

## Thoughts on Predestination

Written by Walter Cash

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By Elder Walter Cash

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We wrote on this subject several years ago, but have had many requests within the last two years to write again, and have had it in mind during the last year to do so, but had been deferring it. The scripture teaching on this subject forms a solid foundation for the principal doctrines held by the Primitive Baptists, and for that reason ought to be kept prominently in mind when treating upon the salvation that was accomplished in the coming of Christ Jesus into the world as a sin-bearer and sacrifice for sin.

The conditional systems of the world are at variance with the scriptural references to predestination so plainly that they can be set aside without difficulty, and hardly need notice. But those who believe in salvation by grace have need to keep these scriptures before them, and see that their teaching and practice are in harmony with them. The passages where the term is used are so clear that there is no escape from the fact stated, that God's predestination reaches to the salvation of individuals. The passage in the Ephesian letter is both comprehensive and positive. It reads as follows:

Eph 1:4-5

"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." - Eph 1:4-5.

In this it is stated that the saints at Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus, were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world that they should be holy and without blame before God in love. This electing them in Christ Jesus was God's way of taking away the blame that was against them as sinners, and making them holy, he having predestinated them to be his children. As those who were thus adopted were sinners, the descendants of Adam, and embraced in his fall, they must be freed from their state of condemnation, and made holy. This was to be accomplished through Christ Jesus, who was to redeem and cleanse them through his blood, thus making them acceptable. All this was to be done because of God's grace, and it is therefore "to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."

Ro 8:28,31

We have the word predestinate used in Paul's letter to the church at Rome with the same meaning and import as in the Ephesian letter.

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"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called them he also justified, and whom he justified them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? if God be for us, who can be against us?"- Rom. viii:28-31.

In this scripture it is affirmed that God fixed the destiny beforehand of those whom he foreknew. This foreknowledge of God cannot be thought to refer to the omniscience of God, which is an attribute of his, in which all things and persons are comprehended from eternity. But as the apostle had under consideration the saints, for whom intercession is made, (Rom. viii:27) those whom he foreknew were such as he foreknew in his grace in the redemption in Christ Jesus in his purpose of salvation. They were not foreknown as believers, or for any righteousness that they would possess. These he predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son. This is in fact the statement that is made in Ephesians - "having predestinated us unto the adoption of children."

In "conforming" those who were predestinated there must be a work done for and in them, so "Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called." This doubtless refers to regeneration. And "whom he called, them he also justified." They were "justified freely" by his grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ." - Rom. iii:24. And those who were foreknown, predestinated, called and justified are to be glorified.

"What shall we then say to these things?" To what things does the apostle refer? Evidently to the things just enumerated. These are the "all things" that work together for good to the elect of God, who are called according to his purpose, and who manifest the evidence of this in that they love God.

The passages noted above are the only places in the scriptures where the word predestinate is used, and in its connections refer to an act of God before time. This act is followed by other acts - election in Christ, calling by his spirit, justification in his judicial office as judge, and glorification in the final work of salvation.

### False Reasoning of Arminians

The Arminian system fails to provide a remedy for what they charge as a fatal defect in the Calvinistic system - that all men are not made equal as to the conditions of salvation. To make them equal, really, the Holy Spirit must overcome their condition as it is in nature so as to bring them to the same condition. If it so influences one man as to place him where he will accept, then to operate on others to a like degree, they must be brought to acceptance. If it be said that one man has more resistance than another, then to treat him with equal mercy he must have a corresponding increase in the effectuality and power of the Holy Spirit. Then, too, what they call the outward means of grace must be made equal; such as religious influences, and such surroundings as would incline men to be favorable to the gospel.

In the Arminian system the effort has been made to get away from what they conceived to be an injustice in the doctrine of election, which represents God as choosing some and not others. But

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they present a system which in many points is short of putting men on equal basis as to what they consider the means of salvation. According to their system men must believe and accept, and in order to do this, must be under the influence of the gospel, when God in his foreknowledge knew that millions and millions of the race would never be in such favorable circumstances. According to their theory God leaves the fate of men, in this respect, to those who have been Christianized, and God knew that these professed Christians would be so covetous and selfish that they would sit in ease and leave those who are under evil influences to perish in their sins. This presents a system based upon the unjust supposition that God suspends his grace for some, waiting for the preacher and church to throw such influence around them that they may hear the gospel, and then become inclined by these influences to accept it. According to this idea, the intentions of mercy fail, because they depend on the efforts of Christians for those who are in sin, and darkness, and evil surroundings. This can not be called equal treatment to sinners.

