

Predestination or Freewill

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In mainstream "Christianity"—I use the word "Christianity" in quotes, as we know—there is a great disagreement about God's role in what they call "ultimate destinies." What is God's role in a Christian's ultimate destiny? That is, eternal life or eternal condemnation.

Now this question comes from the fact that God is all-knowing and is all-powerful. So, the question is, "Does God, because He is all-knowing, because He's all-powerful, does He know or determine in advance whether or not individuals will be in His Kingdom, attain eternal life, or whether they will go into the Lake of Fire or will be condemned?" Does God know in advance or determine in advance that? And some, frankly even in God's Church today, believe that this is the case that God knows in advance and/or determines in advance what each of us will do. This is known as the Doctrine of Predestination. My mother dragged me to the Presbyterian Church when I was a kid and they were big on Predestination.

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary says this about Predestination. It means:

to foreordain to an earthly or eternal destiny by divine decree...

God foreordains our destiny. And we don't have a choice in that. We don't have a role to play in that. It is all foreordained. So, what we're going to do in the sermon is investigate this Doctrine of Predestination, see what the Bible has to say about it, and, then, find out what it has to do with our everyday life. So, if you want to put a title on it, we could call it *Predestination and Free Will*.

So, Point Number One, what we're going to do is:

I. Define the doctrine as those who believe in Predestination define it.

I've searched lots of websites, read lots of material about this and it's obviously a very large subject, but we can distill it down for the purpose of this sermon to give you an overview of this doctrine. The discussion about Predestination involves the consideration of the fact that God is omniscient—meaning God is all-knowing. That is at the heart of the discussion on Predestination.

And there are two views, two general views of those who believe in Predestination. They have two general viewpoints.

The first is that they say, "Because God knows everything—He's omniscient; He's all-knowing; He can see the past, He can see the present, and He can see the future because He is omniscient—therefore, He knows ahead of time what will happen to each one of us. Therefore, He knows in advance the choices each one of us is going to make and what actions we will take and what our ultimate destiny is. He knows that in advance because He is all-knowing and all-powerful.

Now the second view, and frankly the most common view of those who believe in Predestination, says this: Rather than simply seeing in advance, that God actually

determines in advance the destiny of every human being. It's not just a matter of seeing. It's where He actually determines Himself the destiny of every human being. And the explanation is basically God alone decides eternal destinations of each of us without regard to individual choices, without regard to future actions so that our future actions or beliefs follow according to God's decisions, God's determination.

So, in the first view, God knows because He's omniscient. In the second view, God not only knows, but He actually determines who will be saved and who will not be saved.

Now, again I use the "Christian" community in quotes here, but "Christians" who follow John Calvin generally accept this second view that God determines our actions in advance. Now John Calvin was a major proponent of the Doctrine of Predestination. He was born in 1509. He died in 1564. And he was a very influential French theologian and He was a pastor during the Protestant Reformation. He was also a principal figure in the development of the system of Christian theology later called Calvinism, and, as I said, a proponent of the Doctrine of Predestination.

Now, there is a website called "The Calvinist Corner." And it is written by a man named Matthew J. Slick who has a Bachelor of Arts Degree and also a Master of Divinity Degree. And on this website, they promote the Doctrine of Predestination. So, I will read his definition of Predestination.

Predestination is the doctrine that God alone chooses (elects) who is saved. He makes His choice independent of any quality or condition in sinful man. He does not look into a person and recognize something good nor does He look into the future to see who would choose Him.

Meaning: What individuals (humans) would choose God. Going on:

He elects people to salvation purely on the basis of His good pleasure. Those not elected are not saved. He does this because He is sovereign; that is, He has the absolute authority, right, and ability to do with His creation as He pleases. He has the right to elect some to salvation and let all the rest go their natural way: to hell.

So, I thought, "Oh boy!" And he says, "This is Predestination."

And so, to Matthew Slick it's though—you remember the—if you study Roman history and you remember the Coliseum and the gladiatorial contests and usually one gladiator would get another one to the sword at his neck and the Roman Emperor would either do thumbs up or thumbs down and determine whether this guy lived or perished. So, in his view God is like that with all of us. He determines who will live and who will perish.

Now this view presupposes that since God is all-powerful and He is Sovereign (And we know that He is.) that He **determines in advance** what each individual is going to do. Therefore, He knows in advance what each individual will do and what our future holds, either eternal life or eternal condemnation. That is Predestination. And hopefully before we're through today, we will see that this doctrine is not correct. It is not true. And we will see that we as individuals have a part to play in this—a huge part to play in it.

So, that in a very brief amount of time is an overview of the Doctrine of Predestination.

Now, in doing the research on this, they use several Scriptures in the Bible to prove their point. So what we're going to do now in the Second Point is:

II. We're going to go over the Scriptures that they use that allegedly prove that Predestination is a true doctrine and that God, indeed, does behave in this way.

They have many Scriptures. I've eliminated all but five because most of them are so easy to prove it's almost irrelevant. But these five Scriptures are used by Calvinists and others to prove the doctrine. They're taken from various papers on the subject and we're going to look back at these five and see what they actually say. They are not in any particular order. So, we'll just take them as they come. So, five Scriptures.

The First One is in Romans chapter 9. We will read verses 15 and 16. Romans 9 verses 15 and 16, Paul is writing to the Church at Rome and he is actually quoting here Exodus 33 and verse 19. So, to help us understand this as we go through this, we need to understand the context of Exodus 33 and verse 19 when we read Romans 9. We will begin in verse 15, Romans 9 and verse 15.

