

**“Who Is Predestined?”**  
(Nothing Short of All Things in Heaven and Earth!)

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There have been many views on the subject of predestination since the beginning of the Church! I think it is an understatement to say that the question and subject of predestination is still a very controversial subject within the church! Sadly, because of the disunity around the subject, it has become the source of much insecurity in the souls of many, as well as the source of much pride and arrogance within the church! Whenever such an important issue is approached from so many different perspectives, and we see the effects of insecurity and arrogance, there is no doubt in my mind that somewhere along the line, we are being taken *“captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.”* - **Colossians 2:8, NRSV.**

Knowing that the Gospel is supposed to be a source of Good News based on the grace of God, or an encouraging fact and blessing given to creation based on nothing other than God’s lavish love and goodness to that creation in Christ (**Acts 20:24**), would indicate most, in my opinion, that whatever predestination is, it is more a truth and reality to be proclaimed rather than something to be prescribed and/or maintained by those who received it.

In order to begin getting a little clarity on this subject, we must answer the question as to what predestination is? Taking the word apart literally, we get a clue. The prefix “pre” means “before”, and the word destined comes from the word “destine” which means “to stand” or “to be intended.” Putting this together, it says something about a “before intention” or something

“intended before”. This is exactly the meaning readers of the bible are to understand about the subject, as the Greek words convey the same idea but debate is stirred up around the Who, What and When questions that come to mind. Since this subject is definitely biblical (**Acts 4:28; Romans 8:29; I Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11**) it would seem that, in light of the Good News the bible is supposed to give, it would be a subject made plain enough for readers to understand, and yet, we debate it in such a way that it appears there is no way to really understand it.

In short, there are 3 basic views of predestination. One view is the view that some people are predestined to salvation and the rest are predestined to damnation. This is often called “Calvinism” in today’s religious world, but Augustine also held this view – a view called “double predestination.” Another view is that “God in his omniscience can look ahead to see in advance of who will respond yet without forcing their acceptance” as espoused by Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) and John Wesley (1703-1791). A 3rd view is that “predestination is best understood as the Work of God in Christ the Messiah”, as promoted recently by Karl Barth (1886-1968).

I would like to interpret the subject of predestination from the 3<sup>rd</sup> view, which is a view expounded on by, theologian, Karl Barth in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and express why I believe it is the most important way to look at the subject of predestination. I also believe it is the only way to more fully uphold the Christian hope in Triune God, Who “ desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” – **I Tim 2:4**.

Barth, in my strong opinion, held to the most accurate view of the Word of God as can be seen in this quote from an article about him on [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com), “Barth tries to recover the Doctrine of the Trinity in theology from its putative loss in liberalism. His argument follows from the idea that God is the object of God’s own self-knowledge, and revelation in the Bible means the self-unveiling to humanity of the God who cannot be discovered by humanity simply through its own efforts. Note here that the Bible is not the Revelation; rather, it points to revelation.” In other words, Barth properly sees Jesus, the Son of God as man, as the self-Revelation of God that the bible is pointing to at every point! This is the CRUCIAL way to interpret what the bible is actually saying to us, because Jesus says that He is the Truth. This is his way of helping us see that HE is the Truth of all truths and that anything we have to understand can only be properly understood with that Christological lens.

Interestingly, the bible never calls itself the Word of God, but points to Jesus as the Word of God (**John 1-14**). Therefore, that is where we must begin to understand what the word, or bible, is really trying to say. This is why Paul is cautioning the Colossians, and by extension the rest of us who read his writings, to look at things “*according to Christ*” (**Col 2:8**). Everything else becomes a distraction and we become captive to philosophy, empty deceit, and the rudiments of the world, when we fail to take the personal and self-revelation of God in Jesus as seriously as we should. As Barth is quoted as saying, “Jesus does not give recipes that show the way to God as other teachers of religion do. He is himself the way.”

With this Christ emphasis in mind regarding the subject of predestination, I would like to look at a couple of passages in Ephesians 1 that makes, in my mind, the subject of predestination fairly

easy to understand and, at the very least, encouraging, while maintaining the Good News of God's grace that the Gospel is supposed to be for all people. Let's look at **Ephesians 1:1-14** and see if this subject does not become more clear, simple, and less confusing.