That anyone may be predestinated to salvation through Jesus Christ, individuals must be designated, and this is known as election. The position of Primitive Baptists is, that without imposing any conditions on the sinner, God chose individuals of the sinful race of man to be saved by Jesus Christ, the only reason being found in God's grace. Many passages might be cited, and the reader who is interested should turn and read those here noted:

"Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the World;" - Mt 25:34

"According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world;" - Eph 1:3

"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our work, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began;" - 2Ti 1:9

Joh 6:37; 17:2-24; Ac 13:48; 1Th 5:9; 2Th 2:13; 1Pe 1:2; Re 13:8; 17:8.

### Predestination Not an Attribute

Predestination has been thought by some to belong to the attributes of God, but the use of the scriptures will not admit this. It is the decree of God, fixing the destiny of those upon whom grace is bestowed. They are predestined before the foundation of the world, to be children of God. God foresees all things and events; but this foreknowledge does not confer grace. He sees the acts of devils, but mercy is not extended because of this omniscience. His foreknowledge is not his prerogative, it is his being, and necessary to it. It is not an act. But predestinating sinners to be children of God is an act of mercy, and is a bestowal of grace. Predestinating sinners unto the adoption of children is to the praise of the glory of his grace. If it was a necessity of his being, and not an act of mercy, it could not be called grace. But sinners are saved by grace, and it is the prerogative of God to save whom he will, and from that arises election in Christ Jesus. It is written, "Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated." Also, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that

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sheweth mercy." It is the prerogative of God, and none may say unto him, What doest thou? And being entirely of him and by him, all the praise belongs to him. He has determined on whom grace shall fall, and he brings it to pass. The cause is in his hand and he leaves it to no uncertain conditions.

### Predestination a Cause

Some have said, "Predestination does not 'cause' anything." But if the adoption of children, and the conforming them to the image of Christ result because it was predestinated, then this act of God is indeed the cause of all things which are necessary to bring about the end. Because he predestinated them unto an end he sent his Son into the world to free them from the condemnation of the law, and cleanse them from the stain of sin; then because he predestinated, he called them; and having predestinated them he justified them, and will in the end glorify them, because he predestinated them to that end.

The definition of "cause" is, "That which occasions or effects a result; the necessary antecedent of an effect." Is not predestination a necessary antecedent of salvation? It was the decree that put in motion all that was done to bring about the end. The affirmation of this very fact makes the Primitive Baptists to differ from others, for they assert that there can be no failure in the plan, because God predestinated and then carries forward the work himself. If predestination be not causative, then why should Primitive Baptists contend so strongly for it as making certain the salvation of sinners who are embraced in it? If it does not cause to come to pass, then there is no use to use the word at all; just stop with foreknowledge, which as before asserted is not the cause of events.

Some seem to have adopted this idea that predestination cannot be considered a cause, because they want to assert that God predestinated sinful acts; and yet they see the inconsistency of asserting that God actually causes men to do the very opposite of what he tells them not to do. If predestination cannot be connected with sin as a cause, on the ground that it is not the actual cause of events, then why connect it with salvation through Christ Jesus? If it does not cause anything then it is certain that predestination has no effect in bringing about salvation. This is a very unscriptural position.

### Ac 2:23

But it is asserted that God does predestinate sin, and the following passages are referred to as proof. One is in Ac 2:23:

"Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

Take notice that Jesus was "delivered" according to the determinate counsel of God. Jesus came into the world to be offered up as a sacrifice. That was a part of the eternal covenant between the Father and the Son, the very hour being set for it. These "wicked" hands and hearts had attempted to take and kill Jesus before, but his time had not yet come, and he escaped out of their hands, and was not delivered to them. But now his time had come and so

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he was "delivered." God in his perfect foreknowledge knew what the "wicked" hands would do, but he did not cause them to be wicked, and therefore he did not predestinate them to that end, and act, any more than he makes the devil do his wicked deeds. Nowhere is it intimated that God predestinated to send evil into the world by Adam. He was not treated as a servant of God, but was held to blame for his act.

The fact is not changed in the responsibility resting upon the wicked hands because God had predestinated Jesus to be offered as a sacrifice. Wicked men and devils cannot defeat the purpose of God, but they are not in harmony with him. They meant it for evil; even as Joseph's brethren meant murder when they disposed of Joseph. But God's purpose can and does set a limitation to the wickedness when it would thwart his purpose. The wrath of man shall praise him and the remainder he will restrain.

Ac 4:27

Another passage is quoted to try to make it appear that God's predestination caused men to do wickedness. It is in Ac 4:27:

"For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."

