

Predestination and Calvinism

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Introduction

In John 3:16, Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Who does God love? Everyone or just a select few? The Bible clearly teaches that God loves everyone and wishes for all to be saved; not all will, but it's not His fault. In Acts 10:34-35, Peter said, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him."

Romans 2:10-11 says there will be "glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God." Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:9 that the Lord is "not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance." Paul said in Titus 2:11: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men." In 1 Timothy 2:4, he said that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." Finally, John wrote in 1 John 2:2 that Jesus "is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."

These and numerous other passages in Scripture show that God's grace is freely offered to all. There are many, however, who believe and teach otherwise. Many people in the religious world believe that, before man was ever created, God decided ahead of time whom He would save and whom He would condemn. They contend that Christ died only for those who are thus elected, and that it is impossible for those elected to refuse God's grace or ever turn away from it.

Calvinism

This doctrine of predestination was originated centuries ago by John Calvin (1509-1564). He said: "By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestined to life or to death. We say, then, that Scripture clearly proves this much, that God by his eternal and immutable counsel determined once for all those whom it was his pleasure one day to admit to salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, it was his pleasure to doom to destruction. We maintain that this counsel, as regards the elect, is founded on his free mercy, without any respect to human worth, while those whom he dooms to destruction are excluded from access to life by a just and blameless, but at the same time incomprehensible judgment" (Institutes, III.21.5,7, Beveridge translation).

The 5 points of Calvinistic Predestination (TULIP)

T -- **Total Depravity** - Human beings are so affected by the negative consequences of original sin that they are incapable of being righteous, and are always and unchangeably sinful; human freedom is totally enslaved by sin so we can only choose evil. Opposite doctrine is Depravation - Human beings are sinful, but we are born with the capacity to choose between good and evil. Man is thus capable of choosing to believe and love God and respond to Him.

U -- **Unconditional Election** - Since human beings cannot choose for themselves, God by His eternal decree has chosen or elected some to be counted as righteous, without any conditions being placed on that election. Opposite is Conditional Election - God has chosen that all humanity be righteous by His grace, yet has called us to respond to that grace by exercising our God-restored human freedom as a condition of fulfilling election.

L -- Limited Atonement - The effects of the Atonement, by which God forgave sinful humanity, is limited only to those whom He has chosen. Opposite is Unlimited Atonement - The effects of the Atonement are freely available to all those whom He has chosen, which includes all humanity, as in, "whosoever will may come."

I -- Irresistible Grace - The grace that God extends to human beings to effect their election cannot be refused, since it has been decreed by God. Opposite is Resistible Grace - God's grace is free and offered without merit; however, human beings have been granted freedom by God and can refuse His grace.

P -- Perseverance of the Saints - Since God has decreed the elect, and they cannot resist grace, they are unconditionally and eternally secure in that election. Opposite is Assurance and Security - There is security in God's grace that allows assurance of salvation, but that security is in relation to continued faithfulness; we can still defiantly reject God.

Total Depravity

Calvinist Michael Bremmer says, "The Scriptures teach that we are incapable by our own will or goodness to redeem ourselves from our depravity inherited through the sin of Adam. We cannot transform our character or moral disposition in any fashion that will redeem us from sin. Nor can we, in this state of sin, will to love and obey God or exercise faith; however, the heart of the matter is not that we cannot save ourselves, but that we do not want to be saved. Inability means humanity cannot redeem itself from its sin and corruption; depravity means humanity has no inclination to redeem itself. Salvation is impossible unless God supernaturally intercedes by electing and calling a particular people for Himself."

Calvinists teach that all are born guilty of original sin, i.e., the sin of Adam. In 1 Corinthians 15:22, Paul says, "In Adam all die." In Romans 5:12, he says, "Just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." Ephesians 2:1-3 talks about those who were "by nature children of wrath." Calvinists interpret these passages to mean that all are born in sin (guilty of Adam's sin) and therefore spiritually dead (until called by God).

