . .
Then let human pride and vain cavil subside,
 It is plain to a full demonstration,
That he's a wild [donkey], who over his glass,
 Dares ridicule Predestination.¹

I. THREE CAUTIONS (BEFORE CONSIDERING DIVINE ELECTION)

1. We must remember: the gospel defines us, not the doctrines of grace.

“We give our hand to every man that loves the Lord Jesus Christ, be he what he may or who he may. The doctrine of election . . . is not intended to divide between Israel and Israel but between Israel and the Egyptians. Not between saint and saint, but between saints and the children of the world.” **Charles Spurgeon**

2. We must remember: God is God and we are not.

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. Deuteronomy 29:29 (also Psalm 131:1; Prov. 25:2)

¹ Quoted in Sam Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 19-20.

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“The subject of predestination, which in itself is attended by considerable difficulty, is rendered very perplexed, and hence perilous, by human curiosity, which cannot be restrained from wandering into forbidden paths. . . . Those secrets of his will which he has seen fit to manifest are revealed in his word—revealed in so far as he knew to be conducive to our interest and welfare. . . . Let it, therefore, be our first principle that to desire any other knowledge of predestination than that which is expounded by the word of God, is no less infatuated than to walk where there is no path, or to seek light in darkness.... The best rule of sobriety is, not only in learning to follow wherever God leads, but also when he makes an end of teaching to cease from wishing to be wise...”² John Calvin

3. We must remember: God would have been just if he had condemned the whole world for rebelling against him.

II. THE DEFINITION OF DIVINE ELECTION

Statement of Faith: God in his great love, before the foundation of the world, chose those whom he would save in Christ Jesus. God’s election is entirely gracious and not at all conditioned upon foreseen faith, obedience, perseverance, or any merit in those whom God has chosen. His decision to set his saving love on the elect is based entirely on his sovereign will and good pleasure. The number of God’s elect is fixed for eternity, and no one who has been chosen by God will be lost. In the mystery of his will, God passes over the non-elect, withholding his mercy and punishing them for their sins as a display of his holy justice and wrath.

1. God chose before time.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. Eph. 1:3-5 (Also: 2 Tim. 1:9)

2. God chose on the basis of grace, *not* anything else.

Eph. 1:4: *Even as he chose us in him.*

¹When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. John 17:1-5

Isaac: Romans 9:6-9.

Jacob: Romans 9:10-13.

² John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, xxxi. 1

3. God chose specific persons, whom he foreknew and predestined.

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. Rom. 8:29-30

Foreknown: The distinguishing love of God whereby people are set apart for salvation.

Predestined: The specific decision to save God made concerning people he foreknew.

4. God chose according to his sovereign will and good pleasure.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. Eph. 1:11

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Rom. 8:28

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began. 2 Tim. 1:8–9

Rom. 9:15-16.

5. God passes over the non-elect, punishing them for their sins.

And if anyone's name was not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Rev. 20:15 (See also: Rom. 9:17-22; Jude 4; others).

“Rather than explicitly expressing a double decree of election and reprobation (which treats the two decrees as virtually parallel), the statement explains reprobation in terms of preterition—God's “passing by” of the non-elect. Such an approach seems to better reflect the asymmetry between election and reprobation—God actively and positively brings about the salvation of the elect (they are saved solely by his grace), but he does not actively and positively bring about the damnation of the non-elect (they are justly condemned because of their sins).” **Jeff Purswell**

III. THREE HARD QUESTIONS ABOUT DIVINE ELECTION

1. Is God unjust?

“The wonder is not that some are saved and others not, but that anybody is saved at all. For we deserve nothing at God's hand but judgment. If we receive what we deserve (which is judgment), or if we receive what we do not deserve (which is mercy), in neither case is God unjust. If therefore anybody is lost, the blame is theirs, but if anybody is saved, the credit is God's.”³ **John Stott**

³ John Stott, *Romans*, 269-270.

2. Is God unfair? Does election mean God rejects people who wanted to come?

As one author has said: “Election keeps no one out of heaven who would otherwise have been there, but it keeps a whole multitude of sinners out of hell who would otherwise have been there. Were it not for election, heaven would be an empty place, and hell would be bursting at the seams.” **Mark Webb**

3. Does election mean prayer, evangelism, effort, and Christian obedience do not matter?

IV. THREE IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS OF DIVINE ELECTION

1. Humility.

2. Assurance.

“[The Christian faith] began in the eternal counsels of God. Without the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ there would be no Christian faith. But without the eternal counsel of God, there would have been no incarnation, atonement, and resurrection. That God has thus planned our redemption from all eternity delivers a declaration louder than any thunderclap. It is that he is *for* us, that he has always been *for* us. He was *for* us in the far reaches of eternity. It was there that he took thought of us even before we existed. It was there that he planned to act for us. This plan was there from the very beginning.” **David Wells**

3. Gratefulness.

“When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths [of the doctrine of election] in my own soul. One week-night, when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher’s sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, *How did you come to be a Christian?* I sought the Lord. *But how did you come to seek the Lord?* The truth flashed across my mind in a moment—I should not have sought him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, *How came I to pray?* I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. *How came I to read the Scriptures?* I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that he was the Author of my faith, and so the doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession, ‘I ascribe my change wholly to God.’” **Charles Spurgeon**

CONCLUSION