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About the Author

chapter

Jack Arnold was the President and founder of Equipping Pastors International Inc, a missionary organization designed to train pastors anywhere in the world, with special emphasis on those who will never get an opportunity for a formal Biblical education.

Dr. Arnold served five very different pastorates over 37 years. He received his Master's and Doctor's degrees from Dallas Theological Seminary and was ordained in the Presbyterian Church in America. He was an adjunct professor at Reformed Theological Seminary Orlando and New Geneva Seminary and a visiting professor at Nairobi International School of Theology in Nairobi, Bible Institute of South Africa in Cape Town, Ukraine Biblical Seminary in Kiev, East Asia School of Theology in Singapore and Regent University School of Divinity. Dr. Arnold had a worldwide note ministry, now available on www.thirdmill.org, which is being used in theological training by extension in many developing countries.

Jack died suddenly on January 9, 2005 while doing what he loved most—preaching. He was preaching to his former congregation and a large group of seminary students, telling them that God could call him home at any moment. Then he quoted his life verse, “For me to live is Christ;” and before he could finish the last part of the verse (“and to die is gain”) the Lord did indeed call him home.

Jack leaves behind his wife, Carol, who resides in Orlando, Florida. They have 4 sons, all in various forms of ministry, and 14 grandchildren. Carol and son Dean have put together a Leader's Guide to go along with this book on the topic of Salvation.

chapter 1:

predestination

OBJECTIVES

- To know the biblical meaning of predestination.
- To be able to explain the different usages of predestination as found in the Bible.
- To understand the importance of the doctrine of predestination.
- To know the various aspects of God's predestinating work as it affects our relationship with God and other men.

“You are not one of those people who believes in predestination, are you?”

This is a question that comes my way frequently, and it is said with such scorn that it makes me feel like believing in predestination is equivalent to having leprosy. It seems that no biblical doctrine is more likely to prove offensive to the unregenerate and spiritually immature than that of predestination.

Predestination is a biblical subject, and relates to our salvation in Christ. To deny election and predestination, one must tear out page after page of the Bible. However, it seems as though this doctrine is purposely avoided, even in many Bible-teaching pulpits, for fear of offending those in the pews. Predestination stirs people, and most pastors do not want the hassle of dealing with confused or angry saints or the embarrassment of losing potential members. Yet predestination is a biblical subject and it must not be avoided, for God has commanded ministers of the Gospel to preach the whole counsel of God. No pastor should be a manpleaser, and if the doctrine of predestination rubs some people the wrong way, so be it. Maybe they need to be challenged with God's sovereign purposes so as to cause them to bow humbly to the Sovereign God of the universe.

I have pleaded with some men to trust Christ, begged them to commit to Christ, and wept tears before them to put Christ as their Lord, but there is no response or interest. But let me preach on election and predestination and these same folks are stirred and ready to crucify me. Why? Because this doctrine really hits at the fact that man cannot save himself by his good works.

The subject of predestination is the meat of the Word, and it is for the more mature believers. There are many other doctrines we should learn and apply before we sink our teeth into the subjects of election and predestination. However, this does not mean we should never preach on the sovereign purposes of God. Just because this doctrine confuses some and offends others does not make it any less the Word of God. Nor should we stop preaching predestination because some have abused this doctrine by becoming fatalistic. The Apostle Paul was with the Thessalonians between two and six weeks. Yet, when he wrote them a few months later, he assumed and expected them to understand about election and predestination.

Spurgeon, as he sought to answer critics who said that the doctrine of election should not be preached because it has been so badly abused by some, said,

That is popish doctrine! It was upon that very theory that priests kept back the Bible from the people. They did not give the Bible to them lest they should misuse it. "But," says the objector, "do not some men abuse the doctrines of grace?" I grant you that they do, but if we destroy everything that men abuse, we should have nothing left. What, are there to be no ropes because some fools hang themselves? And must knives be discarded as dangerous because some use them as weapons of destruction? Decidedly not! And, besides all this, remember that men do read the Scriptures and think about these doctrines, and therefore often make mistakes about them. Who shall set them right if we who preach the Word hold our tongues about the matter?

