

WHAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD KNOW VOLUME II (#WCSK2) PART VI: PREDESTINATION & ELECTION

The series What Christians Should Know Volume II (#WCSK2) boosts your understanding and shows you how to apply Biblical principles to everyday life. All Scriptures will be taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB) unless otherwise noted. Biblical references are examples and are in no way intended to be exhaustive. Many of the ideas here will build upon the series [What Christians Should Know Volume I \(#WCSK\)](#), which provides education on core beliefs and doctrines in the Christian faith. All of the lessons are best used as a general guide as you engage in your own Bible study.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalms 119:105)

How this principle applies to your everyday life: Having a guaranteed destiny makes very clear the direction you are moving and the path you are to take in life. Such certainty about where you are going does not artificially limit you or crush your freedom. Instead, this certainty gives you a sense of security, purpose, and an unbreakable assurance backed up in earnest by a trustworthy God.

Introduction

Before I dive into this lesson, I want to establish one simple rule. This rule makes what may seem complicated exceedingly simple. It is the rule that you must always come back to if you feel confused or unsure with any of the information that I am about to explain.

The Rule: God is sovereign.¹

The *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines sovereign as a “supreme ruler” or one who “possesses supreme or ultimate power.” Basically, when the typical person thinks of “God” they think of an all-powerful ruler who answers to no one but himself. Being sovereign is one of God’s characteristics, proven by the 30 (and by no means exhaustive) Bible references in the footnotes of The Rule. So, if an idea suggests that God is not sovereign, then that idea contradicts the Bible. If an idea contradicts the Bible, which is

¹I Chronicles 29:11-12; II Chronicles 20:6; I Samuel 2:6; Isaiah 14:24, 45:7, 46:9-10, 55:8-11; Jeremiah 27:5, 32:27; Job 23:13, 42:2; Psalm 103:19, 115:3, 135:6; Proverbs 16:4, 16:9, 16:33, 19:21, 21:1; 21:30; Ecclesiastes 7:13-14; Lamentations 3:37; Daniel 4:35; Matthew 28:18; Romans 8:28, 9:18; Colossians 1:16-17; Ephesians 2:10; I Timothy 6:15

God's Word, then that idea contradicts God. If an idea contradicts God, *Who is sovereign*, what that idea is really saying is that God cannot be God. This is very dangerous territory. So, the short version of this perilous chain is that if God is not sovereign, then God is not God.

The implication of this rule specific to predestination is also very simple: Salvation is of THE LORD.² The only thing we can do for God is bring Him our sins. He takes care of everything else.

Keep The Rule in the back of your mind for this lesson. Every credible idea or concept must obey The Rule. If an idea doesn't obey The Rule, then it's certainly wrong because it doesn't obey God, it rejects His deity, and it rejects what the Bible teaches us about THE LORD.

Let's begin.

What is predestination?

In Ephesians 1:3-12, the apostle Paul writes the following:

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, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He *predestined* us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 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 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been *predestined* according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. (emphasis added)

Predestination refers to the sovereign³ choice of God. The English word *predestination* is translated from the Greek word *prooizō*, meaning "to determine beforehand" or "to decide in advance." Predestination is a combination of the prefix *pre* and the word *destination*. A destination is a place that you're going, and pre means before. So as it pertains to time, predestination means a decision has been made of where you are going

² Jonah 2:9; Psalm 37:39

³ For more on God and His characteristics, please refer to What Christians Should Know Volume I (#WCSK), Part II: [Who God Is](#).

before you even take your first step. Of course, the agent of predestination, or the One who decides, is God. As the text says, “*He chose us ... according to the kind intention of His will ... according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.*” Because God is timeless and eternal, this decision happened, “before the foundation of the world.”

People tend to use the word *predestination* as it pertains to God making a decision beforehand about the destinies of people. Properly speaking, predestination refers to the predetermination of *everything*. The term *election* is the most technically accurate term as it applies to those *people* chosen by God to be saved. Election, then, is a type of predestination that pertains specifically to salvation. God predestined, for example, for Earth to be located between Venus and Mars. Earth, however, was never *elected* because the Earth is not a person. Because it was predetermined that Moses would be *elected*, Moses was therefore saved. Election is a subset of predestination, and election is more restrictive. For the rest of this lesson, I will go back and forth using these terms, but please keep this differentiation in mind.

Wayne Grudem defines election as “an act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on any account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure.”⁴ Election is an important concept because it clarifies the start of God’s grace in dealing with particular individuals. That is, and as we shall learn, before the foundation of the world, God chose to bring salvation to specific people. Election signals that before we were even born, God’s grace was already in effect and had a predetermined plan for our lives.