Now in this passage, as in the previous one considered, the foreknowledge and predestination of God had to do with the things that were to befall Jesus as suffering for the sins of his people. It was determined in the covenant of Grace that Jesus should suffer all these things. Of course the perfect foreknowledge of God was not at fault, and when Jesus' hour was come, would any one in the world have wickedness in the heart to do it? Sure enough, here was Herod and Pontius Pilate, led on by the devil to do the things to Jesus that he and the Father knew would be done, that he might finish the work that the Father gave him to do. Did God predestine, and so cause the hearts of these wicked persecutors to thus hate the Son of man? These two passages are referred to as the most notable instances of God predestinating evil deeds, and they are as far from it as darkness is from light. God determines to prevent the wickedness of devils and men from overthrowing his designs. He is the sovereign ruler. As a sovereign he decides the proper punishment for the transgressors of his laws. Many of the passages that are quoted to prove that God predestinates sin, are but prophecies which show the foreknowledge of God.

The London Confession

The London Confession of Faith is quoted to show that Primitive Baptists have stood, and now ought to take the position, that God predestinates all things that come to pass, both good and evil. The authors of this instrument used language that is open to this construction had they not gone on to so qualify it in the positive manner that they did. It is clear that they saw that the language could be so interpreted as to deny the plain teaching of the scriptures. So they connected with the statement on decrees, qualifications, and it is not right to quote part of their statement without including all. The paragraph on Decrees reads:

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"God hath decreed in himself from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin, nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor is yet the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established, in which appears his wisdom in disposing of all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decrees."

According to the qualifying clauses of this article we should not refer to the predestination of God in such manner as would seem to imply that evil acts are prompted by God; or the will of the creature so environed by the Lord as to direct it to sin. Neither is God in harmony or fellowship with any in sin. According to this the will of man is free to act in a moral way.

Doubtless the authors of this article meant to say that God is a sovereign ruler, and this is not a chance world. God sees all the possible events to the end of time, though he may not be the author of them, but he so takes them into consideration that his government of men and events shall not be overthrown. The transgressor shall receive his just reward, for as he sows so shall he reap.

According to common usage it is understood that if it be affirmed that God predestinates a thing, that he wills it, and that the individual is hereby compelled to it. To be in harmony with the scriptures and the London Confession of Faith this idea should not be given out. So if one now should assert that God predestinates all things, to be in harmony with the London Confession, he should go on to qualify his statement. He should go on to say, I do not mean by this that God prompts men to sin; or that it is in harmony with his will; or that he in any way influences men to evil deeds; neither is the will of the creature in any way directed in sinful ways. But this would require a great deal of circumlocution to make people understand, so it would be better to use Bible terms and expressions that are not likely to be misunderstood. The Bible nowhere says that sin is predestinated. If we say that, we are likely to be misunderstood, unless we actually believe that God is the author of sin. But if we say that by man came sin into the world, and that God holds all men to account for their sins, and by his law forbids sinful acts, we are in agreement with the Bible. We should also say that the apostles and preachers of the gospel of Jesus exhorted all men to morality, and the children of God to love and obedience to the commands of God. We can say all these things and be in harmony with God's word.

### God Rules Over All

It will be entirely proper to say that God rules over all things. He rules over all his creation in nature. He does not have to set a time today for the sun to rise tomorrow, he has appointed laws which will govern all created nature until the end of time. He does not set a time today for the seed to germinate tomorrow, for his law was put into the life of the seed. All the apples that shall ever fall from the tree to the ground will be controlled by the law of gravitation that God made, unless there shall be a special dispensation, as there was when the waters of the Red Sea stood up as a wall until the children of Israel passed over. Special dispensations have been made and may be made again to show that the God of the whole earth has power to do as he will.

God made man an accountable being, which means that he can be governed by a moral law. He is not controlled as the sun and the stars, he is held to account for his acts. So Adam was

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made. God gave him a commandment and told him the result of disobedience. Adam had the power of individual decision, or else he could not have been held to blame for his act. God did not put in him the inclination to sin, for in that way God would have been the author of sin. But the Bible says that Adam sinned. God did not put about him influences that compelled his transgression, for in that case it would have been injustice to visit upon him a penalty for his act. But God rules, and carried out his law, and Adam was driven out for his crime.

### God Dealing With His Children

God delivered his chosen people from Egyptian bondage. He had chosen and called them and he never changes. But when they had crossed the Red Sea he gave them laws by which to order their lives. He told them what would be the result of disobedience, and he did not cause them to go contrary to his laws any more than he did Adam. When they disobeyed it was their own act, and God held them to account and chastised them.