1. Romans 9:15-16.

***Romans 9:15.** For he [Christ, the God of the Old Testament] [said] to Moses, (KJV)*

Now, this was when Moses asked to see God's glory. Remember Moses asked that? "Will You show me Your glory?" And Paul is now quoting God's response from the Old Testament.

***Romans 9:15b.** I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. (KJV)*

That's quoting Exodus 33. Now going on in verse 16 in Paul's words, he says:

***Romans 9:16.** So then it is not of him that [wills], nor of him that [runs], but of God that [shows] mercy. (KJV)*

The Predestinationists say, "It doesn't make any difference whether we run or whether we walk or whether we fall. God's going to show mercy or not show mercy. And that's up to Him."

Verse 17:

***Romans 9:17.** For the scripture [said] unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised [you] up, that I might [show] my power in [you], and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.
18) Therefore [has] he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he [harden]. (KJV)*

So, the Predestinationists say, "God gives salvation to whoever He wants. It's His choice independent of anything that we do and then, He will condemn those—all the rest."

Now, remember the context of Exodus 33? We won't turn there. I'll just summarize it for you. God was not happy with the nation of Israel. And so what He did is He took the Tabernacle from being in the middle of the camp and put it way outside the camp. That was a message to them saying, "I'm not happy with you. You're over here. I'm over

here. And the reason you're over here is I'm not happy and you're not following My way. And I'm embarrassed by the fact that I'm even putting My Tabernacle in the camp of Israel."

So, then when Moses—when God wanted to talk to Moses or Moses wanted to talk to God, Moses would have to walk across the desert for some distance. We don't know. It doesn't say if it was a half a mile, a mile, or five miles. But off in the distance you could see the Tabernacle because Exodus 33 says the people stood up to watch as Moses walked toward the Tabernacle. And, then, of course, the cloud would descend down over the Tabernacle when Moses went in. That was the context.

And we're told that God was talking to Moses as a friend. And so, after this discussion, Moses said, "Can I see You? Can I see You in Your glory?" And God said, "Unh uh. You can't do that because no human can see Me face-to-face or he's going to die." Then God said, "But here's what we're going to do." He says, "I'm going to put you in the cleft of this rock, a split in the rock. And I'm going to walk past you, but when I walk past, I'm going to cover your eyes with My hand because if I didn't, you would die instantly. And after I walk past, then, I'm going to remove My hand from your eyes and you can see My back parts. You're not going to look at My face because you're not going to live if you do that, but you'll see just a hint of my back." And that's exactly what happened.

And then God said, "I do this because I have mercy on whom I'm going to have mercy. I'm not doing this for everybody." And so that was the context of Exodus 33 and then as quoted by Paul in Romans chapter 9. Here it shows that God is going to have mercy on whom He chooses for His own purposes, but this has nothing to do with salvation! The context in Exodus 33 is not about salvation. And Paul is not talking about ultimate salvation here in Romans chapter 9.

And there are many instances, if you're a student of history, there are many instances where God did miraculous things—not very often, but occasionally miraculous things—to people that were not called and had nothing to do with Him at that point because He hadn't called them.

One example—in World War II, a plane went down in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. There were either three or four survivors in a life raft in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean hundreds and hundreds of miles from any land. A storm was brewing. They could see it coming in from the North. And here are these three guys in a life raft and this storm was coming and the seas were getting heavy and they had no hope.

And the three of them cried out to God and asked God for mercy. "Please save us! Please help us!" And at that instant, overhead the clouds, a hole appeared in the clouds and off in the distance you could see a PBY Catalina. It's a flying boat, World War II flying boat. And that PBY came through the clouds, saw them, landed, picked them up, and saved them.

And this is a perfect example of the situation where God chose to have mercy on whom He will have mercy. And you can see that through history time after time. Maybe you know of instances in your life. They cried to God and He responded. That's what this is talking about. That's the discussion.

Also, He will harden whom He will harden. And we know He hardened Pharaoh's heart. He absolutely did, but it was done to suit His own purposes. It was done to suit His own Plan.

And, of course, we know that Pharaoh is going to come up at the Last Great Day and have his chance, but it's not talking about salvation. Rather simply God choosing to show mercy when He chooses to show mercy. So, Romans 9 has really nothing to do with the subject at hand although it can be made to do that if you want to twist it a little bit.

The Second Scripture is Acts 13 and verse 48. This is talking about the Gentiles and salvation coming to the Gentiles, but the latter part of this Scripture, verse 48, is used to support the Doctrine of Predestination. Acts 13 verse 48, we're told:

2. Acts 13:48.

Acts 13:48. *And when the Gentiles heard this, (KJV)*

Meaning they received the news about salvation coming to the Gentiles.

Acts 13:48. *And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, (KJV)*

They were happy, of course. The latter part of verse 48:

Acts 13:48b. *... and [they] glorified the word of the [Eternal]: and ... (KJV)*

Now, here's the phrase that's in question.

Acts 13:48 continued. *...and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. (KJV)*

Those that were ordained to eternal life believed that salvation was open to the Gentiles.

Now, the Predestinationists say, "Those determined in advance by God for salvation will believe. God will make them to believe, but He determined in advance the fact that they would be chosen for salvation."

Okay, the word "ordained" here is Strong's #5021 and it's the Greek word *tasso* (*tas'-so*). And Zodhiates says it means "to arrange in a certain order; or to assign to a certain position."

So, it says, "as many as were assigned to a certain position," or "as many as were arranged in a certain order" they believed.