The why and how of predestination

The next question that arises is *why* does God predestine some people for salvation? The simplest answer is that God is God, and the universe works according to His purpose. II Timothy 1:8-9 says, “God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” Because God is sovereign, these are the types of calls that He makes. The Bible does not offer a precise description of how God chooses, and thus this is a secret thing that belongs to THE LORD.⁵ What is clear is that He predestined us “according to the kind intention of *His will*, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He *freely* bestowed on us.” In other words, predestination is initiated *by God* and is *freely* given to us. There isn’t anything that we do that affects our destiny, so our salvation is not conditional on our actions.⁶ If our destiny was conditionally based on our actions, what does that imply? That implies that God makes a decision based upon what I do. If that is the case, then God isn’t sovereign. And if God isn’t sovereign, then

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 670

⁵ Deuteronomy 29:29

⁶ The *prescient* view of election is conditional, meaning that before you were born, God looks down the corridor of time and observes how you will respond to Him. *Conditional* on your response, He then predestines you.

God isn't God. Election is in fact *unconditional*, meaning it is not subject to any conditions. Unconditional election simply refers to the fact that the basis of our election has nothing to do with God seeing something in us that's worthy. Again, the reason, or the why of predestination lies in God's secret will.⁷ Isaiah 43:7 tells us why human beings were made (to glorify God), and thus God's glory stands above human choice.

Many contemporary circles suggest that somehow *we choose* to follow Christ. The idea that we are born "OK" and thus can choose God isn't a new idea at all. Way back in the 5th century, a man by the name of [Pelagius](#) touted this idea, but orthodox Christianity has since labeled him a heretic. Pelagius began with the premise that God could not command us to do anything that we are incapable of executing. Thus, because of our "free will," we are morally responsible for our actions. This, of course, rejects what the Bible teaches us about original sin: *none* are good by their own merit (Romans 3:10-11), and because of the original sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden, sin entered the world and infected everyone for all time (Romans 5:12).

Of course, if you follow Pelagius's thinking and declare that we are born "OK"—and that someone would "choose" to follow God—a frightening conclusion arises: since some can in fact choose the "right" path, we have no need for Jesus, no need for His sacrifice on the Cross, and no need for faith. So, while some believers may have sincere intent in their subscription to the belief that we choose God, one ought to fully consider how that understanding, when applied to God, drastically alters the terrain of Christianity. In short, this interpretation means that Jesus died in vain, dismantling the entire Christian faith. In fact, Pelagius would also say that [original sin](#) doesn't exist.

Predestination is predicated on the foreknowledge of God and is executed based exclusively on the will of God. How do we know this? This brings us to what Reformed theology calls the "golden chain of salvation":

foreknowledge -> predestination -> calling -> [justification](#) -> glorification

⁷ It is worth mentioning here as well the theology called Arminianism, a school of thought that is upheld, generally speaking, by the Methodist church and in some evangelical circles. Essentially, Arminianism elevates human free will to something that is autonomous and "free" from external influence. The argument goes that "free" will cannot, in fact, be free if that will is predetermined. Resultantly, an individual can resist God's grace, a person can become "unsaved" by falling from grace, and the person is the final arbiter of his or her election by choosing God. Basically, in Arminianism, my choice can override God's will. Thus, God is not sovereign, and therefore, cannot be God. The other pressing eschatological question that all Arminians must deal with is that if you are "free" not to choose God, what value does that "freedom" really have if it irrevocably allows you to choose eternal damnation? Furthermore, it must necessarily be the case as well that God wills something (human choice) more than He does salvation. The problem here is that this dynamic violates Scripture (I Timothy 2:5-6 and II Peter 3:9).

The golden chain logically answers the question of what is the precise order by which people are saved. This process involves predestination. Romans 8:29-30 says:

For those whom [God] foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

So, our salvation begins with the foreknowledge of God. All those whom God foreknew, He predestined. All those whom He predestined, He called. All those whom He called, He justified. And all those whom He justified, He glorified. (Glorification refers to being raised from the dead in new imperishable bodies, having eternal life, and being in heaven with THE LORD forever.)⁸ *Foreknew* comes from the Greek word *proginōskō*, meaning, “to know beforehand.” The Bible tends to make a distinction between mentally “knowing” a person and a profound, intimate affection for them.⁹

The foreknowledge of God, then, is much more than simply being aware of the choice someone will make. It involves a deeper sense of a person’s sincere heart condition. So, God knows much more than “the facts” about the choices we make. He knows us on a personal level. Many opponents of predestination say that it is God’s knowledge of the “facts” of our choices beforehand that compels Him to choose some over others. A serious relationship, just like marriage, involves much, much more than the facts of the matter. In fact, God is a loving God, and love tends to act against “the facts” and what is reasonable. If God just knew “the facts” of our humanity, He would be compelled to choose no one because of the overriding “fact” of sin.