Under the New Covenant God gives his people eternal life, and a new understanding, which can be instructed by gospel teaching. And under this dispensation God's spiritual children are held to account for their acts of disobedience. But God does not lead them into evil ways, he is not the author of sin. He gives them the Holy Spirit to lead them and teach them. They often go contrary to his teaching, and then God shows his disapprobation, and often hides his face from them. He is still the sovereign ruler and this is his way of ruling. He does not tell his children to do so and so and then predestines they shall do just to the opposite.

But regeneration is under a different law from those which may be transgressed. The will of man is not consulted, as it is "not by blood, nor by the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." This work is under a different law. This work is done under the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Man cannot argue the freedom of the will here, for this is the work of God. A work that he predetermined before the foundation of the world, and in which there will be no failure in a single case.

### Is Disobedience Predestinated?

But what about the disobedience of the children of God? and of all the crime that is being committed in the world? This much can be said of a certainty, God has positively forbidden it all under penalty, and as he is both lawgiver and judge there can be no doubt as to the outcome. Another thing may be stated positively, and that is that the chastisements of the people of God are conditional. He does not bless them in disobedience, nor chastise them in obedience. Jesus said, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." There is certainly a connection between the doing and the blessing. "If ye live after the flesh ye shall die," is another conditional statement, for it is asserted in the same connection, "but if ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Will it make any difference which course the children of God take? "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." He who does not believe that the child of God is held to account for his acts, does not believe the Bible. God's people are saved by grace, and not by works of righteousness which they have done, but their disobedience is not brought about by God's predestination. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; but every man is

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tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed."

God's word denounces the wickedness of the world, and the children of God are warned against it. How unreasonable then to suppose that it is in harmony with the will of God and his holy nature so that he should be connected with wickedness as a cause.

It may be urged that God certainly knows what will be, and so it may be said he "predestinated to permit" all the evil that there is in the world. The fact that he does not prevent evil cannot be denied. And he permits in the sense that he has power to prevent and does not do so. But we should so hold ourselves to the use of scripture language that we do not use terms that the scriptures do not use, and it is nowhere said in his word that he predestinates to permit. This is too strong a term to use unless God himself had authorized it.

### Use Only Bible Expressions

Why should we say that? To say that God predestinates, is to say that he determines that the thing shall be. Why should we use that term which implies the effective decree of God, when he has forbidden, and laid heavy penalties on transgression? That he does not prevent we do not call in question, but why connect his predestination with that which he positively forbids?

The scriptures present the idea of permit in some passages.

"In reference to the acts of wicked men and devils, the Holy Spirit uses six different Greek verbs, all having essentially the meaning of 'permit' in eleven passages in the New Testament." - Hassell's History, page 650.

He might have a purpose in permitting in special cases. Of course men in "reasoning" about God come to the conclusion that in God's mind he makes a "permissive decree," but is there a scripture to warrant such an expression? Some wise men have used it, but is it necessary? "Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" We do not know why he allowed Adam to sin. We would not understand it any better to say that he predestinated to permit it. In the laws of our state crime of every sort is committed. Would it be right to say that the state of Missouri had a law to permit crime, just because there is crime? If the state had a law to permit crime, then the crime could not be punished. God punishes crime, therefore it is wrong to say that he has decreed to permit it. It is not according to the law of his dominion to so rule man, or his people either, so that his decision is to be taken as the cause of the act. The fact that he enforces the law that men shall reap what they sow shows that it is wrong to represent him as favoring sin. It is the wrong word. He says, "Do not do it, you will suffer for it if you do." Why say that he made a decree in eternity to permit men to do that, when he has laid down a law against sin, and still enforces the penalties.

We may argue that as God could prevent sin, and does not, therefore it is in accord with his will. That argues that the manner in which God controls dead matter, is the same way he governs man and his people. But the teaching of the Bible leads to no such conclusion.

He certainly can stop crime, and can make his people willing, and obedient, but is that his usual

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course and according to his word? If one thinks that God is making him do every thing that he does, he will find out some day that God is holding him for his deed, and he will have to take his punishment or his chastisement as the case may be. The individual will have to take the blame, however much he would like to lay it at the door of the decretive predestination of God.

There are passages which stand directly opposed to the idea that it is right to use the expression "God predestinates to permit sin."

"And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin." - Jer 32:35

God's laws do not limit the Lord, as the many miracles show, but he does not cause man to violate them.