

Predestination and Election

By Dr. Manford George Gutzke

Do you have any idea what the word "predestination" means? I want to read to you some words from the Apostle Paul:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren (Romans 8:28-29).

The word "predestination" is a heavy word. We like little words. The Anglo-Saxon language has little words that are strong and pungent in their meaning. They say everything in just a syllable. When we get to words like "predestination" everyone would prefer some little word for it like "luck." But I say to you right now, that is not predestination.

I can tell you why there isn't any little Anglo-Saxon word for predestination. In the days when the Anglo-Saxon language was developed, all the Anglo-Saxons were pagans. Our forefathers worshipped trees, thunder, the sun, moon and stars. Back in those days they would have used a word like "luck." They never had a word for "predestination" because they never thought of such a thing. A person must be a Christian to believe in it. When the Anglo-Saxons became Christians the Gospel came to them through the Latin people and through the Latin language. That is why this word "predestination" has Latin roots. For the idea of predestination there must be a living God able, willing and anxious to do for His people; and that is the God of the Bible.

There are two common ideas about predestination that are mistaken, but they are very difficult to understand because each of them is half true. People will say "When you say 'predestination' you mean what is to be will be. God is going to do what He is going to do. No one can stop Him from doing it because He is God. Is that what you mean?" The half-truth here is that God does know all things; and He knows what is going to come to pass because He has already decreed it. When we say that God knows all things we do not mean only that God knows all things that are going to come to pass. He knows all things that could have come to pass. For every one single thing that happens there are fifty-seven other things that could have happened at the same time in that place. God knows them all. Then there is a truth about God that we honor and respect. He is on the throne. He foreordains whatsoever comes to pass. This is to say, He sees the situation coming up the road, if you will pardon the expression. He permits one event to happen and the other possibilities not to happen. Foreordination is the word to use here. But that is not predestination. Foreordination does not have any coercion in it. God knew that Judas would betray the Lord Jesus, but He did not make Judas betray the Lord.

The Bible never one time uses the word predestination about unbelievers. There is no such thing in the Bible as that God ever predestinated any man to be lost. God predestinates believers to go to heaven, to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. Every time you see the word predestination used in the Bible, it is applied to those who believe in Christ Jesus.

And one should never use the word predestination with reference to events. If there is an accident someone may say, "Well, that was predestinated." No; this would be a mistake in speech. If a person wants to talk in that kind of language, one should say "foreordained."

God is working on something so far as I am concerned. He is going to make me like the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what the Bible means when it says "all things work together for good to them that love

God." What is the "good" that all things work toward? Providence works toward this "good" that the believer will be in heaven like the Lord Jesus Christ.

The other error is really part of the first, but deserves special mention. Someone may say, "Oh you believe in predestination? You mean whoever is to be saved, will be saved; whoever is to be lost, will be lost?" This is a garish error; yet part of it is true. Do you know which part that is? It is true that God knows who will be saved, and God knows who will be lost. He knew before the foundation of the world, as when the Scripture says of believers, "He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world." It is very difficult, if not impossible, for us to think the thoughts of God. The first thing we try to do is to put "time" in God's mind. He does not have "time" in His mind. He makes time. He is God: He is eternal. Everything is present with Him all the time. There are no yesterdays nor any tomorrows with God. God knows right now who in the next generation, if this world would be spared, will believe in Him. The word to use for that and for those is "elect."

But so many students leave out altogether the way Peter puts it, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God." On the other hand many will slip in something extra, and make the word mean "select." These think the word "election" means "selection." This means that God looked all persons over, and decided some are to be "in" and are called the "elect"; others are to be "out" and will be called the "non-elect." This leaves the impression that God will decide it altogether, apart from the people, apart from the persons, apart from you.

The word "elect" is a good word, and actually means "called out of." It is very much like our common practice of getting recruits. When a Marine sergeant is ready to recruit men into the Marine Corps he calls them. He will take anybody between certain ages with certain physical qualifications. Not all will come. He may want 80, he might get 18. Because those 18 were taken in, is not the reason others were excluded. We should be very careful not to read the Bible's use of the word "election" as meaning the same as the democratic political process of election. We know what it is to have a number of candidates; only one gets in. That is "election" according to a democratic process, but that is not election from the Bible point of view. The Bible's use of "election" is never from the point of view that if one makes it no one else can. The grace of God is not so limited. The Bible puts it this way, "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." And again, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."