As Spurgeon said, we must set men right on their understanding of election and predestination, but this does not mean we should argue over the issue at the drop of a hat. Many who come to the truth of God's sovereign purposes in salvation go on personal crusades to convert every Christian to their newfound excitement. They often become more evangelistic for election and predestination than they are for Christ and His kingdom! We should have our convictions on the subject of election and predestination, and speak out on them when people are truly seeking some answers for life. But we should not spend five minutes arguing with people, for a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still. You may convince a brother that predestination is true, but be so obnoxious in doing so that the brother is offended by your bad attitude. We are to hold the truth, but to speak it in love. Remember, God must reveal the truth of sovereign election and predestination to His people.

Martin Luther once said that folks who have lived long and suffered much are more ready to accept the teachings of election and predestination, for they desire answers to their sufferings and can find answers only in the sovereign purposes of God.

THE DEFINITION OF PREDESTINATION

The word “predestination” comes from the Greek *prooridzo*, which means “to mark out beforehand” or “to decide beforehand.” The word *oridzo* means “to put a boundary around” or “to establish a limitation.” The preposition *pro* means “before.” Some have therefore defined “predestination” as “to fix” or “to appoint.”

The word “predestination” as it relates to salvation refers only to God’s elect. God marked out the elect and put a boundary around them and destined them to an ultimate end or purpose, which is salvation and conformity to Christ. When it is used of God’s elect, predestination means a predetermining of the destiny of the elect. It looks to the ultimate end of God’s choice, which is the saint’s ultimate glorification.

In His purpose (plan), God foreknew, chose, appointed, and then predestined those He elected to be like Christ. God loved us and then chose us for salvation. He then appointed us (His elect) to eternal life and predestined us to be like Christ in heaven.

THE USAGE OF PREDESTINATION

PREDESTINATION OF CHRIST’S DEATH

For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. (Acts 4:27-28)

These verses tell us that Christ’s death was no accident. It was part of God’s sovereign purpose. He was predestined by God the Father to die. Everything about the death of Christ was planned, even the free actions of sinful men. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to accomplish our redemption through His death, while His murderers purposed otherwise. These verses tell us that predestination is equivalent to or a definite part of the plan of God.

This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. (Acts 2:23)

PREDESTINATED TO ADOPTION

In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. (Eph. 1:4-5)

This verse clearly teaches that the true Christian was predestined to be in God's family. God chose the Christian "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). God then marked out the chosen ones to be adopted into God's family. God destined the elect to be adopted as sons through the death of Christ.

Notice carefully two aspects of God's predestination of His people. First, this act of predestination to salvation and adoption was done in love. The words "in love" in Eph. 1:4b should be read with Eph. 1:5: "In love He predestined us." Predestination is based on God's love, for all that we have as Christians comes through God's love and grace to us. To reject predestination is to reject a very important aspect of God's love to us. Second, this act of predestination was according to the "kind intention" or "good pleasure" of God's will. He marked us out to be His sons and daughters because He wanted to do it, not because He was compelled. God was under no obligation to save any of the sinful human race, but He did so because He loved us.

PREDESTINED TO A SPIRITUAL INHERITANCE

*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.
(Eph. 1:11)*

Our total inheritance in Christ is because God predestined us to it according to His purposes, after the counsel of His own will. We did not deserve salvation. We were not worthy of salvation. We were sinners going our own independent way and headed for eternal destruction, but God switched things around because He determined that we should be His children and be joint heirs with His Son, Jesus Christ. These truths are too wonderful for me!

PREDESTINED TO BE LIKE CHRIST

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 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. (Rom. 8:28-29)

Those whom God loved (foreknew) according to His eternal purposes, He "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." The end, the goal, the design of predestination is to make the elected saint Christlike. God's ultimate purpose for the Christian is that he may share the spiritual image of Christ. Therefore, we can say that the ultimate purpose of predestinating the elect was that the image of God might be restored to a fallen race through the redeemed ones of the perfect plan.