Now, what is he talking about? Well, when we were called, guess what? We were assigned to a certain position. We were assigned to a certain order, that being the Firstfruits.

Let's go to John 6 and verse 44, a very familiar Scripture, John 6 and verse 44. When God called us, we were taken out of the world and assigned to a certain group, that group being God's chosen ones, the Body of Christ, and the Firstfruits. John 6 verse 44, it says:

John 6:44. *No man can come to me, except the Father which [has] sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. (KJV)*

Now, when Christ says, "I'll raise him up in the last day," we're going to see that there's a lot of "ifs" that depend upon us but if we follow God and do not reject God and Christ, then, indeed, we will be raised up at the Last Day.

But the fact is that nobody can come to God except the Father calls him. And when we are called, we are then put in a certain group. We are arranged in a certain order. We are assigned to a certain position. God chooses us not on a whim but for a purpose. And the Calvinists would say, "It's just God's whim. He just decides here and there." But we're told that we're called for a purpose. Let's go to John 15 now, chapter 15 and look at verse 16. It's not just some thumbs up or thumbs down. We're called for a purpose. Verse 16 John 15:

John 15:16. *[You] have not chosen me [by anything good we've done], but I have chosen you, and [I have] ordained you, (KJV)*

For what purpose? We're told in the next sentence.

John 15:16b. *... that [you] should go and bring forth fruit, (KJV)*

Now notice what this says. It doesn't say that "You **will** go forth and bring fruit." It says, "You **should** go forth and bring fruit," implying that it is our choice. If Predestination was true, then it would say, "We will" because God's already predetermined it and that's just the way it's going to be. But it is our choice whether or not we bring forth fruit.

John 15:16 continued. *...and that your fruit should remain: (KJV)*

Meaning it should remain over our entire life. The longer we're converted, the more we are involved with God's holy spirit and have God's holy spirit, the more fruit we should develop over our entire lifetime. That's what He's saying.

John 15:16 continued. *... your fruit should remain: that whatsoever [you] shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. (KJV)*

So, when we're called, we are, indeed, ordained to eternal life **if** we do not reject it. We are ordained when we're called. If we do what God says, if we yield to God and have His holy spirit and are led by His holy spirit, we are, indeed, ordained to eternal life if we don't turn around and walk away from it.

Now, if we don't bring forth good fruit, guess what? Remember what it says in Matthew 7? What did Christ say? "Every tree that brings forth not good fruit," what happens to it? It gets cast into the fire. And then He goes on to say, "By [their] fruits you will know them." So, it's obvious that if our fruits aren't good, we're not going to be in God's Kingdom. But again, it is **our choice**. It isn't predetermined.

It is **our choice** whether or not we believe Christ's teachings and we obey Christ's teachings. Let's go back to chapter 12 now of John and read verse 48. When you put all the Scriptures together, it is very, very clear. John chapter 12, verse 48. The Doctrine of Predestination takes the human equation—takes us out of the equation. Therefore, we don't have any job to do. It's already predetermined. Then we can be lazy and just do whatever we want and God's already decided. Notice verse 48:

John 12:48. *He that [rejects] me, and [receives] not my words, [has] one that [judges] him: (KJV)*

What judges him?

John 12:48b. *[It's] the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. (KJV)*

Now this clearly says that people can reject God and reject Christ. If we look back on our lives, how many people have we seen in God's Church that have rejected him? What were there—over a 160,000 attending Worldwide at one point? Look at the number today. Not counting the deaths, but look at the number today. How many tens of thousands have rejected what they were taught and rejected God? And verse 48 makes it clear that we can reject God and Christ and their words. As we're going to see by putting all the Scriptures together, it's **our choice** whether or not we reject or accept Christ and whether or not we bring forth fruits that lead to salvation or lead to condemnation.

So, as we can see here, this verse [Acts 13:48] does not in any way talk about the fact that God predestined us to either be saved or predestined us to condemnation.

Now let's look at a Third Verse. This is in Romans chapter 8 and we'll read verses 29 and 30. This actually uses the word "predestinated" or "predestinate." Romans 8 verse 29, it says—and we need to take this in steps—it says:

3. Romans 8:29.

Romans 8:29. *For whom he did foreknow, (KJV)*

So, He does foreknow some people.

Romans 8:29b. *... he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, (KJV)*

So, He foreknows some and then their destiny is to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Romans 8:29 continued. *... that he [Christ] might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

30) Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and [then] whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (KJV)

Now the Predestinationists say, "God determines in advance who will be conformed to the image of His Son; therefore, who will be saved. And it is God's choice and not ours. It's already done in advance."

Now, let's look at the phrase "whom He did foreknow." Let's ask a question. Does God say anywhere in the Bible how far before we were called did He foreknow us? We're not told. We're all here. We were all called individually at certain ages, but if we look back in our lives, it was clear that God was dealing with us before He actually threw the switch and we came into the Church.

I was talking to Roberta this morning. We were talking about her early life and she grew up a Presbyterian like I did. And she said, "I was a little girl. And I was sitting in Church," she said. I mean here she is a little girl! And she began to think, "This isn't it. This isn't the answer." This is a pre-teenager sitting in Church saying, "This isn't it."

Well, you've got to know that God, even at that early age, was beginning to work on a person's mind. And I think we can look back in our lives and we can see that with each one of us.

Did He foreknow us before our birth? Or after our birth? We don't know. Is it possible that He, knowing the DNA of our parents, knowing our parents, knowing their DNA, would keep an eye on someone from their birth and watch them as they progressed? I think that's possible. Sure.