**Ephesians 1:1-14**, “*1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful <sup>E1</sup> in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 just as he chose us in Christ <sup>E2</sup> before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. 5 He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight 9 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, <sup>E3</sup> having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; 14 this <sup>E4</sup> is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.*”

The first thing to notice is that even though Paul is obviously writing to those who believe, he is emphasizing to them what God has done to and for us IN CHRIST. The controversy on the subject of predestination obviously comes with wondering who Paul means by us. Based on the context of the people to whom Paul is writing, it would appear that he is only meaning Christians, or those who believe the Good News, but this passage gives us some other clues right away that show us that would not exactly be the best place to start in understanding the Gospel. From verses 1-10 you could understand why a person might think that only believers are predestined to adoption or salvation by God's grace as Calvinism and Arminianism state in various ways, but you would immediately have to reconsider that position in the light of the revelation of God in Christ as Paul outlines in **verse 10**.

In **verses 10-12** Paul clearly writes that God has made known to us (believers) the mystery of his will and his plan set forth in Christ, "**10** *as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11* *In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance,* <sup>E3</sup> *having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12* *so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.*"

Before Paul can get too far in his letter to the Ephesians he has already given a clear thought he has about who is predestined in the self-revelation of God in Christ. He states in verses 3-5 that IN CHRIST we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places and that we were chosen IN CHRIST before the foundation of the world, and that we were DESTINED FOR ADOPTION AS GOD'S CHILDREN THROUGH CHRIST by God's grace freely bestowed on us IN THE BELOVED!!

Whereas it is clear he is speaking of Christians (no view of predestination argues against that), Paul clarifies in verse 10 that Christians, or believers believe that the plan was to “gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” Do you see, REALLY see, what Paul is saying that believers believe? He says that Christians believe that God’s plan was to gather up EVERYTHING in heaven and on earth IN CHRIST, and that he planned and fulfilled this in “the Beloved”, Jesus Christ, by grace! The question, “Who is predestined?” has a very definite, unshakeable answer in Christ, and that answer is that everyone and everything was predestined to be adopted into the Triune life of God in Christ!! That’s the answer to “Who is predestined?” and that question can only be properly answered by seeing Who Jesus is, and then going with that Revelation. We like to answer that question according to traditional responses that have been handed on to us, but Paul says that we are no longer to answer questions and situations that way any longer; we are to answer them according to Christ (**II Cor 5:14-16, Col 2:8**).

One of the main objections to this Christological focus in the religious world is because of everyone’s fear of universalism, and how close to that heresy this understanding sounds. Universalism is the idea that, in the end, everyone will be saved. The Church has always esteemed the doctrine of Universalism as heresy, or not in line with the basic, orthodox beliefs of the Church as founded on Jesus through the Apostles. I agree with the Church on this point but I also think that we think that the early Church was saying something that it really was not saying.

First, no matter how much we may fear universalism, God does desire everyone to be saved; therefore, if our message does not at least carry a universal hope and emphasis, then it is already

a message not faithful to Who Triune God really is! A question that can be asked fairly, I think, is “why don’t we REALLY desire everyone to be saved?” I think it is because God’s passion is often seen as “flat” and “limp”, meaning God has done God’s part, now God is waiting for us to do our part with our “free will”, and hopefully we make the right choice! To see God as man in Jesus is to see God’s passion more properly; as “fiery hot”, intentional and objective, meaning, God is not sitting back waiting on us to make certain decisions, rather, God makes the objective decision he intended, to include us in His life, and our personal, subjective free-will can live in that Truth in one of two ways – in truth or in lies! But we can’t get away from the Truth!! I think our problem today is in a wrong emphasis on the biblical thought of salvation. We put too much weight on our personal experience of it FIRST! Our personal experience carries weight for us, but it is not all-important!

If Jesus is the Revelation of scripture, and he is, then to get really basic and fundamental is to understand that HE is Salvation, as Simeon spoke (**Luke 2:29-30.**) Salvation is FIRST a person before it is a concept or word to try and describe. By nature of the fact that this Person is no less than the One in, through, by and for whom all things are created and sustained (**John 1:1-5, Heb 1:1-3, Col 1, Acts 17:28, I Cor 8:9 etc**), then there is already a union that the Son of God has with all things before he becomes a man. Then there is the fact that this Son became Man!