God did not predestine His people only to heaven, but to Christlikeness. Christlikeness will be complete only when the elected saint is in heaven with his glorified body. However, we do not have to wait until we get to heaven to experience

Christlikeness. Conformity to Christ is taking place now to some degree as the Holy Spirit works progressively in the life of the Christian who walks by faith.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

God's predestinating purpose can be compared to an artist who wants to sculpt the bust of a person from marble. The artist first conceives in his mind the image he wishes to make, and he never deviates from that plan. He chooses a block of rough marble and begins to chip away on that rough slab. At first it does not look like much, but the finished product is exactly what he predestined the image of the person to be. There was a great deal of chipping and smoothing off of the rough edges in order to get the final image. So it is with the Christian. We have been chosen by God and predestined to be conformed to His Son, Jesus Christ. God never gives up on His plan to make us Christlike. God chips away at our sin and smooths off the rough edges of our lives. He never gives up on what He has conceived and planned for us to be. He wants us to have complete and perfect conformity to Christ in eternity.

THEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

IS PREDESTINATION INCONSISTENT WITH 2 PETER 3:9?

If God has a plan that includes the salvation of the elect, how does this match up with the teaching that *"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). This verse, and John 3:16, are probably the most used and abused verses in the Bible.

Universalism

If this verse is taken literally and one refers it to the sovereign will of God, then it teaches that all men will be saved ultimately. If God sovereignly wills that none shall perish, then none will perish and all will be saved. The Greek word for "willing" is *boulomai*, which in the Bible usually means "a planned purpose" or "a sovereign will." If this verse refers to salvation and the "any" and "all" refer to mankind in general, then this verse teaches universalism, that it is God's sovereign will that none should perish and all should come to repentance.

This interpretation contradicts the other teachings of Scripture, for we know that not all men will be saved.

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. (John 3:36)

Desire of God

Most Bible scholars make a distinction between the desire and the sovereign will of God—that it is not God’s emotional desire that any should perish, but in the hidden plan some do perish.

Three aspects of the will of God may be observed in scripture: (1) the sovereign will of God; (2) the moral will of God, and (3) the desire of God coming from His heart of love. The sovereign will of God is certain of complete fulfillment, but the moral law is disobeyed by men, and the desires of God are fulfilled only to the extent that they are included in His sovereign will. God does not desire that any should perish, but it is clear that many will not be saved. (*Scofield Bible*)

This view has several weaknesses that the keen Bible student must face. First, the word for “willing” is *boulomai*, which usually means “a planned purpose,” referring to God’s sovereign will. It is difficult to translate this as “desire” or “wish.” Second, it is difficult to make a distinction between God’s will and God’s desires, for the Bible seems to indicate that all of God’s desires do come to pass.

But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does. (Job 23:13)

Elect of God

I believe the above explanations are not satisfying to the insightful Bible student, so he must search deeper for the meaning of this verse. The context of 2 Peter 3 must be taken into consideration. The context is about false teachers who were denying the promise of Christ’s second coming. “*Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation’*” (2 Pet. 3:3-4). Peter assures the Christian that the Lord will return in His own time. “*But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*” (2 Pet. 3:8). Notice carefully that he is talking to the “beloved.” God is not slow concerning the promise of the return of His Son and is patient toward true Christians, His people. “*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance*” (2 Pet. 3:9). Notice God is patient toward “you,” and this refers back to the “beloved” who are Christians. Who do the “any” and “all” refer to in context? What is the nearest antecedent to “any?” It is

the “you” that refers back to the “beloved,” who are Christians. “Any” and “all,” therefore, refer to the total community of God’s elect whom He will save before the second advent of Christ.

It is God’s sovereign will or determined purpose to save all the elect of the church before the Lord Jesus returns. This explanation fits the context grammatically, contextually, and theologically. In light of this interpretation, there is no inconsistency between God’s sovereign election and 2 Pet. 3:9.

IS PREDESTINATION INCONSISTENT WITH 1 TIMOTHY 2:4?

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:3-4)

Desire of God

This passage may refer to the emotional will of God and not His sovereign will, because it uses the Greek word *thelo*, which often means “wish” or “desire.” Therefore, it is God’s emotional will (desire) to save all men, but in His secret plan it is not His sovereign will to save all men.

All Who Come to the Truth

The word *thelo* does sometimes refer to God’s sovereign will. “*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God*” (John 1:12-13) and “*So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills*” (Rom. 9:18). Furthermore, the Bible speaks of God bringing all of His desires to pass. “*But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does*” (Job 23:13). The “all” in 1 Tim. 2:4 must be given a limited meaning and refer to all who believe (“come to the knowledge of the truth”), and these are the elect of God.