We know, as I said, many in the Church know that God intervened in their lives, dramatically sometimes, prior to their calling. One of my mentors in the Church when I was in the Air Force trying to get out of the Air Force my first year in the Church, I would drive 240 miles from the Canadian border down to lower Michigan to Midland, Michigan. And the home of Nick Tomich was always open. Get there on a Friday. If I needed a place to stay, the house was always open, stay there, go to services, spend Saturday night, go to Club Sunday morning, and then head home. And [I] got to know Nick and Betty just really, really well.

And in a heart-to-heart speech in Spokesman's Club (This was my first year in Club.), Nick gave a Heart to Heart speech. And he was an infantryman in World War II. And I believe it was in Italy. The Italian Campaign was very fierce, really bad.

And they were fighting the Germans and it was a fierce time in the battle, but there was a lull in the battle and he and his friend leaned up against a giant tree, a big tree. And they both were kind of leaning head-to-head against the tree and were eating some K-rations as I remember the story. But he said, "Our heads were almost touching." They were leaning together and they were just talking very quietly. And they figured they were safe because there was a lull in the battle and the fighting was actually up ahead a ways.

And he said, "I pushed myself away from the tree," and he said, "I heard the whistle of a bullet." He said, "It passed right by my forehead and my buddy's head exploded." He said, "It just completely took his head off. And, where his friend was, now, there was just blood and goo and ooze. He said, "If I hadn't moved my head, the bullet would have gone through both of our heads." And there was obviously a sniper out there and that's exactly what he was waiting for. But a fraction of a second he [Nick] moved his head and the bullet missed him by—Who knows?—an inch or two and killed his buddy.

And he was making the point in the Heart to Heart speech that he felt God was intimately involved in his life in the military in World War II to preserve him and spare him so that a few years later he could be called. And he was.

Now the Greek word for "predestinate" used here in Romans chapter 8 is Strong's #4309. And it means to limit in advance; to determine before—to limit in advance or determine before.

And it says here, "Those He did foreknow"—and we understand that that has happened in our lives—"He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son." Well, guess what? When we're called, He foreknew us. We're called; our calling, our whole reason for being here is to change through the power of God's holy spirit to be in the image of Jesus Christ. Isn't it? I mean that's why we're here.

So, this Scripture (Romans 8:29-30) is absolutely true, but the key is that those He has called are predetermined; **the Plan is for those He calls to be in the image of Jesus Christ.**

Now let me read Clarke's Commentary regarding verse 29. Notice this. He says:

To foreknow here signifies to design before, or at the first forming of [a] scheme; to bestow the favour and privilege of being God's people upon any set of men [or women],

And notice here, Clarke did not say "individuals." He said, "any **set** of men [or women]." And, so, all he is saying is that God's Plan ordained a group to be called as He chooses, and the goal of that group, God's desire for that group is to be conformed into the image of His Son.

Going on, Clarke says this about verse 30.

The whole of the preceding discourse will show that everything here **is conditional**, as far as it relates to the ultimate salvation of any person professing the Gospel of Christ; [because] the promises are made to character, and not to persons, [Emphasis added.]

So, what we're being told here by Clarke, and what we know in Scripture, is that we are called to develop the character of Jesus Christ. And it's not that a person is just [the] finger gets snapped and that person gets saved regardless of anything they do, think, or say.

Now, the Greek word for "glorified" here—it says, "whom He did foreknow, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son" and then "He glorified" at the end of verse 30—the word "glorified is Strong's #1392 and it means to honor or magnify. It just means to honor or magnify. It doesn't mean salvation. It means to honor or magnify.

And we know that we're honored by our calling. Why? Because we don't deserve it! We've done nothing to deserve our calling. We know, we won't turn there, but in 1 Corinthians 1 verses 26 and 27, we're told that we are we are the weak of the world. We're not the high. We're not the mighty. We're the foolish things of the world and God chose us so that we can't glorify in ourselves.

And so, when we read here in verse 30, "those He justified, He also glorified," that means that we were magnified; we were honored by our calling. Not because of anything we've done but because God just picked us out of the muck. And when you think about it, God here reaches down into the swill of the world, pulls an individual up, as we would say today "hoses him down," cleans him up, puts His spirit in him or her. We're honored and we should feel honored because God did that to us because we don't deserve any of it. We're honored by our calling.

And the context of this whole Scripture in Romans 8 is **our calling**. It is not salvation. It is our calling. Look at verse 28. We read verse 29 and 30. Notice verse 28.

Romans 8:28. *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. (KJV)*

And then it goes on "for them He did foreknow," He also predestined those people who are called to be conformed into the image of His Son. [It's] very simple. So these verses here in Romans chapter 8 tell us that God knew us before He opened up our mind to the truth, before the actual hard calling (We would say when we heard the radio for the first time or read a Plain Truth or whatever it was in our lives.), that He called us to be transformed, to change from a carnal human person that He just pulled out of the muck to be in the image of His glorified Son Jesus Christ. And, in doing so, He justified us.

Now the word "justified" means to make in a right standing with God through the blood of Jesus Christ. So, when we're called, we're justified. And then the King James says, were glorified. Meaning we're honored by the calling, by the indwelling of God's spirit, by the chance to become like Jesus Christ and the chance to have salvation.

So, Romans 8, again, talks more about our calling and less about ultimate salvation.