As Dr. Baxter Kruger outlines in his essay “The Truth of All Truth’s”, “There is no dimension of divine being deeper than or beyond the Trinitarian relationship. Every act of God, therefore, is a Trinitarian act, arising out of and involving the relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit. All things, therefore, as the apostles testify, have their origin and existence not simply through God,

but in and through and by the Father's Son. For the Father never acts behind the back of or in isolation from His Son and Spirit. Not one thing, as John insists, was created or continues to exist apart from the Father's Son. It is of critical importance to recognize that confessing the eternal Trinity and the deity of Jesus Christ means that prior to the incarnation, there is a connection between the Father's Son and all creation, including the human race. For the Triune God is the Creator and the Father's Son is the One in and through and by whom all things were created and are sustained...

...Following the apostles, Calvin is at pains to point out that the existence *and* the continued existence of all things are completely dependent upon the Son of God. What then are we to make of the fact that it was *this Son* who became human? Did this Son break his relationship with his Father and the Spirit when he became a human being? Did he dissolve his relationship with the human race and all creation in his incarnation? What does the incarnation of this Son mean, except that the connection that he has with all creation is tightened and made all the more real and abiding? If he is not the Father's eternal Son, in and through and by whom all things were created and are sustained, it would be sensible to see him as a mere individual, and to see ourselves disconnected from him and what happened to him. But given that he is this Son, given that his relationship with his Father is unbroken, and given that he upholds creation, then what happens to him has dramatic implications for the whole universe, from the being of God itself to every atom and the entire human race. If we were created in and through and by this Son; if we live and move and have our being in this Son, then, for good or ill, what happens to him in his incarnate life, death and resurrection necessarily involves us. How could it be otherwise?"

What this tells us is that when the Son becomes human, He does NOT lose His connection with all things, rather the connection He already has with CREATION is made even stronger and abiding and, in fact, is now made eternal!!! As Paul says, looking at Christ, God has gathered up nothing short of “*all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*” This doesn’t take away our personal distinction and freewill as some suppose. All of us were born humanly by grace, and had nothing to do with it, and yet we have a lot to do with how we live in this life, and yet, we don’t totally control how we live in this life!! We can see this easily as humans but we have the most difficult time seeing this same thing occurring in Christ! Actually, to see humanity in Christ takes our distinction more seriously! He became a distinct human being, validating our human life and distinction! We will all be eternally alive somewhere, as saved and delivered as can be in Jesus, and that will not be a fact that we can change, however, because we are truly distinct IN THAT UNION, we will be free to oppose and reject it forever if we wish (hence the doctrines of hell, repentance, faith, etc.)

We cannot make this objective fact of our predestination a lie except in the legend of our own minds, because Jesus in our humanity is the objective fact of Who and what humanity and creation really is. Paul rightly says, and means, “all things”, because he recognizes that Jesus is not only a human being but also a creature. To take this seriously is to see that by nature of Jesus creating all things and becoming a creature Himself, all created things have been positively impacted and changed in their union with Him, and will be forever compelled to live in line with that Truth or live in contradiction to it! To quote Barth again, "The center is not something which is under our control, but something that controls us. " (Church Dogmatics)

Have you ever enjoyed the pleasure of using your arm in the right way, perhaps hugging and being embraced of another human being you cared for? On the other hand, have you or someone you know, ever had an arm twisted in a way it wasn't designed to be twisted and felt the pain of that contradiction? That is what it is like to be in union with God in Christ and to be distinct at the same time. When you live in harmony with the union of arm and body, you experience pleasure. When you contradict the union of arm and body, you experience pain but the possibility of pain is only real because the union is real!

All things have been predestined to live in the Union of the Triune God relationship in the Adoption that occurred in Christ, and this has already been fulfilled as an objective fact in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, in whom we are all hidden (Col 3:1-4). Now, the Holy Spirit is educating creation in the "mystery" of this objective fact, so that we might subjectively participate in the Truth of this fact in our personal distinction. Not spending our life trying to "get saved" or "get others saved" but educating others and ourselves to "BE saved". In other words, to trust and be who we already are in Jesus Christ by God's Grace!!

**Bibliography.** [The New Revised Standard Version](#) "The scripture quotations contained herein are from the **New Revised Standard Version** of the Bible, copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission. All rights reserved."

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