

Chapter 5 - Salvation and Predestination

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“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” “Ah, Sovereign Lord,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.”

– Jeremiah 1:5,6

Omnipotence and Our Power of Choice

Members of the Godhead are omnipotent. This means that if it were not for the rule of law, they could do anything they please with anything or anybody and no one could prevent their abuse. As Omnipotent Rulers of the universe, they are not subject to anyone. However, they are willing to be closely studied and observed because they are willing to abide by the laws they have put in place. Without law there is chaos and arbitrary rule. The presence of law imposes order and accountability for everyone. Even though the Godhead has the prerogatives of omnipotence and other incredible powers, these prerogatives are not exercised according to whim. When the Godhead does exercise their prerogatives, their actions are lawful! The Godhead submits their actions and decisions to their created beings for careful study and analysis. The Godhead wants all of us to see that they are singularly motivated by love and righteousness. Additionally, they want their freewill creatures to choose to follow their example!

As our Creator, Jesus is the source of life. He could have created slaves or robots, but instead He created intelligent beings that are free to exercise the power of choice. Think about this privilege for a moment. Human beings can choose to obey God or rebel against Him. Jesus speaks and worlds appear. He is capable of doubling the size of our infinite universe in a split second by simply commanding it. He could also speak Earth's entire solar system out of existence and we would cease to exist the very moment the words left His lips. Through Him everything exists. Without Him, there is nothing. He creates matter. He destroys matter. He sets limits and no one can change them. (Colossians 1) Although Jesus has omnipotence, He will not violate the power of choice granted to any person. Jesus said to Isaiah, **“This is what the Lord says – your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the Earth by myself, who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense. Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.”** (Isaiah 44:24-25, 46:9-11)

Omniscience

Members of the Godhead are also omniscient. This means they know everything about the

past, present and future. And yes, the Godhead knew before the world was created the names of the individuals who would choose eternal life and those who would not. This fact bothers a lot of people because they cannot reconcile God's omnipotence with His omniscience. Some people believe that God has already decided who is going to live forever and who is going to die forever, so no matter what we do, the outcome has already been predetermined. This concept is called "fatalism." Fatalism interprets everything that happens as the predetermined will of God and it is a false doctrine. The devil would like people to believe that they have no choice about their eternal destiny. He also wants us to believe that Jesus created some people simply for destruction. Both ideas are false.

Some Things are Predestined

According to Webster, predestination means, "to decree beforehand." Because the members of the Godhead are omnipotent, they can predestine anything they want to. (Notice, I did not say *anyone* they want to.) For example, when Jesus agreed to die in man's place, His death was predestined long before the actual event took place. Because of God's foreknowledge, the Plan of Salvation was prepared and waiting before He created the world. The Godhead foreknew the rise of sin on Earth and when the rescue was needed, they instituted the Plan. To put divine foreknowledge into perspective, let us say it is something like carrying a diaper bag when you have a newborn baby in your arms. You know the baby will soon need a fresh diaper and you are prepared for that eventuality. This is foreknowledge. However, notice in this simple illustration that your foreknowledge does not predetermine the need for a fresh diaper.

Predestination simply means that God can decree beforehand anything to happen, and it will happen because He has the power and authority to make it happen. Again, Jesus said, "**I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.**" (Isaiah 46:10,11) Predestination is a function of God's omnipotence and foreknowledge is a function of God's omniscience. Foreknowledge simply means God knows everything. He knows what our choices will be – not because He makes them happen, but because He knows what we will choose to do. Everything that happens is not, I repeat, *is not* predestined by God. God did not predestine the rise of sin. Therefore, we should not interpret every event in life as a predestined event. God did not predestine Adam and Eve to sin, but He knew they would sin. In the same way the Father knows who will choose or forfeit eternal life.

Jesus Lays Divine Prerogatives Aside

When Jesus stepped "in the way" of the executing angel who was preparing to execute Adam and Eve, Jesus became the "Son of God" that very day. According to the provisions of the plan to save humanity, the day Adam sinned Jesus agreed to lay aside His prerogatives at an appointed time. Even though He was an equal member of the Godhead, He agreed to become subject to the will of the Father at the time of His birth. (John 6:38) Therefore, Jesus is often called the Son of God. (See Psalm 2 and Hebrews 1:5,5:5.) During Old Testament times, Jesus sometimes exercised omniscience and omnipotence, but at the time of His birth, He laid these

powers aside to become a man.

