

23. Predestined with a purpose

September 21, 2008

This portion of Romans chapter 8 is one of the most controversial subjects, if not THE most. The people in both camps of Calvinism and Armenianism insist that their points are correct.

For us to understand v29 and 30, we must approach with the understanding of predestination, Calvinism and Armenianism first.

A. PREDESTINATION

In its wider sense, the word refers to God's predetermining whatever comes to pass.

Ephesians 1:11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,

In its narrower sense, which specifically relates to salvation, predestination refers to God's selection of a multitude of people whom He would save through Christ out of sinful humanity. This narrower sense of predestination is also referred to as 'election'.

Ephesians 1:3-6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.

In this one long sentence, apostle Paul described the predestination perfectly. Someone said, "To explain the predestination, it will make some one crazy. But to ignore it, it will take someone to hell."

By His foreknowledge, God knew who would choose Him by their own free will, He simply appointed them to be children of God – not by merit of ours, not by our good work, nor by anything we could have done – but by His love for us.

Does it mean that He doesn't love those who reject Him to their last breath and will end up in hell? No, that is what is amazing about our God. Just like Jesus loved Judas to the last moment at the last supper and the Garden of Gethsemane, He loves those who hate Him and reject Him.

Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

Some of you may wonder, "What were Calvinism and Armenianism all about?" Please allow me to explain them to you.

B. CALVINISM

They have five points they argue about their doctrine.

1) Total Depravity

Calvinists believe that man is in absolute bondage to sin and satan, unable to exercise his own will to trust in Jesus Christ without the help of God.

AGREE Mankind is clearly fallen by their own choice and lost in sin.

Romans 3:23; Titus 3:5; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:10-12; John 1:12-13; 16:8-11; 1 Peter 1:23-25

2) Unconditional Election

Calvinists believe that foreknowledge is based upon the plan and purpose of God, and that election is not based upon the decision of man, but the “free will” of the Creator alone.

DISAGREE God clearly does choose, but man must also accept God’s invitation to salvation with free will.

Ephesians 1:4-6; Romans 8:29-30; John 3:16; Romans 10:13; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Rev 22:17; 1 Peter 1:2; Matt 22:14

3) Limited Atonement

Calvinists believe that Jesus Christ died to save those who were given to Him by the Father in eternity past. In their view, all for whom Jesus died (the elect) will be saved, and all for whom He did not die (the non elect) will be lost.

DISAGREE The atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ was clearly sufficient to save the entire human race.

1 John 2:2; 4:9-10; Eph 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Romans 6:23; John 3:16-18; 1 Tim 4:10; Heb 2:9

4) Irresistible Grace

Calvinists believe that the Lord possesses irresistible grace that cannot be obstructed. They teach that the free will of man is so far removed from salvation, that the elect are regenerated (made spiritually alive) by God even before expressing faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. If a totally depraved person wasn’t made alive by the Holy Spirit, such a calling on God would be impossible.

DISAGREE God’s grace can either be resisted or received by the exercise of human free will.

Romans 3:24-28; 11:6; Ephesians 2:4-10; Romans 11:6; Matt 23:37; John 3:18; John 5:40; John 6:37; John 12:46-48

5) Perseverance of the saints

Calvinists believe that salvation is entirely the work of the Lord, and that man has absolutely nothing to do with the process. The saints will persevere because God will see to it that He will finish the work He has begun.

AGREE and DISAGREE I firmly believe in God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility.

Romans 8:38-39; Romans 8:1; John 10:27-28; John 6:37; Phil 1:6; Eph 1:13-14; 4:30; Luke 9:62; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:3-5

C. ARMENIANISM

These people also have five points for their doctrine as well.

1) Free Will

Armenianists believe that the fall of man was not final, maintaining that there was enough good left in man for him to accept Jesus Christ unto salvation.

DISAGREE

2) Conditional Election

Armenianists believe that election was based on the foreknowledge of God as to who would believe. Man’s “act of faith” was seen as the “condition” or his being elected to eternal life, since God foresaw him exercising his “free will” in response to Jesus Christ.

AGREE

3) Universal Atonement

Armenianists held that redemption was based on the fact that God loves everybody, that Christ died for everyone, and that the Father is not willing that any should perish. The death of Christ provided the grounds for God to save all men, but each must exercise his own "free will" in order to be saved.

