

Predestination and Free Will are Partners

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The Bible contains many apparent conflicts and some of these were discussed in the July, September, and October Wake Up Reports. This month we will consider another textual conflict. This conflict can be resolved so that all Bible passages are harmonious, but the resolution does not come easy. I would like to begin this article by saying “yes,” it is true that God has predestined certain things; and “yes,” it is also true that God permits people to exercise free will in other things. The key to resolving this conflict is in knowing which “things” were predestined and which “things” are free will.

Predestination Does Not Mean Forcing the Outcome

The topic of predestination involves several subjects which have to be included in the study. Even though many Bible texts do not use the word predestination, the texts are related to the topic! Remember, truth is proven true by the harmony that comes from the sum of its parts. For example, God’s omnipotence and omniscience have substantial roles within the topic of predestination. Many people believe that since God is all powerful and all knowing, He has predetermined who will be saved and who will not and there is no possibility of changing the outcome. For these people, there is no difference between God knowing the outcome and forcing the outcome.

Consider the ramifications of this logic: If God has predetermined the outcome of all things, He is responsible for everything that happens. This logic makes Him responsible for sin because He predetermined that Lucifer and a third of Heaven’s angels would sin and be cast out of Heaven. Then, He forced Adam and Eve to sin; and to save certain people from death, He forced Jesus to die on the cross. This logic makes God the Creator of sorrow, sickness, and death. Worse yet, He is the source of dishonesty, hatred, cruelty, and sexual immorality because these behaviors exist in many people! If all of these dreadful things about God are true, then predetermining who will go to Heaven and burn in Hell is not out of character. Moreover, if these things are true, then God is the greatest liar in the universe. He claims to be a God of love, He claims that righteousness and justice are the foundations of His throne, but these words are lies if God created some people to end up in Heaven and others to end up in Hell.

God is not a liar. He is righteous and does not force anyone into sin. If He did such things, no one would want to spend eternity with Him. There is a simple solution to harmonizing predestination with free will. Knowing the outcome is not the same thing as forcing the outcome. For example, if I set an alarm clock to go off at 6 a.m., I am forcing the event to occur (Predestination). However, if I walk into a room and see that the alarm clock is set to go off at 5 p.m., I am not forcing the event, even though I know the outcome (Foreknowledge). It is possible that the divine powers, foreknowledge and omnipotence, can operate in God’s heart without interference.

A Living Trust

Before Heaven and Earth were created, the Father foreknew that sin would occur and this would separate mankind from His presence (no sinner can live in God's glorious presence). Therefore, He created a plan to save sinners and He designed this plan to operate as a living trust.

A living trust is a process whereby the assets of a benefactor are distributed to beneficiaries through the services of a trustee or trustees. Trustees have specific obligations established by the trust. They are to complete the terms and conditions of the trust and distribute the assets of the benefactor to beneficiaries. *Trustees are servants of the trust. They are not free to act on their own, they do not own the assets of the trust, and they are not permitted to appropriate the assets of the trust to themselves.*

After Adam and Eve sinned, God chose patriarchs to be the trustees of His gospel. However, the sons of God (the patriarchs, the spiritual leaders) became distracted with beautiful women who had no interest in spiritual matters. Consequently, the world became so wicked and degenerate that after 1,600 years, God cleansed the Earth with a flood and started over. Then, He chose the descendants of Abraham to serve as the trustees of His gospel. Israel became so wicked and rebellious that after God patiently waited 1,400 years, He sent Jesus to win Israel over, but they killed Him. So, God started over with a new covenant with believers in Christ (Christians) to serve as the trustees of His gospel. However, after 1,600 years of apostasy, He had to make a change and caused a reformation with Christians and Protestants. After a mere 200 years, these trustees became so divided, confused, and blasphemous that God gave up on them. When the Great Tribulation begins, God will start over for the last time. He will choose 144,000 individuals to be His trustees and these people will accomplish within a mere 1,260 days all He wants done.