1 Corinthians 15:22 Calvinists claim that Paul here is speaking of spiritual death inherited by all because of Adam's sin. But Paul does not really appear to be speaking of spiritual death in these passages; the entire context of 1 Corinthians 15 is physical death and resurrection from death. It is mentioned over and over throughout the chapter, first in v3-4 and then in every verse starting at v12 and continuing through v22. V3-4 tell us that Christ died (physically) but was then resurrected. V12-22 tell us that since Christ rose from the dead, so can we. V21-22 teach that as physical death came about because of one man (Adam), resurrection from death comes about because of another man (Jesus). Paul says nothing about the guilt of Adam's sin being passed on to others, only the consequences--physical death.

Romans 5:12 It is again contended that Paul is referring to spiritual death in this passage; but is he? Paul's reference to Adam appears to be connected to his reference to Abraham in the previous chapter. The Jews felt salvation was due only them because they were descended from Abraham ("our forefather"—4:1), but Paul argues that salvation is also for the Gentiles. He shows that Jews and Gentiles are all descended from Adam and have something in common with him. His point is that all have physical death in common because of Adam, and that all can have life because of Christ. V12 says: "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin." This is consistent with Genesis 3:22-24 where it says that because of sin, Adam was driven out of the garden "lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever." Though he did not die at that very moment, the sentence was then pronounced and provision for such was then completed.

Augustine (5th century forerunner of what would become Calvinism) based his doctrine of original sin primarily on Romans 5:12, but it should be noted that he had to rely upon the Latin text which states: "By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for in him all men sinned." The phrase "in

him" was used to teach that all are guilty of Adam's sin. However, in the more reliable Greek texts, "in him" is *eph ho*, which actually means "since, because, inasmuch as," and is so rendered in most modern translations.

Such a rendering shows an emphasis, not on Adam's sin only, but also on the sins of all mankind thereafter. Death spread to all men because sin spread to all men.

In v13-14, Paul says there continued to be both sin and death from the time of Adam up until the time of Moses and the Law, but that "sin is not imputed when there is no law." In other words, they were suffering the consequences of sin (physical death) even though (because there was no law) they were not counted guilty of sin. In fact, v14 says there were "those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam." Adam transgressed concerning a law, but there was no law after Adam until Moses and therefore no guilt of sin, only the consequences of physical death.

If Paul were saying that all suffer spiritual death because of Adam's sin, then he could not say that "sin is not imputed" (v13). He would have had to say that even though there was no law, the guilt of Adam's sin was still imputed to them. That's basically what Calvin said, but it's the opposite of what Paul said. If sin is not imputed, then there is no guilt and no spiritual death. It was not the guilt of Adam's sin that was passed on to all, but rather the consequences, that being physical death.

In chapter 6, Paul goes on to speak of death metaphorically--actually in two ways. He says we will die spiritually unless we die with Christ to sin (v6-8). Spiritual death is the "wages" of sin (v23); it is something we earn/deserve if we are guilty of committing sin. It is not something given at birth because of Adam's sin. Adam's sin has corrupted our bodies, but our own sins corrupt our souls. There is no dispute that Adam sinned and all of us since have also sinned, but nothing in this (or any other) passage teaches that all are born guilty of Adam's sin.

Ephesians 2:1-3 This passage talks about those who were "by nature children of wrath." There is no dispute that we are all born with a sinful nature, if by that it is meant that we are born into an environment of sin and will all ultimately commit sin (Romans 3:23). Sin does indeed become our nature, but that is not the same as being born with a guilty nature. Remember according to 1 John 3:4, sin is lawlessness--it is transgressing a law; therefore guilt comes by doing such, not inheriting such. Paul doesn't say they were born deserving of the wrath of God, but rather they became such because "You were dead in YOUR trespasses and sins, in which YOU formerly walked according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind." Paul says they were children of wrath because they sinned. Not because Adam sinned. And not because they were born guilty of sin.

The Bible teaches that one may at times suffer the consequences of another's sin, but not the guilt. This is clearly stated in Ezekiel 18:1-20. Verse 20 says: "The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself." (See also Exodus 32:31-33; Deuteronomy 1:34-39.) Rather, the Bible teaches that each will be judged by his own actions (Matthew 12:36-37; Romans 2:6—"God will render to every man according to his deeds."; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 1:17). If we are born guilty of sin, then why are children portrayed all throughout Scripture as pure and innocent?! In

Jeremiah 19:1-6, the slaughter of children in sacrifice to Baal was called "the blood of the innocent." Jesus Himself said that we need to be like little children (Matthew 18:1-3; 19:13-14). Paul also said that we need to be like babes concerning evil (1 Corinthians 14:20). Ecclesiastes 7:29 says, "God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices." Several other passages indicate that one is born innocent but, at some later point, becomes guilty by choosing sin (Romans 7:9-11; Ezekiel 28:15—King of Tyre was "blameless in all your ways from the day you were created until unrighteous was found in you."; Isaiah 59:1-2). In fact, the words

"redeemed" and "reconciled" indicate that we are bought back and restored to a position of favor with God (see Colossians 1:14, 20; John 3:3-7), which means we had to have had His favor originally. Redemption makes no sense if we were born guilty of sin and separated from God.