I do not want to over-simplify this, nor to ignore the fact that God can have some influence on those who will come to Him. Our Confession of Faith helps me in this matter. It tells me that God is not the author of sin. When I am preaching on the decrees of God, or when I am preaching on foreordination and predestination, our Confession of Faith has a statement that warns me to be very careful how I teach. I should not leave the impression that God is responsible for evil or that man is not responsible for his conduct. The Bible never one time says anyone would be elected to go to hell. It never one time says anybody was predestinated to be lost. I know that it says Pharaoh was a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction, but when you read this in its context you will see it means that God did not destroy him when Pharaoh was a boy. God let him live and run his course to serve God's purpose, even though he was hard headed and hard-hearted. God knew that Pharaoh never would yield to Him, but that does not give the idea that God pushed him to where he was.

The word "foreordination" does not have any push in it. It simply tells you what God allows and wills. Of all the possibilities it tells you which one will come to pass. The word "predestination" has a "pull" in it. It is pulling you, the believer, to God. God pulls to Him those who believe in Him. If one were to speak about predestination with reference to bringing a man to hell, one would be indicating that

God was manipulating things in such a way that a man would be lost. That would be a slander on God. Remember how Paul puts it: "God is not willing that any should perish but all should have everlasting life." We can also remember how Peter makes the remark about God that He is "long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).

This brings to our mind what God does about lost people. He gave His Son to die for them. Some people will go to hell. This is sad to say. Some people will be lost, and we can be sorry about that. But we must remember that Almighty God gave His Son to die that they should not go to hell. His Son gave Himself, and laid down His life, and shed His blood, so that they would not be lost. Those who are lost are lost in spite of the grace of God, if we understand the Scriptures properly. How else can you understand the Lord Jesus looking out over Jerusalem and weeping: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

Then how shall we understand this doctrine? The word "predestination" has two parts in it. "Pre" which means "before," such as when we say pre-war and pre-anything we mean before it happened. "Destination" is "where you are coming out at." What then is "predestination?" Predestination means that your destination is known already. This means to say that when God is working in you, He has in mind as He is working in you what you are going to be. You are not yet fit for that place. But He is going to take you there. He is going to make you fit for the place to which He is going to take you. God knows my destination as a believer is in heaven, "conformed to the image" of the Lord Jesus Christ, to be "before Him without spot and without wrinkle," in joy, in love forever. That is my destination. I am not fit for that now, but He is working in me.

Predestination is the name for a special kind of providence that God exercises in which He brings believers into His will. That is why all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. God is maneuvering those who belong to Him so that they will get to where He plans for them to be.

Years ago when I became a believer, it was as though God had pinned a label on me saying "in heaven like the Lord Jesus Christ." That was my destination. The word "predestination" implies that before God ever sent His Son into this world, He had known just exactly where I was going to wind up. In all the years of my life every single thing that has happened to me: all the good fortune, all the bad fortune, all the pleasure, all the sorrow, all the gladness, all the grief, everything that has happened to me, has been manipulated. It has been worked around in such a way according to that ticket that was on me. God will maneuver and manipulate all things together in such a way that I will be taken right along on my way. That is the meaning of this marvelous doctrine of predestination.

God has His eye on every believer for good. He is not going to let anything happen to us that will hurt us, because He "which hath begun a good work in us will complete it." God has a plan for me. But I have ideas of my own. That raises a problem. How can God get me where He wants me to go, when I have ideas of my own? Of course, if I may speak just very roughly and bluntly for the moment, God could hit me in the head and move me around in an unconscious condition, but that would not be the Gospel. He wants my eyes to be open. He talks to me. He wants me to come to Him consciously, and aware of what I am doing. This poses the technical problem that naturally exists between the sovereignty of God, in which He gets His will done; and the free will of man, in which he does as he pleases. How can these two principles fit together?

At this point let me tell you a story. We had in our family at one time four little children. All of them were small at the same time. I was pastor of a church. Now every pastor of a church is very interesting

to his people. They want to see the pastor and they want to see his family. When people would come to visit us they would not be in our house any great length of time before they would ask where the children were. Now if you had four little children, and their ages were about 3, 4, 5 and 6, with no servant help around, you can imagine that it would not always be convenient to have the ladies of the congregation see the children.

On a certain day I looked out the window and saw a woman walking down the street toward our house. I said to my good wife, "Mrs. So and So is coming down the street." She had not been to see us, so my wife said, "I expect I had better go to the door." I said, "All right." I knew what to do. I went to the back of the house, where I rounded up three of the children. I quickly got them looking presentable and brought them into the front room for presentation. The lady appreciated them. Then she said the inevitable thing, "But you have another one, don't you?" "Yes." Then she said, "Well I must see him I can't go until I see the other one."