If the plan of salvation does operate as a living trust, the textual conflict is resolved. Predestination and free will are not in conflict within a living trust. Before creation, God predestined that groups of people would serve as trustees of His gospel. Because He gives people free will, they may choose to receive or reject the gospel. During the Christian era, God appointed trustees to serve His beneficiaries: **“It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”** (Ephesians 4:11,12)

After Jesus came to Earth, we see that individuals have a choice to believe or disbelieve: **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever [chooses to] believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:16) **“The [Holy] Spirit and the bride [the people of God] say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears [the invitation also] say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is [hungry and] thirsty [for truth and peace], let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life [which flows from the throne of God].”** (Revelation 22:17)

The Bible teaches that God has predestined certain events. For example, He told Noah He would send the flood 120 years later. (Genesis 6:3) He told Daniel that Messiah would die in the middle of the 70th week. (Daniel 9:26,27) He revealed to John that the date of the sixth trumpet has been set, down to the very hour, day, month, and year. (Revelation 9:15) Jesus plainly told His inquiring disciples just before He ascended that the Father has set dates and times according to His own authority. **“He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.’ ”** (Acts 1:7) **Note:** Jesus said that it was not for them to know certain dates because He did not want His disciples to understand that His return would be 2,000 years later. If Jesus had revealed this, Christianity would have died before the end of the first century A.D.

When Israel camped at the base of Mt. Sinai, God let Abraham’s descendants know from the beginning that their position as trustees of His covenant (gospel) was conditional. He sent Moses to Israel with the big “if.” **“Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, ‘This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob. . . ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole Earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ [my trustees]. . . . So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak.”** (Exodus 19:3-7, italics mine) **“The people all responded together, ‘We will do everything the Lord has said.’ So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.”** (Exodus 19:8) **Note:** Please review Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 if you have any question about the conditional nature of God’s arrangement with Israel. God’s appointment of trustees is always conditional.

The Lord gave Israel these instructions: **“I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison [of sin’s curse] and to release from the dungeon those who sit in [spiritual] darkness.”** (Isaiah 42:6,7)

Israel failed to meet these terms and God’s patience ended when Israel refused to receive Jesus as the Messiah. This is why Jesus terminated the trusteeship of Israel shortly before His death saying: **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ”** (Matthew 23:37-39, italics mine)

After Jesus ascended, the Jews persecuted the apostles and the believers in Jesus. One reason was that early Christians understood that God had abandoned old Israel and created a new Israel. (James 1:1; 2:1; Galatians 3:28,29; Ephesians 2) Christians also understood that under the new covenant, all believers in Christ are trustees and commissioned to proclaim the gospel. (Matthew 28:19,20) Paul and Barnabas affirmed this transition in their thinking when speaking to the Gentiles: **“For this is what the Lord has commanded us [that is, all believers**

in Christ]: **‘I have made you [to be a new Israel, you are now the seed of Abraham, heirs of the promise given to him, you are now] a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the Earth.’ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.**” (Acts 13:47,48)

The last nine words of Acts 13:48 are often used to justify the idea that God has predetermined who receives eternal life. If these were the only words on the topic of predestination, the conclusion would be reasonable. Since many other texts were written and the setting during which these words were spoken should be considered, they have a different meaning. These nine words mean, “Gentiles can receive salvation without becoming Jews.” When God established Christians as His trustees, God opened the door to salvation to the Gentiles through Christ whereas the door to salvation had previously been through Israel. Under the new covenant, God ordained that Gentiles could become heirs of Abraham through Christ and this took old Israel entirely out of the loop. Therefore, the phrase, “all who were appointed [that is, the Father had predestined that the Gentiles should hear the gospel and those who were convicted of their need] for eternal life,” believed.

From the very beginning, it was God’s plan that after Jesus died, there would no longer be any distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Of course, the Jews could not know this (and it remains unknown to them) until God revealed this fact to Paul. Notice his words to the church at Ephesus: **“In reading this [Paul is referring to his comments in Chapter 2], then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”** (Ephesians 3:4-6)

“For He [the Father] chose us [all who believe] in Him [Jesus] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ [whether Jew or Gentile], in accordance with His pleasure and will – to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves. . . In Him [Jesus] we were also chosen [to become trustees], having been predestined [for this task] according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:4-6, 11,12)

James understood that old Israel had lost its trusteeship and new Israel had been appointed as trustees. This is why he defined “the 12 tribes of Israel” as believers in Christ. (James 1:1, 2:1) He wrote, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us [Christians] birth through the word of truth, that we [as believers in Christ] might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created.” (James 1:17,18)

God has always had an “elect” on Earth who are appointed to serve as trustees. His chosen people have the task of distributing the love of the Father to His beneficiaries. **“But you [believers in Christ] are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you [as trustees of His gospel] may declare the praises of Him who**

called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you [Gentiles] were not a people [you were not a chosen nation like old Israel], but now you are the people of God [as believers in Jesus you are the new Israel]; once you had not received mercy [such favor], but now [through Jesus] you have received mercy [astonishing favor].” (1 Peter 2:9,10)

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