

PREDESTINED TO BE SAVED

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August 22, 2015

¹A group of theologians were discussing the tension between predestination and free will. Things became so heated that the group broke up into two opposing factions. But one man, not knowing which to join, stood for a moment trying to decide. At last he joined the predestination group.

“Who sent you here?” they asked.

“No one sent me,” he replied, “I came of my own free will.”

“Free will,” they exclaimed, “You can’t join us! You belong with the other group!”

So he followed their orders and went to the other clique. There someone asked, “When did you decide to join us?”

The young man replied, “Well, I didn’t really decide—I was sent here.”

“Sent here!” they shouted. “You can’t join us unless you have decided by your own free will!”

There are serious minded people who actually believe that God predestines some to be saved and some to be lost, irrespective of their real wishes in the matter. This is discouraging to those who find it hard to believe that God would choose them to be among the fortunate few. One who thinks he has been numbered among the unlucky ones will do one of two things: live in despair or abandon himself to a life of profligacy.

If such a doctrine of predestination were true, one can hardly imagine any bad news that could be worse than to receive God’s irrevocable rejection slip. And to make matters worse, those who have believed in such predestination usually believe that the unlucky lost will roast and sizzle consciously in terrible flames for all eternity, writhing and screaming in endless horror, while the vengeful God who sent them there looks on, nodding His head in approval.

The Bible paints an infinitely better picture of God than that. There is a Bible teaching of predestination, but when you examine it, you find that it is quite different from the one some people have assumed it to be. God has predestined everyone to be saved. And the only way anyone can be lost is to veto the vote that God has already given in his favor; in other words, undo the salvation that the Lord has already wrought out for him.

Let us look at a sample of Bible teachings on this matter.

“God our Saviour” wants “all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:3, 4. But He does more than sit idly by, “wanting” all to be saved. He does something to bring it about. Jesus said that by His cross He would reach out and touch “all men;” “‘I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.’ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.” John 12:32, 33, NIV. He is “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” John 1:9. His drawing or pulling is gentle, for He will force no one against his will; but He is firm and

¹ Romans 8:29, 30. “Jesus Saves,” “Blessed Assurance.”

persistent. I am sure there is no morally responsible human being anywhere in the world, who can either read or hear these words, who has not been enlightened somehow by that Light or felt its drawing power in some way.

Thus “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love 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.” Ephesians 1:3-5, 11, NIV. Paul gives no hint that anyone is excluded or predestined to be lost. He means all in the human race are chosen who will welcome the good news.

God sees things before they happen, and He knows people before they are born. When Jeremiah came to understand how God loved him, the Lord told Him:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;

I appointed you as a prophet.” Jeremiah 1:5, NIV.

In the same way, the Lord has “appointed” every person to be saved, and His Holy Spirit is working to lead “all men . . . to a knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:4, NIV. This does not mean that everyone will at last be saved. Sad to say, many will be lost, but it will not be the fault of God, nor the result of His rejecting them.

The good news is set forth powerfully in these words: “We know that in all things God works for

the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. . . . And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified. . . . If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? . . . I am convinced that neither death nor life, . . . neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love [*agape*] of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:28-39, NIV).

We read that “whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). Our Calvinist friends understand God’s predestination to mean that before the creation of intelligent beings on this earth, God chose to favor certain ones with salvation and others He chose for eternal hell fire. There is no Seventh-day Adventist who would follow such an interpretation of God’s predestination.

Nevertheless, we find that some understand the following words to pertain to believers only: “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” (Rom. 8:30). If God’s predestination here pertains only to believers and not to unbelievers, then God has singled out only those who respond by faith to His *offer* of salvation as eligible for justification and glorification.

But the Father, without whose knowledge not even a sparrow falls to the ground, knew from ancient times every son and daughter who has been born. Consider the phrase “whom He did predestinate.” This is completed action. This predestination is in Christ. “In Christ we have already been blessed with all spiritual blessings.”

“Them He also called.” “All men are called to that which God has prepared for them.” God’s gift to every one would not be well-intentioned unless His call was particular to each individual. Calling involves conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit.² Surely the Lord leaves no one who has ever been born out of this important step of conversion. “The call of God is addressed to every man individually.” “I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine” (Isa. 43:1).

“Them He also justified.” This is past action on God’s part. Every one has been given the gift of justification of life. But Paul continues further by saying, “them He also glorified.” How can the unbelieving be said to be glorified? In the same sense that Paul said his unbelieving fellow Jews—“kinsmen according to the flesh”—“who are Israelites” pertained “the adoption, and the glory” (Rom. 9:4). Glorification is the change that comes when Jesus returns and bestows immortality upon mortal flesh and we are no more subject to temptation. In Christ the unbelieving person has

² “Calling is the drawing of the sinner to Christ, and it is a work wrought by the Holy Spirit upon the heart, convicting of sin, and inviting to repentance.” Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 390.

been given the gift of legal justification and glorification.