Hence, what Romans 8:29-30 *does* say is that our predestination *is preceded* by God’s foreknowledge. What this text *does not* say is that God’s foreknowledge is conditional on something. Our salvation, then, begins with God, not us. In fact, when we place Romans 8:29-30 in the context of Romans chapter 8, we discover a general theme of the sovereignty of God. Thus Paul writes, “*God causes* all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His purpose* ... *God* is the one who justifies” (emphasis added; verses 28 and 33).

Theologically speaking, there are two types of calls. The first is the external call, which is the preaching of the Word. Many people can hear the external call, but not everyone who receives this call will be justified. For example, someone may come to church one Sunday, hear the message, remain highly disinterested, and never come back. This also helps to make sense of Jesus’s words in Matthew 22:14, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” The internal or effectual calling happens when the Holy Spirit operatively

⁸ Isaiah 45:25; John 6:44; I Corinthians 15:51-54; Philippians 3:21; I Thessalonians 4:16-17; I John 3:2-4; Revelation 21:1-22:21

⁹ See Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 8:3; Galatians 4:9

and irresistibly [regenerates](#) a person and allows them to respond to the internal call with faith. It is by this faith that a person is [justified](#). Faith, of course, is also a gift from God:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God*; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, *which God prepared beforehand* so that we would walk in them. (emphasis added; Ephesians 2:8-10)

As another example, when Paul and Barnabas began preaching the gospel to Gentiles, Luke writes in Acts 13:48 that, “when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as *had been appointed* to eternal life believed” (emphasis added). Because of this appointment (election), they responded to and believed the truth of the gospel. In Romans 11:7 (ESV), the apostle Paul writes that the reason some Israelites were saved and others were not is because of election: “Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. *The elect obtained it*, but the rest were hardened” (emphasis added).

When Paul writes to believers in the church in Thessalonica, he writes, “For we know, brothers loved by God, that *he has chosen you*, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake” (emphasis added; I Thessalonians 1:4-5, ESV). Notice as well that Paul writes of the *full* conviction of the Holy Spirit. It’s not partial conviction or hoped-for conviction but full conviction. The Greek word for conviction is *plērōphoria*, meaning *full assurance*. First, when the Holy Spirit convicts you, you become convicted. The compulsion is irresistible. Second, Paul knew who among the believers in Thessalonica were elected by who responded to the call of the gospel.

Peter begins his first epistle by addressing his letter “To God’s elect” (I Peter 1:1, NIV) and latter refers to the same group as a race “chosen” by God (I Peter 2:9).

In fact, because the predestination of God affects everything, even some angels were chosen: “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of *His chosen angels*, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality” (emphasis added; I Timothy 5:21).¹⁰

¹⁰ And if you really want to get theologically fancy, we know that the devil was an angel who was cast out of heaven (Luke 10:18; II Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:9). God predestined angels. So, because of predestination, the devil did not catch THE LORD by surprise. Without election, our future would be damnation. Because of election, human beings are chosen to inherit eternal life. That sounds like a great bargain to me considering the alternative: no election at all.

II Thessalonians 2:13 says, “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because *God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation* through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth” (emphasis added).

So, what does this all mean? It means that all those in this life who will ever have faith and believe God have faith and believe God *because* they have been predestined. Romans 8:29-30 reveals that we have faith because we were first elected. *Election is causal*; therefore, election causes the faith necessary for salvation. Faith does not cause someone to be elected.

Romans 9:10-16 says:

And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, “The older will serve the younger.” Just as it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

Paul makes our understanding of predestination very simple by citing a classic example. Jacob and Esau were twins. They were brothers. They shared the same womb. So before they did anything, and before they even had the ability to choose, God’s purpose is what predetermined the outcome of events—and the outcome of events was *independent* of either brother. Also, twin brothers are as similar as you can get. The implication was that if there was something in Jacob that God saw was “good,” then He should have also “seen” that same good thing in Esau. This isn’t the case. And the reason God’s purpose predetermined the outcome of events is simply that God is sovereign. And again, if God is not sovereign, then God is not God.

