

# **“GOSPEL” MEANS “GOOD NEWS”**

## **A Four-Part Seminar on Reformed Theology**

### *SESSION 3: PREDESTINATION*

#### **Why Do Some Believe While Others Don't?**

#### **I. Understanding the Question**

- A. The question “Why do some believe while others don't?” has to do with the cause of a person's faith in Christ
- B. Related questions:
  - 1. How is saving faith in Christ produced?
  - 2. Who can be saved?
  - 3. What role, if any, do we play in our salvation?
- C. The Bible answers this question by setting forth the doctrine of predestination / election

**Ephesians 1:3–12** 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, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

- D. Every Christian who takes the Bible seriously has to have some doctrine of predestination
- E. In this lesson, we will evaluate the two main alternatives for how to interpret the Bible's teaching on predestination

## II. The Prescient View of Predestination (Conditional Election)

- A. Prescience = knowing something beforehand
- B. Says that God predestined certain people to salvation in view of his knowledge of how they would respond to the gospel
  - 1. In other words, God elects people on the condition of their faith, which he foresaw before the beginning of time
  - 2. Romans 8:29 is cited as key proof-text for the prescient view

**Romans 8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.**

- C. Problems with this view
  - 1. Makes predestination into the equivalent of a person who fills out his NCAA tournament bracket after the tournament is over and then claims that he got all the picks correct
  - 2. The determining factor is not God's action but ours
  - 3. What is so glorious about this? Why would Paul celebrate it as he does in Ephesians 1 and Romans 11?
  - 4. Allows believers to take some of the credit for their salvation, contradicting Scripture

**Ephesians 2:8–9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the**

**gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

5. Romans 8:29 does not say that God chose the elect on the basis of foreseen faith
  - a) It doesn't say, "those whom he foreknew *would believe* he also predestined" but simply "those whom he foreknew he also predestined"
  - b) It says that God predestined these people on the basis of his personal foreknowledge of them, not on the basis of his foreknowledge of what they would do
  - c) In the Bible, having knowledge of another person is not just a matter of having information about that person but is about loving that person

**Genesis 4:1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain**

**Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.**

**1 Peter 1:20–21 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God**

- d) Rom. 8:29 is about God's personal love for his people, a love that he had for them in eternity past
- e) God set his love upon those whom he would choose to save before the beginning of time

### **III. The Reformed View of Predestination (Unconditional Election)**

- A. Predestination is necessary because of total depravity

1. God is free to save some and not others because all people deserve his wrath and condemnation

**Ephesians 2:1–5 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved**

2. Because we are all dead in sin, no one is able to believe in Christ apart from God's effectual working to bring them to faith

**John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him**

**Acts 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.**

**Acts 16:14 The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.**

- B. Predestination took place before time began

1. The elect were given to Christ before time began

**John 6:37–39 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of**

him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.

**Revelation 13:8** and all who dwell on earth will worship [the beast], everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

2. Election is not based upon God's foresight of anything that we would do but is based entirely upon his grace

**Romans 9:14–16** What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

**Romans 11:5–6** So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

- C. Predestination demonstrates that God is completely sovereign in salvation

**Titus 3:3–5** For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit

1. The only thing that we contribute to our salvation is our sin
2. If election were not true, then the determining factor in our salvation would be something that we do, which would allow us to take some of the credit for our salvation

3. As Martin Luther explained, the doctrine of predestination is essential because, without it, "I cannot worship, praise, give thanks or serve [God], for I do not know how much I should attribute to myself and how much to Him."<sup>1</sup>

D. Predestination is worthy of celebration

1. Displays the depths of God's wisdom

**Romans 11:33–36** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

2. Gives us confidence that nothing can separate us from God's love

**Romans 8:30–37** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? 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 with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 78.

E. What if I am not one of the elect?

1. God promises that he will save everyone who looks to Christ alone as their Savior
2. If you trust in Christ for your salvation, the Bible's explanation for your faith is that God predestined you for salvation

**John 6:65 no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.**

**1 Thessalonians 1:4–5 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.**

3. The gospel's promise of life to all who trust in Christ is not based upon anything good that God foresaw in certain people but upon his commitment to save all of those whom he graciously appointed to eternal life in his Son
4. "I frankly confess that... I should not want... anything to be left in my own hands to enable me to endeavor after salvation... If I lived and worked to all eternity, my conscience would never reach comfortable certainty as to how much it must do to satisfy God. Whatever work I had done, there would still be a nagging doubt as to whether it pleased God, or whether He required something more... But now that God has taken my salvation out of the control of my own will, and put it under the control of His, and promised to save me, not according to my working or running, but according to His own grace and mercy, I have the comfortable certainty that He is faithful and will not lie to me.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 314.