Is there a hidden catch here, some “fine print” that excludes unlucky people from this good news? No. Paul simply assumes that his readers join him in responding to this wonderful love of God. If we don’t resist, we are included in the family. The happy thing is that those who respond are “predestined” to be changed into absolutely beautiful people “conformed to the likeness of his Son!” The predestination is progressive.

Don’t the Scriptures say something about God’s playing a dirty trick on Pharaoh and hardening the poor king’s heart so he could not repent? In Exodus 4:21 we read that the Lord said, “I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.” There are nine other similar statements, that the Lord would harden the king’s heart, or make it stubborn. At first glance, it seems to be a pretty bad case against the Lord.

But there are also ten statements that say that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. For example: “When Pharaoh saw that there was respite [temporary relief from the plagues], he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said” (Ex. 8:15). Even the heathen many years later admitted that “the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts” (1 Sam. 6:6). When the Lord said, “I will harden his heart,” He meant that He would withdraw the restraining, softening influence of His Holy Spirit and leave the king to indulge his chosen feelings of rebellion as far as he wished. God focused His spotlight on Pharaoh to show all of

us the awful reality of what we can become if we resist the Holy Spirit. It's like a lump of clay in the bright sunshine. The only way to keep it soft is to keep watering it. Pharaoh was left to dry up, because that was what he wanted. By rejecting God's rain, the clay of his heart was hardened. A natural process worked itself out as the result of the king's choice, in accord with universal laws that God has ordained.

The apostle Paul understood what happened to Pharaoh:

"Is God to be charged with injustice? By no means. For he says to Moses, Where I show mercy, I will show mercy, and where I pity, I will pity. Thus it does not depend on man's will or effort, but on God's mercy. For Scripture says to Pharaoh, I have raised you up for this very purpose, to exhibit my power in my dealings with you, and to spread my fame over all the world. Thus he not only shows mercy as he chooses, but also makes men stubborn as he chooses.

"You will say, Then why does God blame a man? For who can resist his will? Who are you, sir, to answer God back? Can the pot speak to the potter and say, Why did you make me like this? Surely the potter can do what he likes with the clay. Is he not free to make out of the same lump two vessels, one to be treasured, the other for common use?" (Rom. 9:14-21, NEB).

Let's not put words in God's mouth that He did not say. The "potter" never makes a vessel in order to break it or throw it away. Jeremiah says that a wise potter (and surely the Lord is wise!) will not discard

a vessel that gets marred on the wheel, but shapes it into something else useful. One that was originally intended "to be treasured" may end up in "common use" (see Jer. 18:2-6). But it was never the Lord's plan that Pharaoh be a lost man, but because he chose the way of rebellion, the Lord let him become an outstanding example of what people make of themselves when they resist the Holy Spirit. Throughout the tragedy of Pharaoh's progression from initial stubbornness to rebellion and bitterness, the Lord was patient and merciful as Paul points out:

"What if God, desiring to exhibit his retribution at work and to make his power known, tolerated very patiently those vessels which were objects of retribution due for destruction, and did so in order to make known the full wealth of his splendor upon vessels which were objects of mercy, and which from the first had been prepared for this splendor?

"Such vessels are we, whom he has called from among Gentiles as well as Jews." Verses 22-24, NEB.

In the judgment day Pharaoh will never shake his fist at God and say, "You programmed me to harden my heart! It's your fault!" God would quietly answer, "You could have been a vessel for splendor, but I left you to have your own way which you chose."

The "good news" tells us that God has given to "every man" a complete pardon and welcome into His family, if only he will choose to accept it. "God. . . hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling. . . in Christ Jesus before the world began, . . . who

hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:8-10). We cannot rewrite Paul’s words for him. Christ has “abolished death.” If any human being at last suffers the pain of the second death, it will be against God’s will and action, because that punishment is specifically “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). Any human who gets there does so only because he thwarted God’s salvation already wrought out for him, like Saul kicking against the Lord’s leading.

One of the most explosive ideas in God’s good news is grace, which is kindness shown to the most undeserving and that includes everybody. That “grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men” (Titus 2:11, NASB, emphasis supplied). There are various translations of this passage that differ significantly from this rendering because some translators can’t fathom how good the good news is. However, the New American Standard Bible is true to the original meaning. Paul also said: “It follows, then, that as the issue of one misdeed [Adam’s] was condemnation for all men, so the issue of one just act [Christ’s sacrifice of Himself on the cross] is acquittal and life for all men” (Rom. 5:18, NEB).

The King James Version says: “The free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” There are four ways by which people have tried to understand this text: (1) The “justification” means what it says, but the “all men” doesn’t mean what it says. Christ died only for the elect. This is Calvinist predestination and denies what the apostle said. (2)

The “all men” means what it says, but the “acquittal” or “justification” doesn’t mean what it says. Christ only made a provision for justification while He keeps the cards stacked against “all men” until they do something good first. This also contradicts the gospel. (3) The “all men” means what it says, and the “justification” means what it says: therefore everybody is going to be saved whether or not they want to be. This is universalism, but the rest of the Bible contradicts this false assumption. The sad truth is that many will be lost at last. (4) The “all men” means what it says, and the “justification” means what it says: acquittal was effected at the cross for everybody. But this acquittal can be resisted, rejected, and reversed by the perverse choice of the sinner not to believe. This is the true Bible understanding of this verse.