Now you may be saying to yourself, “That’s not fair!” Well, in our finite understanding, that may give *the impression* of unfairness, but in God’s dispositional will, He is “patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”¹¹ In Ezekiel 33:11, God also says, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?” Ultimately, God desires that *everyone* come to know the truth,¹² but this is not reality.

¹¹ II Peter 3:9

¹² I Timothy 2:4

To address the question of fairness, Paul writes the following in Romans 9:20-24:

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? 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? 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? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

Justice is very fair. God’s justice says that because of one sin, the irrevocable penalty is death. Fair justice says that a violation of one of God’s commandments buys you a ticket to eternal damnation. But guess what? God is also gracious and merciful, and the grace and mercy He offers aren’t fair at all. God doesn’t have to give us His grace, but He does. God doesn’t have to show us mercy, but He does. If mercy is “deserved” then it’s not, by definition, mercy. John Doe is not inherently better than Susie Q if he is elect because nothing in him made him “more worthy.” The sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross wasn’t “fair” (for God) at all because God owed us nothing, but out of “unfairness” (to Himself), the elect receive the gracious gift of salvation because of election.

“What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there?”¹³ Of course not. God could have *not* chosen both Jacob and Esau, and that would have been perfectly fair *and* perfectly just. People who dispute unconditional election use it as fuel to label God as unrighteous, but this is a view that is man-centered, not God-centered. In a man-centered view, things have to make sense to me. Here, God can’t truly be sovereign because my choice matters. Here, God isn’t God. In a God-centered view, God is sovereign and God is God. God could have elected no one and thus saved no one. What He chose to do out of kind intention is to save some.

You may also say that predestination seems offensive. That’s because it is. Predestination turns people away. Look at what Jesus (Who implicitly confirms predestination) says in John 6:43-44, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me *draws* him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (emphasis added). So who draws? God does. What does *draw* mean? It comes from the Greek word *helkyo*, meaning to “draw by inward power, to compel.” Notice that “him” is not active in this verse; he is a passive recipient and is drawn *by* the Father. Also notice that if God compels someone and His grace is resistible, then the person has more power than God. In this case, God is not sovereign, and therefore, God is not God.

And look at what Jesus says in John 6:64-68:

But there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would

¹³ Romans 9:14

betray Him. And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.” As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. So Jesus said to the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?”

Jesus essentially says that *no one* can come to Him lacking an allowance *from the Father*.

The other objection to the sovereign choice of God is that that election *seems* to be random, like God rolls the dice and whenever He gets a three, someone gets elected. Ephesians 1:5 says that those whom God elected are chosen “according to the *kind* intention of His will.” Yes, God’s choice is independent of us, but that doesn’t mean it’s random or arbitrary—it’s based upon *kind* intention so that “all things may work together for good” (Romans 8:28). In fact, for example, in the Church, God executes *specific intention* by gifting specific things to specific people for specific purposes.¹⁴

Paul drives the point home when he paraphrases Exodus 33:19 and reiterates what THE LORD explained to Moses: “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.” Election does not “depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, *but on God* who has mercy.”¹⁵

What predestination is not

Predestination does not make us robots. Predestination itself was a free, voluntary choice made by God, and that choice was made *in love*.¹⁶ If God wanted “robots” to glorify Him, then He wouldn’t have needed to bother with our creation at all. He just would of had to make robots. Jesus came into our world because of God’s love.¹⁷ Love is always relational—it’s never mechanistic. Love is always voluntary and free. This is why Jesus invites people *to come* to Him,¹⁸ but some still refuse that invitation because they are free to do so.¹⁹ Unbelievers have a chance to come to Christ but choose *not* to do so.²⁰

Predestination does not mean people are chosen based on faith. I touched upon this in the discussion of Jacob and Esau. In the New Testament, Romans 11:5-6 states, “In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.”²¹ Our faith as a condition for predestination would be a form of “works.” As we have already learned in [WCSK: Volume I](#), one of the central

¹⁴ I Corinthians 12:11

¹⁵ Romans 9:16

¹⁶ [Ephesians 1:5](#), NIV

¹⁷ John 3:16

¹⁸ Isaiah 55:1-13; Matthew 11:28; Revelation 22:17

¹⁹ Matthew 23:37; John 5:40

²⁰ John 8:43-44; Romans 1:20, 9:20

²¹ See also II Timothy 1:9

tenets of the Christian faith is that we are saved *by grace alone through faith alone*.²² Grace makes faith possible.