Furthermore, Calvinists teach that man, born in sin, cannot do anything good or choose to do good or love God until God changes their will, and that He only does this for the elect. The Bible, however, teaches that man is created with the capability to choose good rather than evil. Romans 2:14-16 talks about Gentiles doing by nature the good things of the Law. Acts 10:1ff says that Cornelius, though not saved, was "a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the people, and prayed to God continually." Indeed man does have the freedom to make such choices as is evident in the words of Joshua: "Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15).

God has not supernaturally interceded in the lives of particular individuals to call them to His grace, but rather He has called all men by Jesus Christ and His gospel. John 1:9 says that Jesus is "the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." Romans 1:16 declares that the gospel "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Romans 10:17 says that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." In 1 Corinthians 1:18, Paul says, "The word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Finally, in Matthew 11:28, Jesus said, "Come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Why would He invite all of us if most of us were created incapable of accepting that invitation?! The Bible teaches that Jesus is standing at the door and knocking; each of us must decide whether or not to open that door to Him (Revelation 3:20; see also 22:17).

Unconditional Election

Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof defines unconditional election as: "That eternal act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on the account of no foreseen merit in them, chooses a certain number of men to be the recipients of special grace and eternal salvation."

The Bible does indeed teach predestination, but not as Calvin did. Perhaps the two most common passages on the subject are Romans 8:28-30 and Ephesians 1:3-11. In Ephesians 1, Paul is writing to Christians, and he says, "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself..." There are two key words in this passage: "predestined" and "adoption." "Predestined" (Gr. *proorizo* 4309), according to Thayer, means: "predetermine; decide beforehand." It means that God decided something ahead of time. "Adoption" means that we become God's children when we are born again.

Question: what did He decide (v5)? The Bible says, "...to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ." God decided ahead of time that we would be His children and, according to v4, that we be "holy and blameless before Him." Which is, after all, the only way that anyone could be His children since God is holy. God can have nothing to do with sin and those stained by it, so God had a plan from the beginning as to how we could be holy and blameless. How does it happen? The Bible says, "...through Jesus Christ;" "...through His blood;" and, "...according to the riches of His grace." The focus of being "predestined" is more on "through Jesus Christ" than it is "us to adoption as sons." It was God's eternal plan that Christ would give His life so that He could have children. It seems the focus of this doctrine has been perhaps too much on us and not on Jesus! Is this not consistent with the purpose of the entire OT and the Old Law, i.e., to bring us to Christ? Christ coming and dying was predestined. Therefore, our need to believe so that we might have salvation in Him is also predestined (the culmination of God's eternal plan). In Ephesians 3:8-11, Paul talks about the Lord's church and the gospel message. In verse 11 he says, "This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 8:28-30 discusses the same thing as Ephesians 1:4. What was predestined? That we should "become conformed to the image of His Son." Thus, as in Ephesians 1, it was God's eternal plan that we become His children through Christ. (See also Acts 4:28 and 1 Cor 2:7—only other 2 occurrences.)

Christians are God's chosen people, not individually selected, but as a whole. Just as the nation of Israel was at one time God's chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6), so likewise Christians are now such. 1 Peter 1:1-2 talks about Christians being "chosen by the foreknowledge of God." But it seems clear that Peter is referring to the entire body, not selected individuals, in 2:9 when he says, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous grace."

Calvinists refer to Romans 9 to show that God has indeed chosen some and rejected others. They claim that Paul herein teaches that God has a right to predestine certain individuals as His elect and to condemn others as He so chooses. But the context of the chapter is consistent with that of the entire letter; it not about individuals, but rather God's right to save not only Jews, but Gentiles as well. Paul teaches that Israel was indeed at one time God's chosen people (v4), but they can only continue to be such by faith in Jesus (v30-33). Paul sadly states that only a remnant of Israel will thus be saved (v27) along with the Gentiles who also believe (v24-26). His point is summarized in 10:12: "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him."