Now that other boy was in the backyard playing with a wagon. You know there are some people who, when they don't like anything, just show it on their faces. Well this boy is one of those people. You can just tell by looking at him how he feels. I wanted the lady to think he was a nice boy. But he was not going to like my interrupting his playing. So I had a problem, as you can see. But I remembered we also had apples. I went to the back of the house with an apple in my hand, and called his name, "Mark." He stiffened. I knew he did not want to come. But he looked. Now he was still at that age when I could have insisted, and he would have come, but he would not have liked it, and he would have shown it. So I held the apple in front of him, made a gesture to him to imply "this is yours." He thought for a moment. He dropped the wagon tongue and started toddling across the backyard and as he came I told him, "Isn't this a lovely apple? It is all yours. But first we must take off this play suit." Of course that was all right, he was through playing anyway. Then I would wash his hands. Certainly. While I washed his hands I said, "I might as well wash your face." I went ahead and did that too. It was all part of the deal. So I washed his hands and face, and then combed his hair. This all came as the one package. I would just do the whole thing while we were at it. Then I put clean clothes on him, telling him the other three children were in the front room. When I finished with him, I led him to the front room, put the apple in his hand, pulled the drapes aside and pushed him in. He had the apple. He saw this strange lady, while he was still delighted and pleased. Of course the woman looked at him with appreciation and said, "Oh what a beautiful boy. Just like his daddy."

I want to ask you a question, did that boy come in of his own free will and accord? You tell me, "Sure." And I will admit he did. He came in because he wanted to. But I will ask you again, did I bring him in? You know right well I brought him in. That happened too, didn't it? Why certainly, I started the whole business. And there is the whole problem of the sovereignty of God and the free will of man set out in practical fashion.

Long ago God held up the little red apple to me. You know what that little red apple for me was? He promised to forgive my sins, He promised to keep me forever, He promised me a free pardon, He promised He would never leave me. There it was. And I want to tell you right now I dropped that little red wagon up there in Northern Manitoba and started toddling in His direction. I have had my face and my play suit dirty many times since, but I am going to have that apple anyway. God will not fool me. One of these days He will put it into my hand, and push me right into heaven. When I get there I will be just so delighted and so pleased! I will have made it because He brought me in.

I must say that ever since I have come to know the Lord Jesus Christ there has never been a rebellion in my heart. I have never had the feeling of not wanting to be well pleasing in His sight. He died for me. I

really believe it. He gave Himself for me. I really believe it. He forgives me. I really and truly believe I am forgiven. He is with me. He carries my load. He takes care of my family. He watches over everything I do, even blesses what I do more than I can ask or think. He is doing it. I was chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39). That is the way Paul put it and I would like to say to you that is the way I want to put it. We have a wonderful Savior and if you have accepted Him, you are safe in His hands. He knows what He is going to do with you. He is going to take you home. He is not going to lose you. This is the marvelous meaning of "predestination."

Election

Can you understand how easily men can differ when they try to explain the ways of God?

"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." This is the way Peter writes it in I Peter chapter 1, verse 2. "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." Paul in writing about this says in Romans chapter 9, verse 11 words like this: "That the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth." The word "election" as it occurs in the Scriptures has become the focal point in much serious controversy among Bible believing persons. I would despair of being able to answer all the questions or to clarify all the issues that such discussions have produced. But I have been urged by many to set down in print some considerations that have seemed valid to me, which enable me to understand some of the limitations of many of the more controversial views of this truth in the Scriptures.

I am somewhat aware of the history of thought in the church, and I have often deplored the fact that this wonderful truth that is indicated by the word "election" has been obscured by argument and controversy. I will make no attempt to set forth the several classic theological opinions, nor to compare them, nor to reconcile them. It is my purpose to set forth humbly some insights that I have gained that have been meaningful to me, and to comment on the truth which I can recognize in this phase of the ways of God.

Many words used by the Apostle Paul are used in ways that are different from our normal usage, from our modern way of handling them, and these words need to be studied. But they need to be studied in the context of Paul's writings. Even then the meaning is not easily recognized. Peter said about Paul's writings: "In which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." Unlearned and unstable would mean unlearned in the Scriptures and unstable in the Gospel.

People who are not sure of themselves can take some of the words of Paul and twist them out of their context so that they seem to mean what they were never intended to mean. Such persons can actually do themselves harm. And "election" is one of these words. Paul writes "that the purpose of God according to election might stand." In this Scripture the word "election" refers to an aspect of the work of God. In other words, this is something that God does. Immediately we can feel this is different from our modern use of the word "election."