Predestination does not make gods out of people; “freedom” does. This is an interesting philosophical point to consider. If God is really God, then God is sovereign. If God is sovereign, then He knows the truth about what will happen in the future, and history is determined based on His sovereign will. If, however, your eternal fate is *not* determined by God, and one clings to their autonomous, libertarian, “free will” or “freedom” as the ultimate determinant of their ultimate fate, then how is free will not more powerful than God Himself? If eternal fate is *not* determined by God and is determined by “fate”—or an impersonal Star Wars type of “force”—then aren’t these mystical forces indeed more powerful than God? In both of these hypothetical scenarios, God is not sovereign, and therefore God cannot be God.

Looking into the future and determining what a person will do—regardless if that choice ultimately rests in God’s control or humankind’s—*is still pre-determinism*. Any choice that we make in life—whether it’s choosing a mate or what to have for lunch—is influenced by something. Being externally influenced does not rob us of our will; in fact, this makes us human. The Bible never teaches that human beings are *autonomous*, being free from external influence. It does say that we are free to make choices within the contours of a world that God made. This is exactly why neither you nor I can jump up and fly to China because we cannot override the laws of physics that God had made. We can, however, choose to buy a plane ticket and fly to Beijing, or instead, take a beach vacation in Grenada. *The choice is yours*.

What predestination does

Predestination gives us comfort. God’s predestination of all things, and specifically His election of those to be saved, is a comfort to believers. Again, Romans 8:29-30 says:

For those whom [God] foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

These verses are immediately preceded by Paul writing that God works in *all* things for *the good* of those who love Him (v. 28). So before time began, God *was working* in all things for the good of those who love Him. In the future, God *will work* for the good of those who love Him. So then, Paul reasons, because God’s predestination spans all of eternity, He also *works in the present* for the good of those who love Him. So present circumstances, present adversity, and present struggles all fall under the reign of a sovereign God Who *is actively working* for the good of the elect.

²² Ephesians 2:8-9

Predestination motivates our praise and worship of THE LORD while crushing spiritual pride over “chosenness.” Ephesians 1:5-6 says, “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, *to the praise of the glory of His grace*, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (emphasis added). In other words, cognizant that our election is an act of free, loving grace, believers are compelled to praise God for what He has done for us. In the same light, in I Thessalonians 1:2, Paul writes to the church and says, “We give thanks to God always for all of you” and qualifies one reason for the thanks as God’s “choice of you” (v. 4). Paul reiterates the same sentiment in II Thessalonians 2:13: “We should always give thanks to God ... because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation.”

As mentioned in the beginning, the agent of predestination is God, so there is absolutely no room for anyone to boast. A person alone cannot achieve salvation because election is independent of the individual. Salvation is only possible with God. Predestination, therefore, eliminates any sense of worth or merit that anyone may feel. Spiritual pride makes its subscribers think they’re better than everyone else, leading to arrogance, oppression, and condemnation. Predestination leads to humility, to liberation, and ultimately, to salvation.

Predestination animates your purpose in life: to glorify God by your endurance for the elect. Essentially, predestination compels you to seek and reach out to others because there are many, many people who have been chosen before the foundation of the world but haven’t heard the gospel call yet. Remember the golden chain of salvation:

foreknowledge -> predestination -> calling -> justification -> glorification

As mentioned before, calling entails the external call (preaching of the gospel) and the internal call (God compelling you to respond *in faith*). And what is the natural event that precedes faith? “Faith comes by hearing and hearing *by the word of Christ*” (emphasis added; Romans 10:17). This highlights the pressing need for evangelism because many chosen elect have yet to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Evangelism is a vehicle by which God’s purposes materialize in the natural world. God uses evangelism as a vehicle to bring others to Himself, and without participation in this, some people will not be saved:

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!” However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.²³

Of course, the necessity for evangelism does not suggest that a lack of evangelism will override God’s sovereignty. It does remind us, however, that God is intimately involved

²³ Romans 10:14-17

in the real world and frequently uses natural means to execute His sovereign will. It also suggests that Jesus's sacrifice on the Cross was a purposeful act to make certain the salvation of God's elect—He endured the Cross *for the sake of those predestined* before the foundation of the world. Accordingly, Paul writes in II Timothy 2:10, “I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.” We, as believers, don't endure for our sakes. We endure for the sake of the elect and for our actions to serve as a testimony to others. Our story and how we respond should be a source of encouragement, inspiration, and empowerment to God's chosen people.