How could Jesus lay these powers of divinity aside? This is a mystery, but He put aside a number of divine prerogatives for our salvation. For example, He put aside His immortal life so He could die for sinners. Jesus became subject to death (mortal) and completely experienced sin's penalty when He was put to death by execution! (Hebrews 2:17; 10:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21) After He put these prerogatives aside, He returned to Heaven and was found worthy to receive them back on the basis of His perfect compliance with the Plan of Salvation and the will of the Father. (Revelation 4 and 5) Remember, when Jesus was born of Mary, certain limitations were placed on Jesus' power for a period of time. For example, He said, **"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."** (Matthew 24:36) In other words, in His human form, Jesus did not know the date He would return to Earth, because the Father had not revealed this information to Him. However, Daniel 7 and Revelation 4 and 5 reveal that a time came when Jesus' omnipotence and omniscience were returned to Him. (Daniel 7:13,14) It is obvious that Jesus increases in power and authority throughout the process of saving man, just like the infant Jesus grew in wisdom and favor with God and man! (Hebrews 2:8; Luke 2:52) At the end of all things, when Jesus has acquired all that Heaven can offer, He gives it all back to the Father so He can live among His subjects as one of them. (1 Corinthians 15:24-28)

Careful! Easy to Distort!

God has not predestined some people to be lost and others to be saved. The Bible says, **"He [the Father] predestined us [fallen human beings] to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will . . ."** **"He [God] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."** (Ephesians 1:5, 2 Peter 3:9, insertions mine.) Be careful! These texts are easy to distort. Ephesians 1:5 does not say that God predestined a certain number of people to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ – implying that all others are predestined for eternal death. This text says that God has predestined fallen man *to be adopted* as His sons through Jesus. In other words, God predestined the adoption process. It is called justification! **"Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."** (Romans 4:4,5) Did you not see whom God justifies in verse five? To say that God predestines our eternal reward makes a mockery of the Plan of Salvation. If God predestined the eternal reward of a man without recognizing man's actions or power of choice, the Plan of Salvation would be a deceptive trick. If God predestined people to be saved and others to be lost, a Plan of Salvation would not be necessary. Think about it – what is the point of choosing to follow the Holy Spirit if you are predestined to be lost? In simplest terms, the difference between predestination and foreknowledge is the following: Predestination (decreeing beforehand) is setting the alarm clock to ring at 5:00 a.m. the next morning. Foreknowledge (knowing beforehand) is looking at a clock and observing that the alarm setting indicates it will ring at 5:00 in the morning. God does not predestine eternal destiny, but He does predestine events, such as making the process of adoption as His sons available to all mankind.

God Predestines People for Service

God sometimes predestines people to do certain things. Notice these three texts:

“The word of the Lord came to me [Jeremiah], saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’ ” (Jeremiah 1:4,5, insertion mine.)

“This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron . . . I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me. . . .” (Isaiah 45:1,2,5)

“He [the man of God] cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord: ‘O altar, This is what the Lord says: A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who now make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you.’ ” (1 Kings 13:2, insertion mine.)

I chose these particular verses because they represent certain extremes. In the first text, Jeremiah, the Jew, was appointed to be a prophet for God before he was born. In the second text, Cyrus, the pagan, was appointed to be a great king that would conquer the Babylonians. In the third text, the birth and reformation of King Josiah was foretold. We know that God is no respecter of persons. (Acts 10:34) He loved Jeremiah, Cyrus and Josiah and they were born with a destiny of service for God. However, God’s appointment to service has nothing to do with their eternal reward. That choice remains their exclusive privilege to decide.

These texts demonstrate that God has a plan for our life even before we are born! (See also Psalm 139:16.) However, God’s appointment does not mean that we are forced to fulfill His calling. He respects our power of choice and if we so choose, we can turn our backs on God as King Saul did. Although God appointed Saul to be Israel’s first king (1 Samuel 15:1), Saul became evil in God’s eyes because of his rebellion. Eventually, the Lord refused to have anything further to do with him. (1 Samuel 28:6) Remember, God may predestine a person for certain tasks, but He does not predestine anyone for eternal life or death.

Critical Difference

There is a critical difference between God’s foreknowledge and God’s power to predetermine an event. Predestination *pre-decrees* the outcome, whereas foreknowledge *knows* the outcome of all things in advance. The future is to the Godhead what the past is to us. It is unchangeable. We may have a perfect view of our past, but we are powerless to change one word, thought or deed in the past. Likewise, the Father is powerless, under the rule of love, to alter or change the future in any way. Can He be trusted to leave the future unchanged? *This is the critical question.* Any manipulation of the future would be a malicious act by God because He claims

that His universe is governed by the rule of love. The presence of Lucifer and sin proves, among other things, that intelligent creatures have the power of choice. Is God love? Yes, the death of Jesus proves His love for mankind. The rebellion of one-third of His angels, the fall of Lucifer and the dire consequences of Adam and Eve's sin prove that God will not interfere with the inalienable right of all intelligent beings to exercise their power of choice. This is why the future, as far as God is concerned, is unchangeable. He allows it to unfold according to the choices of His subjects and He responds accordingly.