Our concept of election is largely based on the democratic political practice. We nominate a number of candidates and proceed to cast our ballots according to our preference. One is elected, and all the others are not. But the meaning of the Greek word is different. Our usage of the word "election" is essentially "selection." We choose the one we want. It is one out of a number of others. All the others are actually rejects. Such a concept is definitely foreign to the Bible.

A closer examination of the word "election" as used in Scripture will help. The word "elect" is an English word based on two Greek roots. There are two little words involved. The prefix "e", which means "out of" and the verb "lago" from which is derived "lect" which means to call. Putting them together as "elect," simply means "called out of." The basic idea is the verb "to call." Now call is a common idea in the Bible. It is especially important because it accents the idea of a free voluntary response to the Word of God, the will of God. Thus in Hebrews 11:8 we read, "By faith, Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." You might just take note, for instance, that Adam was never called. He was created. And Noah wasn't called. He was saved. But Abraham was called and he was "elect" so far as Ur of the Chaldees, his home country, was concerned. He was "called out of" that, and we can see he was "elect" because he obeyed when he was called.

When Paul used the words "elect" and "election" in his letters, there had not been anything in his culture, nothing in the world at that time, like the democratic process of electing a representative. In our procedure of electing a governor, I am repeating this, there may be as many as 10 or 15 candidates. The public is asked to choose one out of the 10. Thus electing is actually a process of selecting and the candidate who receives the most votes is called "the chosen one." But I repeat such procedures were not known in the days of Paul. When he used the words "elect" and "election" there was implied no element of "selection." The basic idea in Paul's words was that of being "called out of" one situation so that the person could be brought into another situation.

The whole idea can be clearly seen in the case of the exodus of Israel. Israel as a nation was "elect" insofar as they were "called out of" Egypt, that they might enter into Canaan. It was not a matter of being chosen, as one nation, by selection out of a number of nations.

Just so in the case of the Gospel. Each human being is living naturally as a child of Adam in the condition that Paul designates as flesh, being the biological descendant of his parents in his physical being. In this state he is a sinner, having inherited what his human parents gave him in the natural process. Each believer in Christ Jesus is given the power to become a child of God, as you read in John 1:12. In the new birth he is translated into the spiritual world as a child of God begotten by the Word of God and the Spirit. Thus the believer is "elect", having been called of God in the Gospel to come out of the natural that he might enter into the spiritual. There is no element of selection in this process.

The Gospel is definitely expressed in this promise, "whosoever believeth in Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life." In another Scripture it is written of this person that believes, that he is passed from death unto life. The believer is elect, not in that he was selected out of a group of several persons, but in that he was called out of his existence in the flesh as a child of Adam that he might enter into an existence in the Spirit as a child of God. The believer is elect in himself with no reference to any other person. We should just keep that in mind all the way through.

As human beings living in this world, there is no such thing as a human being in himself being considered a child of God as such. He needs to be born again. He needs to come out of the flesh into the Spirit that he might be indeed a child of God. The original word translated as "chosen" did not imply that the believer is selected out of a number, among whom he would be the favorite one to be brought into the

blessing of God. The term basically means "called," so that the chosen one is the called one. Not chosen out of a number to be one selected to receive a favor, but chosen to a blessed relationship with God wherein the person is adopted as a son, as a child of God.

Peter writes of the believers as "elect according to the foreknowledge of God." This seems to me to say that some souls were known to God before they were born, as those who would respond to the call when they heard it. Since in the foreknowledge of God He would know who, in the course of time, would respond to the call, these could be known as the "elect."

One of the classic proof texts that is often quoted is in the book of Romans chapter 9, verse 13: "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." This is often offered as the basis for holding that God predetermined to favor Jacob out of His own free will without any regard to the conduct of these brothers. But this actually ignores a basic truth about God. God knew what was going to happen. He knows what is going to happen before it does. God knew that Jacob would deny himself to secure the birthright, whereas Esau would sell his birthright for a meal. God loved Jacob, who highly esteemed the blessing of God, and hated Esau, who had a low opinion of the blessing of God.

It is with this in mind that Peter wrote "elect according to the foreknowledge of God." But foreknowledge does not imply any coercion. It is written, speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve" (John 6:70-71). There are other Scriptures that reveal that Jesus Christ knew what was in the hearts of men but none of these imply that He was going to compel them to do these things. He knew that Judas Iscariot would betray Him, but that did not force Judas Iscariot to do it.

In the Acts of the Apostles there is a statement that seems to suggest that God determines what is going to happen. The believers in the early church, in praying to God, said thus: "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27-28). Although this reads as though God had decided what should happen, it does not follow that this is what God would have started of Himself or initiated.