Predestination unburdens you from feelings of guilt. Guilt is something a person incurs when he or she violates a rule. It is that uneasy feeling in your conscience when you do something wrong. This objective guilt fuels subjective feelings of guilt, which everyone experiences differently. For example, some believers are crippled with guilty emotions if they even think about sipping some wine, while others experience no such emotional paralysis. Yes, THE LORD is merciful and loving, but He also has many rules and regulations. Because God makes the ultimate rules we are to follow, many Christians are plagued and burdened from the ultimate guilt that comes from violating God's Law and “missing the mark” that God has set. Ultimate guilt leads to accusation, embarrassment, and shame, and it stunts our psychological growth. Shame also tends to drive people away from family, the church, and God due to a perceived sense of “unworthiness.”²⁴ Of course, it is true that without Christ, no one can stand before God because of the burden of sin.²⁵ When people attempt to atone for their guilt, they often resort to manmade methods with unsatisfactory results.

This is actually where Satan, the accuser, steps in all the time. The devil constantly accuses people of their sins in order to plant the seed of guilt, generate guilty feelings, and destroy people.²⁶ The devil uses guilt as a means to condemn you. God, on the other hand, convicts you of sin in order to show you that something is wrong. The devil convicts and offers no viable solutions. God convicts so that He can show you the only solution: Jesus. God's conviction is a means to repentance, healing, reconciliation, forgiveness, righteousness, and obedience. In fact, when the devil accuses, the best way to respond is the same way Jesus did: with God's Word. We resist the accuser with the unyielding truth of that Word.²⁷ So, when Satan says, “You're a despicable sinner!” you can agree. “Yes, you are right, I am a sinner. But as it is written, I have confessed my sins to THE LORD Who has forgiven me.”²⁸ For Jesus came into this world to save sinners just like me.²⁹ That is a truth to which the devil has no response.

²⁴ And this helps explain why, in this day and age, making anyone feel guilty about anything is a path seldom taken: because guilt diminishes self-esteem, leads to animosity, and drives people away. Making someone feel good about something—even if it's wrong—boosts self-esteem and retains people.

²⁵ Psalm 130:3

²⁶ For example, see Zechariah 3:1-5

²⁷ James 4:7

²⁸ I John 1:9

²⁹ I Timothy 1:15

God does not change his eternal law or “move the mark” so that what we do is now “OK.” He makes us aware that indifference to His law still fails to solve the problem of guilt. He also reminds us that in *our* power, nothing can be done to pay our debt.³⁰

And here is where God solves the problem. The Bible is an eternal truth that is bigger than any individual’s guilt and feelings of guilt. The Bible says that if we earnestly confess our sins, that God *will forgive us*.³¹ Herein lies the ultimate solution to ultimate guilt: the forgiveness of God. As R.C. Sproul writes, “The only real cure for real guilt is real forgiveness based on real repentance and real faith.”³² God has already promised that if we confess, He will forgive us and remove every speck of unrighteousness from us. That is a promise anyone can trust in because it comes from God. Granted, there are some people whom God has already forgiven but are still crippled by guilt. Why? They don’t believe God. They have yet to embrace the awesome fact that God has already spoken an eternal truth that is bigger than any individual’s guilt and feelings of guilt. When the Bible says, “If you confess, then He will forgive” that truly means if you confess, then He will forgive. And if God has forgiven you through the power of Jesus’s blood sacrifice on the cross, you are forgiven, and your guilt is eradicated. God’s forgiveness even transcends other unforgiving people and unchanging circumstances.

So how does all of this relate to predestination? Very simply stated, for the elect, God had already predetermined that they would come to repentance and have their guilt washed away. So, for the elect, once they clinch this humbling truth and praise God for what He has done, they can repent, confess their sins, be forgiven, be unshackled from guilt, move forward, and obey. Paul actually anticipated all the elect who would live on earth burdened by guilt. He writes about predestination and then empowers believers by saying:

Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, “For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.³³

³⁰ See Matthew 18:25 where Jesus talked about forgiveness and the utter inability of a debtor to pay his debts.

³¹ I John 1:9

³² R.C. Sproul, *What Can I Do With My Guilt?* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2011), 47.

³³ Romans 8:33-39

The devil is an accusatory loser. He's a liar, a parasite, and he offers nothing of value. He may *try* to ultimately harm you and may convince you that he has power over you, but he's still a loser. He's such a loser that God already predestined that the accuser would not be able to separate the elect from Him no matter how much guilt and accusations the deceiver pours over us. For who can bring a charge against God's elect? *No one*. Why? Because Jesus already beat the accuser. And before the foundation of the world, God predestined the elect, who will not and cannot ever be separated from the love of Christ.