Conclusion

It is better to take 1 Timothy 2:4 as the emotional will, wish, or desire of God, even though it is difficult for us to understand how God could have desires apart from His secret plan. This is just another mystery we cannot grasp because we are finite. That God desires to save all men seems to be consistent with Ezekiel 33:11 in which God declares, “*Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?*” God takes no pleasure in seeing the wicked lost, but He must do so in order to guard His own justice, His own character.

IS PREDESTINATION A HINDRANCE TO PRAYER?

Absolutely not! Because God has a plan, we know He has the power and wisdom to answer our prayers. Whenever we ask anything in God's will we receive answers to prayer. *"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us"* (1 John 5:14). God says we have not, because we ask not. We must come to God with all our requests, believing in simple faith. We must let God determine whether our prayers are in His will.

We must remember that God's plan includes prayer as a means of bringing about His plan to save men. *"Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved"* (Rom. 10:1). God desires for His people to be collaborators with Him in the salvation of souls, and prayer allows us to see God work His plan through us. We must pray always. *"And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart"* (Luke 18:1). When we pray, we see God work supernaturally. When we do not pray, God does not work supernaturally in our experience. A person who says he or she believes in the sovereign purposes of God in salvation and is not a person of prayer is a hypocrite.

Perhaps if Christians would spend more time in prayer pleading with God for the souls of men and less time superficially begging men to come to Christ, we would have more experience of seeing people genuinely saved.

We pray for the salvation of the lost because we know that God must move upon the lost before they will respond to Christ. We pray because we know that God has the power to change their stubborn wills. God must work supernaturally upon a sinner before the person can trust in Christ, and God has ordained that our prayers should be used to bring about the salvation of men.

A pastor told me of his rebellious fifteen-year-old son who wanted nothing to do with Christianity. The pastor said, "Jack, if I did not believe in God's ability to overrule in my son's life, I would lose my mind. If I thought my son had total free will, then I would never have any hope that he would be saved, for his natural will does not want to turn to God. My confidence is in God, not in my son. God must intervene!"

HOW TO KNOW ONE IS ELECTED AND PREDESTINED TO SALVATION?

People often get shaky when they hear about predestination and wonder whether they are truly among the elect of God. The Bible gives some evidences that a person may test to see whether he is among the elect.

THE ELECT RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL

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. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit. (1 Thess. 1:46)

When a sinner responds to the terms of the Gospel and receives Christ by faith, then he knows he is numbered among the elect.

THE ELECT MANIFEST OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST

To those who are elect exiles ... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood. (1 Pet. 1:12)

This obedience is the initial command to trust Christ and demonstrate a desire to be obedient to Christ as a Christian.

THE ELECT MANIFEST FAITH, LOVE AND STEADFASTNESS

Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you. (1 Thess. 1:3-4)

These virtues will show up to some degree in the true child of God.

THE ELECT FOLLOW CHRIST

"But you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:26-27)

Jesus told the unbelieving Jews that they did not believe because they were not of His sheep (elect), but that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. They follow Christ, not men, not organizations, not systems, but Christ!

THE ELECT MAKE THEIR ELECTION SURE BY DOING GOOD WORKS

Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. (2 Pet. 1:10)

God's elect have a desire to please Christ with their life.

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:58)

Good works never save a person. Only Christ can save through faith in Him. However, good works give us the evidence or demonstrate the reality of our election in Christ. Christians make their election sure in their experience by good works.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. (Col. 3:12-13)

THE ELECT PERSEVERE TO THE END

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 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. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Rom. 8:28-30)

We can rest assured that every person whom God foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified will make it to heaven. These also will persevere on earth.

This does not mean that a Christian cannot slip out of fellowship with Christ, or that an elect person lives a perfect life. The elect of God sometimes rebel, but when they do, God brings deep conviction to their souls about their sin. The elect child of God will have his ups and downs spiritually, but he will persevere to the end.

QUESTIONS:

1. From what you have learned from this chapter and from your study of the Bible, how would you define the word "predestination"?
2. What are the different usages of "predestination" in the Bible?
3. Explain the importance of a biblical view of predestination for our understanding of the relationship of God and man.
4. Prepare an outline of what you would say to defend the doctrine of predestination, and look for an opportunity to share it this week.