- v1-4 Paul's concern for his brethren of Israel to whom belong adoption
- v6-8 Paul distinguishes between physical and spiritual descendants of Abraham (Galatians 3:7, 29)
- v11 God decided beforehand that all would be blessed through the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
- v13 God saw beforehand that He would approve of Jacob's faith and not Esau's
- v15 God has the right to choose whom He wishes—
- v20-26 Therefore He has the right to choose the Gentiles
- v27, 30-33 Salvation is by faith in Jesus, not by works of the Law

Calvinists say that God has predestined some to heaven and some to hell. But Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32). Even though not all will accept, He has still called all men and His ultimate desire is that all would be saved. Some Calvinists say that God hates sinners and loves only His elect. But Jesus looked at the rich young ruler, a sinner, and "felt a love for him" (Mark 10:21). Calvinists say that God's grace is unconditionally given to those He has selected, but the Bible says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). Galatians 3:26 says we "are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Romans 9 makes it clear that salvation is certainly conditional; there is no salvation without faith.

Limited Atonement

Michael Bremmer states: "Calvinists . . . believe Christ's death is sufficient for all, but efficacious for only those whom the Father has given to Christ, the elect. Christ died not to make salvation possible, but to make salvation sure for the elect. The Westminster Confession of Faith reads: 'As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ; are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified and saved, but the elect only.' The Puritan John Owen writes: 'The death and blood shedding of Jesus Christ hath wrought, and doth effectually procure, for all those that are concerned in it, eternal redemption, consisting in grace here

and glory hereafter.' In other words, Jesus Christ died for, and redeemed only, the elect. This is what Calvinists mean by limited atonement or particular redemption. I favor the phrase particular redemption over limited atonement since it accurately describes the doctrine Calvinists believe."

In 1 Corinthians 6:20, Paul says, "For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." In Acts 20:28, in speaking to the elders from Ephesus, Paul refers to "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Indeed Christ has paid the ransom. Calvinists teach that He did so only for the elect.

The doctrine of Limited Atonement, however, is not consistent with the Bible. There is hardly a clearer teaching in Scripture but that Jesus died for all. Isaiah 53:6 says, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." 1 Timothy 2:5-6 says that Jesus "gave Himself a ransom for all." 1 John 4:14 says, "And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." Hebrews 2:9 says, "But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone." (See also Luke 19:10; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.)

Furthermore, the Bible teaches that the blood of Christ can wash away anyone's sin. John the Baptist declared of Jesus: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). 1 John 2:2 says that Jesus "is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."

Calvinists argue that if Christ died for all, then all are saved. If He paid the price for all, then all have been redeemed. If Christ is truly the propitiation for all, then God's demands are satisfied for all. But they forget one vital detail: not all accept the gift! The debt has surely been paid for all by Christ, but not all choose to believe and put on Christ (Galatians 3:26-27). 1 Timothy 4:10 says, "For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers." Again, salvation is conditional on faith. Christ died for all, but not all believe and accept His gift of salvation.

Finally, to say that Christ died only for His elect is to plainly contradict what Peter says by inspiration in 2 Peter 2:1-4. Peter talked about false teachers who were "even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves." He clearly states that those who teach such "destructive heresies" and those who follow after them will be lost eternally, even though Jesus had paid the price for their salvation.

Irresistible Grace

The Westminster Confession states: "All those whom God has predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by His almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed by it" (Chapter 10 Section 1 and 2).

It is certainly true that some hear the gospel and then believe and obey it. Others hear that same gospel proclaimed and reject it. Calvinists say that it is God who makes this difference, that He selects certain ones and then supernaturally persuades only them to come to Him. They teach that it is impossible for one who is elect not to believe, and that it is impossible for one who is not elect to believe.

The Bible, however, teaches that we are called, not by a supernatural act of God, but by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Romans 1:16 declares that the gospel "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Romans 10:17 says that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the

word of Christ." Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "We also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe." Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

For more on this and other lessons, see [*The Doctrines That Divide Us*](#), available on Amazon.com.