Predestination guarantees your salvation. People make lasting decisions all the time that are based on uncertainty. Marriage is one example. In the beginning, a couple comes together and intends to spend the rest of their lives together. This decision is not absolutely certain because no person knows the future, and the success of the marriage is dependent on people and circumstances. People are fallible. People change. Circumstances change all the time. Marriage, then, is a lifelong commitment based on uncertainty. But aware of this reality, people still get married. Experience tells us that people are willing to make temporal decisions based on uncertainty all the time. Yet, when it comes to your *eternal* destiny and something that will last forever, would you rather devote your entire being to pursue something that is uncertain and insecure or something that is absolutely certain and assured?

As I mentioned in the first lesson of *WCSK Volume II*, faith is never blind. [Faith](#) has value only because of what that faith is in: a very certain God.

The good news is that eternity is based on the certainty of God and the full assurance of God's promises. Predestination illuminates the comforting fact that not only can you be sure that you're saved, but once you are counted among God's elect, your salvation is guaranteed. This nullifies the natural peaks and valleys of the Christian experience where some days we "feel" saved and other days we "feel" unsaved. Thankfully, because of God's sovereign choice, *our salvation is not dependent upon how we feel or our subjective experience*. We can't judge us by us.³⁴

Because election is based on God's sovereign choice, our salvation is based upon foreknowledge and predestination. Election is not based upon our performance. As R.C. Sproul writes, "Election is unto salvation. In this view, if you are elect, you will be saved, and if you are saved, that is the clearest sign that you are numbered among the elect. Let me say it another way: None who are saved are not elect, and none who are elect fail to be saved."³⁵ Therefore, election not only makes salvation possible, it also guarantees it. Why did God elect? To make absolutely certain the salvation of those whom He chose.³⁶ Jesus did not die on a cross just to make salvation *possible*. He died to *ensure salvation*

³⁴ I Corinthians 10:12

³⁵ R.C. Sproul, *Can I Be Sure I'm Saved?* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2010), Loc 328, Kindle.

³⁶ See John 17:6-12 (the high priestly prayer) and those for whom Jesus prays: the elect; those whom God gave to Jesus.

for those whom God foreknew.³⁷ If this is not the case, then those who do not believe in THE LORD ceaselessly thwart God's purposes. Here, God is not sovereign, and thus, God is not God.

By divine design, God sent Jesus into the world to make salvation certain. So when Jesus said, "It is finished" on the Cross,³⁸ it truly was finished. Salvation was now secure for the elect, not just a potentiality. Jesus did not say, "It is finished from my end, but now it's up to you guys to take it from here."

Assurance of salvation always has to be tempered with caution as one cannot use it to move forward with an arrogant sense of self-aggrandizement. One has to work out their salvation with fear and trembling³⁹ cognizant that in the final judgment, not everyone who "did all the right things" and called God "LORD, LORD" will enter heaven.⁴⁰ We cannot rest our sense of salvation on ourselves, because our hearts are deceitful.⁴¹ We can rest our sense of salvation on God, Who is eternally good. Hence, because our salvation is dependent on God, Who predestined us, we can be sure of our salvation and be persuaded that God will remain committed to us.⁴²

But *how* can we be sure? Well, God already has salvation covered, so it certainly isn't the responsibility of individuals to ascertain whether other people are saved or not. It does persuade *you* to ensure that *you* are saved. II Peter 1:10-11 says the following:

Therefore, brethren, *be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you*; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.
(emphasis added)

In general, both I Peter and II Peter speak about what election looks like in the lives of believers.

Jesus tells us that those who are in His family are those who *do the will of God*.⁴³ In Matthew 13:1-23, Jesus further explains that the "good seeds" are those who hear the Word of God, understand it, and *bear fruit*, some "a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty." This is why Christ said in Matthew 7:16, "You will know them by their fruits."⁴⁴ The Greek word for fruit is *karpos*, which refers to literal fruit but also means, "works, acts, deeds." People who are genuinely saved *do* the will of God, are *doers* of the Word,

³⁷ This is what Calvinists call limited atonement. Hence, THE LORD is the One who saves. THE LORD is not One who simply enables human beings to save themselves by faith.