Now the Fourth Scripture is Ephesians chapter 1. We're going to read verses 4 through 6. Again, it uses the word "predestined" or "predestinated." Ephesians chapter 1 verses 4 through 6, this is, if you just read it on the surface, you could come away thinking "Well, yeah maybe so." Ephesians 1 verse 4:

4. Ephesians 1:4-6

Ephesians 1:4. According as he [has] chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5) Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6) To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he [has] made us accepted in the beloved. (KJV)

Now jumping to verse 11:

Ephesians 1:11. In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who [works] all things after the counsel of his own will: (KJV)

Now, the Predestinationists would say, "God has determined in advance before the foundation of the world who will be saved." And they focus on the fact that He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world."

What this verse is talking about is that The Plan, The Plan of Salvation, the decision to choose a group of Firstfruits was indeed made before the foundation of the world. Meaning: before the creation of the universe. We, as individuals, join that group when God calls us. But The Plan was to have a group of Firstfruits during the six thousand year period. That Plan was ordained and decided by God and Jesus Christ, the Word then, before the foundation of the universe. That is absolutely true. Verse 5 tells us The Plan was predetermined, not the individual.

Verse 11, when we jumped to verse 11 here, it says, "predestinated according to the purpose of Him." That means it was predetermined that a group of Firstfruits should be called to be praise to His glory in their conduct as Christians. God says, "I want a group threading down through six thousand years of history—the Firstfruits—to carry My way, to keep My way alive on the face of the earth. "They will be," as Christ said, "They will be city on a hill, light shining on a hill. They will keep My way alive and through their example, they will at least be a witness to other people down through history."

Notice Clarke's Commentary here about these verses.

These Scriptures refer to the fact that part of God's plan, decided before the foundation of the world, was that salvation would be open to the Gentiles as a group. (Emphasis added.)

Now this is Clarke's Commentary. He's saying that this is referring to the Gentiles. I don't necessarily agree with that, but I do agree with the fact (I think it's very clear.) that it's referring to a group of people. We would say the Firstfruits.

He goes on to say

Ephesus, being a pagan commercial and trading center with a Jewish contingent....

So, he is saying that The Plan of Salvation was decided upon before the foundation of the world. He thinks it's for the Ephesians. I personally believe that he's referring not specifically to the Ephesians but to the Firstfruits in general.

And what this says is that these verses [Ephesians 1:4-7, 11] tell us that we, as individuals, are part of a group that was chosen by God. This group was chosen not as individuals but as a group before the foundation of the world. God and Christ said, "We are going to have a group of Firstfruits that will carry on Our Word down through the ages." And, as we are called, we are added to that group as God decides to call us. But the group was chosen, the fact that there would be a group was chosen before the foundation of the world.

Now, let's look at the last one, the Fifth one, Revelation 17 and verse 8. This is talking about the Beast, but it talks about the Book of Life and names written in the Book of Life. Revelation 17 and verse 8, it says:

5. Revelation 17:8

Revelation 17:8. *The beast that [you saw] was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: (KJV)*

Now, here we get into the area of Predestination as they view it.

Revelation 17:8b. *... and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. (KJV) ¹*

Now the Predestinationists say, "God put the names that He chose for salvation in a Book of Life. Long before the earth was ever created those names were in a book and that's the way it is. It doesn't make it any difference what we do, what we believe, what we say, what we think. Those names are in there. They're locked in there and we're just going through the motions until the day of salvation comes. And we're either going to be condemned or we're going to be saved. And it's all God's choice and we don't play a part in that. We don't have anything to do with that."

¹ While giving this sermon, Mr. Railston inadvertently read Revelation 17:8 from the Darby Translation instead of the King James Version. (Corrected per Rick Railston November 29, 2011, kb.)

Now, the fact is that the Firstfruits do have their names written in the Book of Life. The Bible makes that very clear. Let's go to Philippians 4 and verse 3. [It's] very clear. The Firstfruits do have their names written in a Book of Life. Philippians 4 and verse 3, Paul says:

Philippians 4:3. *And I [entreat you] also, true yokefellow, help those women which [labored] with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with others of my [fellow laborers], whose names {are} [written] in the book of life. (KJV)*

Notice what we're told here. Those that are called and in the Church, [their] names are absolutely written in the Book of Life, each one of us who have God's holy spirit! That's an awesome thing to think there is a Book of Life and in that book has our name written. What an honor! What a wonderful thing!

Again, the latter part of the King James Version of Revelation 17:8 reads:

Revelation 17:8b. *... they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. (KJV) ²*

So, you could read this as that the Book of Life was in place at the foundation of the world. The names are written **not** from the foundation of the world, but the names are written as people are called. You could interpret it actually either way. But given everything else we've talked about and the balance of all the other Scriptures, it's clear that the Book of Life was established from the foundation of the earth or the world and that names are written as people are called.

Now, does this mean that once somebody's name is written in the Book of Life that they remain there no matter what?

The Predestinationists would say, "Once God determines your name is written in the Book of Life, then, it doesn't make any difference what you do, what you think, what you say, what your example is. Once you are in there from the foundation of the world going way back before the earth was ever formed, your name is there and you are destined for salvation. And if your name isn't there, you're destined for condemnation."

Well, look at Revelation 3 and verse 5. This is the Letter to the Sardis Church. Revelation 3 and verse 5, we have a part to play. Revelation 3 and verse 5 says:

Revelation 3:5. *He that [overcomes], the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. (KJV)*

The clear implication is that some names are going to be blotted out of the Book of Life. It's very clear, very clear. And so, the Predestinationists would lead us to believe that once your name is in the Book of Life, it's there. Well, that's not what the Bible says.