AGREE

4) Obstructable Grace

Armenianists believed that since God wanted all men to be saved, He sent the Holy Spirit to "woo" all men to Christ, but since man has absolute "free will," he is able to resist God's will for his life. They believe that God's will to save all men can be limited by the finite will of man. They also teach that man exercises his own will first, and then is born again.

AGREE

5) Falling from Grace

If man cannot be saved by God unless it is man's will to be saved, then man cannot continue in salvation unless he continues to be willing to be saved.

AGREE

However, some people in Armenianism believe that those who fell away from grace need to get saved again and again by Jesus' repeated atoning sacrifice is also wrong.

According to Col 3:2, Jesus died once for all and rose again from dead and is sitting at the right hand of the father.

D. PROBLEMS WITH THEIR ARGUMENTS

These two camps' arguments bring an important point. Is the believer's salvation secure permanently?

This is one of the most controversial subjects that divides the body of Christ. It is used by satan effectively to divide the church for the last five hundred years. We were stupid and too proud to realize that it is satan's trick.

I believe God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. In other words, we are elected according to His omniscient capability and predestination. However, man still has opportunities and freedom to walk away from His grace.

Actually, the question of the believer's security of salvation is the wrong question to ask. Why do we need to know how far we can walk away from God? The question should be, "What can I do to get closer to Jesus?" Then we don't have to wonder whether we can lose our salvation or not.

I mentioned this at the Midweek Bible Study a few days ago. Many of you may remember Ray Boltz who wrote and sang "Watch the Lamb" and "Thank you" and sold more than 4.5 million copies of his albums. He decided that he no longer can hide his homosexuality. In his interview with "Blade" magazine, he said, "This is what it really comes down to," [Boltz] says. "If this is the way God made me, then this is the way I'm going to live. It's not like God made me this way and he'll send me to hell if I am who he created me to be... I really feel closer to God because I no longer hate myself." What a deception he is into!

Some might ask, "Since Ray Boltz walked away from God, does it mean that he lost his salvation? My answer is, "I don't know. It is NOT my place to judge his salva-

tion. That belongs to God. I need to be concerned about my own, not someone else's.

Philippians 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

E. PREDESTINED WITH A PURPOSE

Romans 8:29-30 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

In these two verse, we find the best chain reaction any person can ask for: God's foreknowledge > Predestination > Calling of God > Justification > Glorification

In its most general sense, foreknowledge is God knowing all things before they come to pass. It is more than God simply having information ahead of time. God knows what will come to pass because He determines what will come to pass.

When specially applied to salvation, foreknowledge is God's knowing us before we knew Him, before He even created us. When the Bible speaks of God's knowing people, it means He has made them the objects of His special love. Foreknowledge, then, is a word of determined choosing. God loved believers and chose them to be His own long before they put their trust in Him. To say that God foreknew us is to say He "foreloved" us.

What is the purpose of this predestination? God orchestrates events in order to conform us to the images of Christ. Jesus is the pattern. In other words, Christlikeness is the goal. Everything we go through – the disasters that ravage our lives, the consequences of our dumb choices, the people who impacts us for good or bad – are used by God to shape us into Christ's image.

Knowing God's plan for the future should help us as it did for apostle Paul in the first century. We can know that whenever we face each trial, we can consider it as just another blow of the Sculptor's chisel, knocking away the sin and hard edges from our lives in order to fashion us into the likeness of the Savior.

F. THE PROCESS

Conformity to Christ's image is the process of sanctification. Our God possesses providential control over our lives from start to finish. He knew us before we are born, before the foundations of the earth were even laid. And He accompanies us every step of the way – all the way into heaven.

How can we Christians ever be discouraged and frustrated when we already share the glory of God? Our suffering today only guarantees that much more glory when Jesus Christ returns!

G. NO PREDESTINATION FOR UNBELIEVERS

Predestination applies only to saved people. Nowhere in the Bible are we taught that God predestines people to be eternally condemned. If they are condemned, it is because of their refusal to trust Christ.

John 3:18-21 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the

only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

If you are not a born-again Christian, don't blame God as if He is not giving you a chance to go to heaven. He has given you opportunities before and now He is giving you another opportunity to be saved. You cannot go to heaven in your own terms, but only His. After all, heaven belongs to God, He has every right to choose how people can come.

H. APPLICATIONS

1) **Do not waste your time in arguing about the security of eternal salvation unless you want to be used by satan to divide the church. But spend that time to know about Jesus your Savior.**

2) **Each chisel hit and each hammer blow of God in our lives is to conform us to be like our Savior Jesus.**