Could Paul’s enthusiasm have outstripped his common sense? Says Jesus, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish . . . but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:16, 17, emphasis supplied). His blood was “shed for many” (Matt. 26:2). He gave His “flesh . . . for the life of the world” (John 6:51, emphasis supplied).

“Ah, yes,” says someone, “you see the catch? You’ve got to do something terribly difficult for most of us—you’ve got to believe. God pretends to be ever so generous, but He still has His loophole; He keeps the cards stacked against those ‘many.’”

What More Could God Do?

The King James Bible offers an encouraging answer to this objection: “God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3). If God handed out this “measure” arbitrarily, it would confirm the predestination libel against His character, for He would be handing out tickets to heaven to His favorites and slamming the door in the face of others. But not only has He given the Saviour to “every man,” but with the gift He has added “the measure of faith” to receive Him. This means that everybody becomes responsible for what he does with the gift of salvation placed in his hands. “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8, NIV).

It follows that the only way anyone can be lost is to reject that gift given by grace so freely. “Here lies the test: the light has come into the world, but men preferred darkness to light” (John 3:19, NEB). This preference involves personal choice. In other words, no one can be lost because of his past sins, for God has provided justification for us all. The lost reject it, having preferred to hang on to sin. This may be a series of unconscious choices, but the judgment will at last disclose how each lost individual has again and again spurned that Light that brightened his or her dark soul.

I like the way one author has put it: “All along the road that leads to death there are pains and penalties, there are sorrows and disappointments, there are warnings not to go on. God’s love has made it hard for the heedless and headstrong to

destroy themselves.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 139.

More than this, by the Holy Spirit the Saviour is sitting beside each of us as we travel down that freeway in the wrong direction, constantly nudging us to get into the right land and take that blessed exit ramp to life eternal. His job is to be a *parakeletos*, “one called to the side of” us and to constantly “convict” us of “sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8, NIV). He will never tire of His job or leave us to our perverse ways unless we beat Him off persistently the way Pharaoh did.

An old song says something true:

And once again the scene was changed,

New earth there seemed to be; . . .

I saw the Holy City beside the tideless sea.

The light of God was on its streets,

Its gates were opened wide,

And all who would might enter,

And no one was denied.

In other words, God is voting for you. He has elected us all to be saved. Our job is to say, Yes, to believe, to let our hearts be softened by the sweet influence of the Holy Spirit, showing appreciation for the love by which we were redeemed.

Remember, of course, the Lord will not force Himself on anyone who doesn’t like Him and doesn’t want Him around. He is too much a gentleman to use coercion. If He forced everyone to be saved, many would be miserable in an environment where the prevailing spirit is heartfelt gratitude to the Lamb for His sacrifice. If by accident

one rebel found himself in the City, he would head for the nearest exit.

When you see what happened at the cross, the kind of love that pushed Christ to do what He did, all this talk about it being hard to obey, hard to give all to Him, hard to surrender, becomes silly. It's only our pathetic blindness in the face of the greatest Light that ever shown in all eternity that makes us imagine for a moment that we are sacrificing anything when we give all for Christ. Justification by faith can never produce one whit less than total obedience. Let's look again at the dimensions of that sacrifice:

"If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:31, 32).

How can we who appreciate such love not also freely give Him all things? Such devotion will include keeping the Lord's true Sabbath. Any vestige of a self-caring motivation by withholding full obedience negates the truth of justification by faith, for it cancels out faith. If I withhold from Christ full obedience to any one of His commandments which contain the whole duty of man, I program myself to stand before Him at last with downcast face in shame, for I will never be able to forget how He withheld nothing in His utter devotion for me. For one who accepts God's "good news," obedience that once may have seemed hard becomes now a joyous principle.

The "good news" works! It will accomplish something never yet done since time began: it will

prepare a people from all over the world to be ready for Christ's glorious appearing. There will be no faces downcast with shame in that vast throng. To have let the Lord do something for them and in them will be looked upon as their greatest joy.

You can know today that you are expected to be there among the happy ones, not as a guest, but as one belonging to the establishment. Heaven's computers are spelling out your name as one predestined to be saved. Even though there are over four billion people on planet Earth, you don't have to be content with the fraction of one four-billionth part of God's loving attention. You get the whole of it, for He is infinite. It's like standing outside in the bright sunshine; you get as much as if you were the only person on earth. If you will simply believe it, you are like an only child to your heavenly Father.

If anyone cancels God's will for his salvation, He will feel the pain of the rejection. John the Revelator says that when the Lamb "had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven" (Rev. 8:1). That mystical quietness will be the first time since all eternity that silence has overtaken the music-filled vaults of the universe. Could it be the silence of God's infinite grief mourning for those who had insisted on disbelieving His good news and thus choosing for themselves the way of self-destruction?