As long as we allow God's spirit to lead us and we follow with the thoughts, words, deeds, that show forth the fruits of God's spirit leading us, we will **remain** in the Book of

² While giving this sermon Mr. Railston inadvertently misquoted Revelation 17:8 in the KJV and read the NKJV as well. Please note that both translations place the phrase "the Book of Life" prior to the phrase "the foundation of the world; and, therefore, both support Mr. Railston's point. (Corrected per Rick Railston November 29, 2001, kb)

Life. Let's go to Romans 8 and verse 14. This is the key and it's our part in salvation. It is our job, our choice every day of our life. Romans 8 and verse 14:

Romans 8:14. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (KJV)

[You] can't get away from that. Also, conversely, if we're not being led by the spirit of God, we are not the sons of God and we will not be in the Book of Life. [It's] very clear.

The Greek word for "led" is Strong's #71. And it's the Greek word *ago* (*ag'-o*). And it means—it has two meanings.

1. It means to lead as in taking one with you, like you would lead a child. To lead by accompanying somebody to a certain place or to attach oneself as an attendant and lead them to a certain place.
2. The second meaning is to lead as in guiding or directing. And that's what the holy spirit does in our head. It guides us and directs us. It means to move as influencing the mind. And that's the prime way God's spirit deals with us.

The clear implication here is that there are some who will not be led by God's holy spirit. They will not be called the children of God. And, therefore, they will not be in the Book of Life. But it is our choice whether or not we allow the holy spirit to lead us. If we do not allow the holy spirit to lead us, we are not the sons of God. **It is our choice.**

So, Revelation 17 verse 8 tells us that a Book of Life was indeed ordained from the foundation of the world, but the individual names in that book will be added as people are called and receive God's holy spirit. They will remain there as long as we are led by God's holy spirit, but they can be blotted out if we turn.

So, what is the summary of these Five Scriptures? It's very clear that no one is predetermined to be lost or saved. It's not predetermined. Many, if not most of these Scriptures, refer to our calling and not to our salvation.

The gigantic error of the Calvinists and the Predestinationists and, frankly, most "Christian" churches is that they don't understand two essential facts. And it was a revelation when I was called and you study these facts and all of a sudden the light bulb goes on and you say, "Now, I understand! Now, it makes sense."

1. The first thing they don't understand is that not all people are called now. They think everybody is called. And that if the missionary doesn't get to the African village in a certain time and somebody dies, that person is lost forever. That's not a fair god. That's not a just god. So, what they don't understand is not all are called now.
2. The second thing they don't understand is that God wants all of His children to ultimately attain salvation. He wants everyone. He's not sitting there thumbs up, thumbs down. He wants **all** to be saved. And we'll get into that in the balance of the sermon.

So, now the Third Point. In the First One, we defined what Predestination was. The Second area is we looked at the Five Scriptures. The Third is the fact that:

III. God's Plan of Salvation was created before Adam and Eve—the Plan was created before Adam and Eve.

Let's go to Revelation 13 and verse 8. [It's] talking about all those that dwell on the earth worship the Beast. Revelation 13 and verse 8, it says:

Revelation 13:8. *And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [referring to the Beast], whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. (KJV)*

It's telling us Christ was slain from the foundation of the world. Now the Greek word for "foundation" is Strong's #2602. It's the Greek word *katabole* (*kat-ab-ol-ay'*) and it means a founding or a conception. You know when you have hatch the plan, when you think of the plan.

Zodhiates says it means "from the creation of the world." He goes on to say, "The whole expression 'from the foundation of the world' is equivalent to the phrase 'from the beginning of the creation.'"

And so, it tells us that Christ was slain from the beginning of creation, from the founding of the world. So, this tells us **when** God's Plan was conceived—that Christ would have to die for the sins of the entire world. Christ's death was predetermined before Adam and Eve. And Christ was slain from the foundation of the world.

Now why was that? Why on earth was that? Well, it's very simple. God created mankind and He gave mankind the ability to decide—the Two Trees. **And He knew apart from His holy spirit, the mind of man would choose the way of self.** Deuteronomy 5 and verse 29, a very familiar Scripture, God knew that if man did not choose His holy spirit that apart from His holy spirit, human beings would always seek to gratify the self, to look after the self, to put the self number one. Deuteronomy 5 and verse 29, Christ the God of the Old Testament was lamenting before Moses. Moses is writing this at the end of his life.

Deuteronomy 5:29. *O that there [was] such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever! (KJV)*

God knew in advance that Adam and Eve would choose the way of self. Not that it was predetermined, but He knew what happens when a human being is void of God's holy spirit and what the human being will tend to do. It's obvious if you look at the six thousand years of human history.

This is why Christ was able to say to Peter, "You will deny Me three times." Some people will say, "Well, isn't that Predestination that Christ said 'You're going to deny Me three times?' So, Christ determines he's going to deny Him three times." What Christ did is He knew Peter's heart. God knows our hearts. We don't know each other's hearts. God looks into our minds and into our hearts and He knows what's there. At that moment in time, that night that Christ was betrayed, Christ knew what was in Peter's heart.

Also Christ can make an animal do anything He wants. He can make a rooster crow three times, ten times, a thousand times. He can make a donkey speak. He can do anything that He wants and that's what He did.

And also Christ can put thoughts into the three young women. Remember they said, "Oh, yeah. I remember him. You were one of this man's group."? And, of course,

Christ can plant; I mean God can plant those thoughts in anybody's mind. We know that just as well as we know Satan can plant thoughts in anybody's mind. We've all been there and done that. Just like Christ the God of the Old Testament hardened Pharaoh's heart by putting thoughts in Pharaoh's mind to suit His own purpose.