³⁸ John 19:30

³⁹ Philippians 2:12

⁴⁰ Matthew 7:21-23

⁴¹ Jeremiah 17:9

⁴² II Timothy 2:12

⁴³ Matthew 12:47-50

⁴⁴ See also Galatians 5:22-23, the fruits of the Spirit.

and have varying degrees of productivity in their life. The [regeneration](#) of the Holy Spirit changes what your heart is inclined to do,⁴⁵ and that inclination is toward fruitfulness. Certainly, we are not saved by our works, but a faith that is not productive is dead faith.⁴⁶ True religion involves animated, effectual doers⁴⁷ who act in service to God and to others.⁴⁸

Reprobation

Wayne Grudem writes, “Reprobation is the sovereign decision of God before creation to pass over some persons, in sorrow deciding not to save them, and to punish them for their sins, and thereby manifest his justice.”⁴⁹ Basically, when God elects those who are to be saved, a group remains that is to be judged. Election is an act of God’s grace and is reason to celebrate. Reprobation is the result of God’s justice and, as hard of a pill it is to swallow, this is what is fair because the penalty of sin is death. As we have already learned, God takes no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked⁵⁰ and desires that *all* be saved.⁵¹ Reprobation brings sorrow to THE LORD.⁵² Therefore, Scripture makes clear that God *is active* in the salvation of the elect, but *does not act* to “choose” the reprobate. To do so would be a violation of His will. For the reprobate, they “did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, [so] God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper.”⁵³

Many Scripture verses speak of those who were passed over before the foundation of the world.⁵⁴ One example can be read in Jude 4:

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

⁴⁵ Romans 8:14-17, 12:2; II Corinthians 1:21-22, 3:18, 5:1-5, 17

⁴⁶ James 2:26

⁴⁷ James 1:25

⁴⁸ James 1:17. Always be aware that works come *from* faith and that no one is justified by works of the Law (Luke 18:18-30; Romans 3:20; Galatians 3:11). Many people, in fact, *do* good things, but this doesn’t come from faith. Hence, the works by themselves have no lasting value. Civic virtue results from what Jonathan Edwards called an “enlightened self-interest.”

⁴⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 684

⁵⁰ II Peter 3:9

⁵¹ I Timothy 2:4

⁵² Ezekiel 33:11

⁵³ Romans 1:28

⁵⁴ Romans 1:24, 9:17-22, 11:7; II Timothy 3:8; I Peter 2:8; Revelation 13:7-8, 17:8

Conclusion: What this all means

I have to go back to my 2-year-old son (again) because being a father has helped me make so much sense of the Bible, particularly the doctrine of predestination. Elisha lives with my wife and me in our house. The house belongs to the two adults, but we freely share our house with Elisha because he is our son, and we love him. Naturally speaking, Elisha exists because of my wife and me, and we liberally give to him because of our decision to have a son. And, out of love, each and every day we allow him to exercise his freedom as a zealous and energetic toddler. He is free to put animal stickers on the dining room table, because we allow him to do that. He is free to make a mess with Play-Doh in the section of the living room that we have predetermined is for him. But Elisha, being a child, is subordinate to my wife and me because he is the child and we are the parents. As a result of this, there are many things that Elisha is not free to do because Elisha is not autonomous. He does not live in a house where he can do whatever he wants. We have *predestined* that some things Elisha cannot do, and we have put barriers in place that define the contours of his freedom. Elisha is *not autonomous* and cannot open our front door because there is a high deadbolt that prevents him from walking outside. He is free to roam about the house. Elisha is *not autonomous* and cannot open the drawer that contains knives because there is a plastic lock on it. He loves to carry a spoon around, and we have allowed him the freedom to open a drawer filled with plastic spoons.

Elisha hates sleep. Every night, when it's bedtime, he cries like we're hurting him. Although he doesn't verbalize it, his tears are saying, "It's not fair! This is *my* life, and I want to live it." Little does Elisha realize that his parents are looking out for him, and they both want him to live a happy, healthy life. Because we want all things to work out for good in his life, we recognize the value of good sleep, and we put him to bed early.

The reason we purposely limit his choices is to protect him. If we did allow him to be autonomous, not only would we be bad parents, but we would knowingly give our son the "freedom" to hurt himself. True freedom isn't about the number of choices you have. It's about where those choices take you.

Our house is symbolic of the world, and the parent-child relationship is analogous to the relationship between God and His creations. If things begin to make sense in the small gap between a child and parents, imagine what happens in the infinite gap between humans and THE LORD. Even more, we, being temporary, are trying to rationalize an eternal choice made by an infinite God using our finite understanding.

Hence, predestination can never be interpreted as a doctrine in isolation. It must be interpreted in the context of a relationship between a loving, personal God and His creation. In the same way that a law must consider the Lawgiver, predestination must take into consideration the God Who predestines. He is the one Who predestines with positive intent, and this subsequently fuels a chain that leads to eternal life.

Do you have a question or a suggestion for a future lesson? Then e-mail us at info@wesk.org. God Bless!

Dr. C. H. E. Sadaphal