When I think of God knowing all things before they happen, I must realize that He knows also all the different other things that could have happened; and so I can see how it is that the thing that did happen was the thing that God chose to allow to happen out of all the various possibilities. Satan put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus of Nazareth. In His foreknowledge God knew this, and decided to allow Judas to do it. In that sense it could be said that God determined that this should be done.

Just as a parent knows that a certain child will cry when he is put to bed, that does not mean that it makes the parent responsible for the crying of that child. The child cries because he wants to cry. I can see how it could be argued that the parent caused the crying by sending the child to bed, but I am not inclined personally to accept such argument as good thinking. It is customary for people to say that "God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass." While I can understand this statement as being true to the revelation of Scripture, I keep in mind that, in so many words, it does not appear in Scripture. That is not a scriptural utterance. In other words, this is not what the Bible says. I hesitate to use such a glib phrase among unbelievers because I fear that it could be taken in the wrong way. Actually when I accept this statement, that God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass, I keep in mind the benevolence and the grace of God. To be sure everything and anything that ever happens is fully known to God. It was known to Him before it happened, insofar as it happened at all, it happens with permission from our sovereign God. But this truth should be handled with great care so that no one gets the impression that

God is the author of evil, nor that man is not responsible for any action that he takes.

Jesus of Nazareth knew that Peter would deny Him three times before daybreak; but this does not mean that Peter had to do it, so that he was not responsible for doing it. The foreknowledge of Jesus of Nazareth did not force Peter to deny his Lord, and Peter understood this very well.

When Paul wrote: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth" (Romans 9:11); he was stressing the truth that salvation is by faith in the promises of God. The difference in the standing before God of Jacob and Esau was not based on their works, but on their faith. I am inclined to think that the call of God went out to both brothers. Jacob obeyed that call, so he was the called one. Esau did not respond to the call of God but undertook by what he did to achieve blessing for himself. Jacob received the blessing freely given to him by God, Esau did not choose the birthright and so he did not receive the blessing. Because Jacob heard the call and responded in obedience, he was the "elect," the "called one." And because Esau did not hear the call, so that he did not respond, he is spoken of as the non-elect, the not-called one.

God sends His invitation to all mankind. God is no respecter of persons, "whosoever will may come and whosoever cometh, I will in no wise cast out." "For by grace are ye saved through faith." These and other Scriptures bring to our minds the open invitation that God gives to all men. It seems clear from this study that election is related to faith, which is related to the grace of God, which is available to all men.

The word "chosen" is sometimes used to refer to those who have responded to the call of God. Here is another word we are prone to lift out of its context in the Bible and to give it meaning as we use it in our culture. I could have done that very easily. I remember as a boy how we chose up sides to play ball. Two captains would start choosing the players alternately. The rest of us would stand around to see on which side we would be chosen. But this is not the meaning of this word in Scripture. Israel was the "chosen" people, not because they were preferred before others, but because they had a mission to perform. They were to demonstrate to all nations, of all times, what God will do in and to and for any people who will obey Him.

The call of God is not based on works. It never was, at any time. Some may say that it is based upon Him who calleth. This is true, but actually it need not be thought that this means that the call is hidden in the mind of God. The call of God has gone out to the whole world. "Come unto me all that are weary and heavy laden." There is no limitation in this. It is not a matter of saying, "Come, each one of you that has the name of John." Or, "Come each one of you whose eyes are blue." No. It is an open call, "whosoever will may come." And this is guarded by a promise: "whosoever cometh I will in no wise cast out." This is the very essence of the Gospel. And I suppose this is one reason why I feel so keenly as I do about this whole matter.

I think it is a sad fact that widespread among many many people seems to be the idea that God has favorites, that He picks out certain persons and chooses them willy-nilly. He is going to take them anyway. And He leaves out certain persons and there is nothing they can do to make themselves right with God. That seems to me to be so exactly opposite to what is in the Bible. Those who respond to the call of God are the "elect," as the Bible uses the term. Each believer is called to God out of his flesh, out of his human nature, into the blessed relationship of a child of God. That is, when I believe in Christ I am called out of my flesh, my human nature, my own ego, into the body of Christ, into living in the Holy Spirit. The whole operation of "election" takes place in me: I am called out of my natural being, through death and resurrection, into my spiritual being as a child of God in the body of Christ. God is now my Father, the Holy Spirit is now my Companion, and I rejoice in the communion of fellowship with God. I

am elect out of my old human sinful nature, chosen to be a member of the Bride of Christ, and I now rejoice in the blessedness of being a member of the household of God.