So, when Christ said to Peter, "You're going to deny Me three times," that's **not** Predestination in the sense of salvation. It's God working out His Plan just as He did with Pharaoh. That's not Predestination. He wasn't predestined to be saved or condemned. Adam, Eve, Pharaoh, Ananias the High Priest probably will all have their chance in the Last Great Day.

God wants man to learn that choosing to put the self before God does not work. It doesn't work in marriages. It doesn't work in governments. It doesn't work in society. Putting the self first doesn't work. And God is giving mankind six thousand years to prove the utter failure of human beings putting themselves first.

We're talking about the Plan was created before Adam and Eve. Let's go to Ephesians 1 and verse 4. We covered it earlier. Let's just read that again with this understanding that the Plan was created before Adam and Eve. It says:

Ephesians 1:4. According as he [has] chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: (KJV)

Meaning: The decision to have a group of Firstfruits was made before the creation of the universe. It was a decision. The Plan was made. And knowing man would fail, God decided to call a group, a small group, to proclaim His way and live His way of life during those six thousand years. And we call that group the Firstfruits. So, it's very clear that God's Plan was ordained before the foundation of the world. It was not foreordained before the foundation of the world that certain individuals would be saved or condemned.

The Fourth and the Final Point:

IV. The key to God's Plan of Salvation is that He and the Word, as Christ was when the worlds were created, made the decision to give mankind the ability to choose for himself.

That was evident in the Garden of Eden. They had a choice. God allowed them to make a choice. Our life is not preordained or foreordained.

Look at God's appeal to ancient Israel. Let's go to Deuteronomy chapter 30 and read verse 19. If all of this was preordained, why would God say this? Why would He say this if everything was determined in advance? Deuteronomy 30:19. This is at the end of Moses' life right before the Promised Land. Moses is warning them and rehearsing the last forty years and he is laying it on the line with them. Deuteronomy 30 verse 19, he says:

***Deuteronomy 30:19.* I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore... (KJV)**

It's already predetermined; it doesn't make any difference what you do? No!

***Deuteronomy 30:19b.* ... choose life, that both [you] and [your] seed may live: (KJV)**

It is your choice. You decide. Just as Adam and Eve had a choice and they decided. We choose by our deeds. We choose by our actions. And therefore, we have a trail of fruits behind us either good fruit or bad fruit.

Now Joshua did the same thing. Let's go over to Joshua chapter 24 and read verse 15. Joshua said exactly the same thing. They had a choice to make. Carnal human beings, they had a choice to make. Joshua 24 and verse 15, he says:

Joshua 24:15. *And if it [seems] evil unto you to serve the LORD, (KJV)*

If it's a bad thing, if it's a horrible thing, an evil thing to serve the LORD—Joshua 24 verse 15:

Joshua 24:15b. ... choose you this day whom [you] will serve; (KJV)

It's your choice.

Joshua 24:15 continued. ... *whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood [and that were existent in the land that they were going in, conquering], or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land [you] dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the [Eternal]. (KJV)*

"We choose to follow God." **And to those of us who have been called, our destiny is not predetermined. It is up to us.**

Now, here is the clincher. Here is the clincher of this whole issue of Predestination and it involves the Father of the Faithful, Abraham. Let's go to Genesis chapter 22. And I found it interesting that in all of the papers written about Predestination, nobody answered this question. Nobody addressed Genesis 22. And nobody addressed many of the Scriptures we've covered today.

Genesis 22, we'll start in the very beginning.

Genesis 22:1. *And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt... (KJV)*

The King James says ["tempt"]. The Hebrew means "to prove."

Genesis 22:1b. *God [proved] Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.
2) And he said, Take now [your] son, [your] only son Isaac, whom [you love], and get [you] into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I [and going to] tell [you about]. (KJV)*

Now, this was all after the miracle of his [Isaac's] birth. I mean he was born when they were a hundred years old! That's a miracle. And now, God says, "Okay now. He's here. I've given you the son. Now, I want you to go out and kill him." So, you can imagine what was going through Abraham's head.

In verse 4, it was three-day journey, plenty of time to think, anguish. Can you imagine the knots in his stomach? Can you imagine what the thoughts were going through his mind? Verse 6:

Genesis 22:6. *And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.*

7) *And Isaac [spoke] to Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb...*

8) *... Abraham said [that God's going] to provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.*

9) *And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built [the] altar there, [he] laid the wood [on the altar in a proper] order, [he] bound Isaac his son, (KJV)*

Isaac had a part to play in this. He was a young man. He could have overpowered his father, but he didn't.

Genesis 22:9b. *... [he] bound ... his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. (KJV)*

Isaac now was getting the idea that he was the sacrifice.

Genesis 22:10. *Abraham stretched forth his hand, [he] took the knife to slay his son. (KJV)*

And, at that minute, he had already done it in his mind. He knew he was going to follow through; the knife was coming down; and mentally, he had already killed his son. Then in verse 11:

Genesis 22:11. *[T]he angel of the LORD ... (KJV)*

Clarke says about this phrase, "the angel of the LORD", "The very person who was represented by this offering, the Lord Jesus, who calls himself Jehovah" was the one that said this.