Perhaps one more illustration will demonstrate the critical difference between foreknowledge and predestination. Suppose an airplane pilot can look down from 10,000 feet and see the twists and turns of a long river. In one glance, he can see the end *and* the beginning. Also imagine that people are traveling down the river in a boat – not knowing where the river leads. The pilot of the airplane can see where the boat will be when it reaches the end of the journey, but the pilot of the airplane has nothing to do with the travelers reaching that destination. Instead, he can only see where the boaters will be when they reach the end of the river. Knowing the end from the beginning without interference is foreknowledge. On the other hand, predestination is pre-decreeing that an event will occur, such as setting an alarm clock to go off at a certain time.

In short, God predestines *events* to happen. He also predestines people for service, but He does not predestine the eternal destiny of people. Because He has foreknowledge, God knows what people are going to do. He not only grants us the power of choice, He insists that we use it! (John 3:16)

Jesus Foreknew Israel's Apostasy

The Old Testament story of Israel illustrates how Jesus does not use His foreknowledge to change the outcome of events, even when they run contrary to His will! Notice this prophecy, **“And the Lord said to Moses: ‘You are going to rest with your fathers, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them. On that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them, and they will be destroyed. Many disasters and difficulties will come upon them, and on that day they will ask, ‘Have not these disasters come upon us because our God is not with us?’ And I will certainly hide my face on that day because of all their wickedness in turning to other gods.’ ”** (Deuteronomy 31:16-18)

Jesus knew what the nation of Israel would do in the future and He shared this information with Moses. The Old Testament record confirms what Jesus knew. However, it also confirms that Jesus did not use His foreknowledge to make Israel a stubborn and stiff-necked people. (Ezekiel 3:7; Jeremiah 7:26) In fact, just the opposite is true! The Old Testament verifies that God did everything possible to redirect Israel from its terrible ways – time after time He sent His servants the prophets – but Israel *chose* to rebel against God! (See Jeremiah 3.) Jesus knew that Israel would rebel before they rebelled! The essential point is that Jesus does not deal with His creatures on the basis of His foreknowledge. Instead, He deals with man on the basis of love and our current needs. Aren't you glad! Although He can see the end from the beginning,

He does not use that knowledge to manipulate us. God can be trusted. He will not change the future to protect Himself or His universe. He carefully respects our power of choice. Jesus is the only parent who would send His child through four years of college at the enormous cost of \$80,000, knowing in advance that the child is going to fail. Taking this simple point to its logical conclusion we can only conclude that God's love was profoundly amazing! Who else but God would create the cherub Lucifer and give him everything that Heaven could offer – knowing in advance that Lucifer would eventually choose to become His worst enemy?

From the Creation of the World

Consider the contents of this text: **“The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.”** (Revelation 17:8) This text indicates the wicked, whose names were not written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast (the Antichrist) that will rise up out of nowhere (the abyss). My point is that the Bible student can interpret this text to say, “God knew in advance who was going to be lost from creation to the final moment of Earth's history and He left their names out of the Book of Life.” This statement is true, but understand that the wicked are not lost because God left their names out of the Book of Life. The wicked are lost because they chose to rebel against God's authority! A profound point found within this text is that during the Great Tribulation, Jesus will do everything possible to save men and women. He will save to the utmost. Jesus will present the terms and conditions of salvation so clearly and so powerfully that no one will be able to justify rebellion against God or claim ignorance of His will. Jesus said, **“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”** (Matthew 24:14) John's comment in Revelation 17:8 is set in the context of the final days of the Great Tribulation, after God has done everything possible to save mankind. John is amazed at what length God has gone to save man from the penalty of sin, even though God foreknew who would rebel!

The bottom line is this. The Godhead has omniscience; they know everything, but they do not use their omniscience to manipulate their creatures or alter the oncoming future. If they did, they would be guilty of a terrible breach of confidence. They claim to operate on the principle of love, but any power play to manipulate their subjects would suggest otherwise. From their comprehensive perspective of the universe, the future is clearly laid out, even though their creatures create the future as each day arrives. The good news is that the Godhead can be trusted with this incredible power. As events unfold during the Great Tribulation it will be demonstrated and proven that they are righteous, pure, above reproach and trustworthy. God's omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence mean that wherever we are in the grand march of time, God is already there. Throughout the endless corridors of eternity, nothing surprises God. He knows everything and He is prepared for every eventuality that His creatures will choose. This fact should be most reassuring to finite beings who put their trust in Him. **“. . . From everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him.”** (Psalm 103:17)