Genesis 22:11. *[He] called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.*

12) *And he said, Lay not [your] hand upon the lad, neither do [you] any thing unto him: for now I know that [you fear] God, seeing [you have] not withheld [your] son, [your] only son... (KJV)*

The clear implication here is before He didn't know whether Abraham would go through with this. I mean Abraham could have pulled a "Jonah" and just fled. He could have refused to begin the journey—just wouldn't go. He could have accidentally not brought the firewood. He could have refused to take the dagger at the last minute. God wanted to see what he [Abraham] would actually do at that moment in time when he was under this tremendous pressure. Was he going to choose his son or was he going to choose God?

And God did not know beforehand. It is very clear from Scripture. He didn't know until that minute what Abraham would do. Therefore, there cannot be any Predestination because He would already have known. And why go through the exercise if He already knew?

Understand God has a goal for all mankind, but He will not dictate what men will do because He has allowed man to choose. He has given man free moral agency to

choose. Look at 1 Timothy 2 and verse 4. This tells us what God's goal is for all mankind and this is what people don't understand. Those theologians down through the centuries don't understand these basic Scriptures because they have been blinded. Not that they are stupid people. They have been blinded as part of God's Plan. 1 Timothy 2 and verse 4, we are told:

1 Timothy 2:4. *Who will have all men to be saved, (KJV)*

That is God's goal. It doesn't say, "All men will be saved." It says God's desire.

1 Timothy 2:4. *[He] will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. (KJV)*

Otherwise, it would say "All men will be saved." No. It's our choice, you see.

Look at John chapter 3 and let's read verses 16 through 18. Again, [this is] a very familiar Scripture. And those who believe in Predestination read these Scriptures, but again, it's a blindness. And we were all blind before we were called. So, we can't take any glory in that fact that we know things that maybe other people don't know because God gets all the credit. Not any of us. John 3 verse 16:

John 3:16. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever [believes on] him should not perish, (KJV)*

It's not, "will not perish," but "should not perish."

John 3:16b. *... but have everlasting life.
17) For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (KJV)*

Not "will be saved," but "**might be saved**." It's up to the individual.

Verse 18:

John 3:18. *He that [believes] on him is not condemned: but he that [believes] not [on Him] is condemned already, because he [has] not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (KJV)*

So, therefore, it's an individual decision of who believes and who doesn't.

Now think about this in closing this last point. If God knows from the beginning of the world who will go where (to either salvation or condemnation), why did He bring into existence all those that He knows are going to be condemned? What's the point? Why bring them into existence? Why have them suffer a miserable physical life only to be burned up in the Lake of Fire? Or, as they [the Predestinationists] believe, burn in hell forever? Why would God do that if He already knew in advance? It makes no sense. It makes no logical sense at all.

And then the other big issue to think about is what role does character development play? What role does character development play if God were to grant salvation to humans regardless of what they did, regardless of what they believed, regardless of what they thought? And He just said, "Okay. You go here. You go here. You go here. You go here," regardless of anybody's character or their overcoming or their faith or anything like that.

Look at Romans 12 and verse 2. This is the part we have to play. It is our choice. It is up to us. Romans 12 and verse 2, it says:

Romans 12:2. *And be not conformed to this world: (KJV)*

We have to come out of the world.

Romans 12:2b. *... but be [you] transformed... (KJV)*

That means changed. Water is transformed into steam by heat. It's changed. He says:

Romans 12:2 continued. *... be [you] transformed by the renewing of your mind [making new your mind through the power of the holy spirit], that [you] may prove what {is} that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (KJV)*

The transformation process allows us, as Les was talking about in the sermonette, it allows us to think critically, to see truth from falsehood. And so, we can change, be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, but that whole process is up to us. Do we do it? Or do we not? It is up to us.

Okay, let's summarize now. The Doctrine of Predestination says, "Since God is all-powerful and sovereign, He determines in advance what each individual will do and therefore, knows in advance what our future holds, either eternal life or eternal condemnation."

But we've seen what the truth is in this matter.

Yes, God is completely sovereign over all things but **He chooses** to give each human being self-determining free will. He chooses to give us free will. Each person is able to accept God or reject God. Each person is able to choose good over evil and, therefore, choose salvation over condemnation. It is man's choice of whether or not he has salvation.

Here is the key. This is what people don't understand. Since God has given man the choice, **He willingly gives up the foreknowledge of what any individual will do.** When God said and Christ said, "We will allow individual humans to make their own choices," then, what They said is, "We willingly give up the knowledge of what a person will do. Otherwise, we're creating robots. It's all pre-programmed what people are going to do, but We're not going to do that. We're going to give each individual his individual free will and choice. Therefore, We don't know, will not know, cannot know in advance what any individual will do." Now, God knows our heart, yes, but it is ultimately our choice.

We serve a perfect God who is totally fair. Now, we know in this life this life is not fair. It isn't. We see that everyday. This life is not fair, but God is totally fair. We are not subject to the whim of some capricious god. God wakes up on the wrong side of the bed and he just kills everybody like the emperors did and get upset.

I saw a documentary the other day about Stalin. And he went through a period of time where he was just angry and mad. And he would tell the people—he had extermination crews in Siberia—and he says, he told them to kill—it was approximately Thirty-five hundred people a day. And He sent them a telegram saying, "I want you to kill seven

thousand today and tomorrow and the next day and the next day," because he was ticked about something.

You see we don't serve a God like that. Thankfully, God is fair. **We have our destiny in our own hands.** And God is watching each one of us to see do we, will we develop the mind of Christ, the mind of God the Father during our lifetime or will we not. It's our choice. He wants to see if we will love Him and obey Him with all our hearts and then love our neighbor as ourselves. That's our choice. If we do, then Christ will marry us for all eternity.

But the bottom line is and the thing we should take away is that:

God has given us the choice and the choice is ours.