Do We Have a Choice?

Predestination & Free Will



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by

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Do We Have a Choice?

Predestination & Free Will

People who don't give God much thought will often blame Him when things go wrong. And some Christians believe that everything that happens is automatically God's will. And some believe that God has decided in advance what will happen and then makes it happen. But none of these attitudes and beliefs line up with God's Word. He made us with free will right from the beginning and He will never override our ability to choose. He will always be faithful to how He made us. He has a plan for the world and eventually He will bring it all to pass, but in the meantime, there are all sorts of reasons why things happen or don't happen but it isn't that God is controlling everything.

God Isn't Controlling Everything

There is a lot of evidence in the Bible to show that everything that happens isn't God's will. Here are a few examples.

In the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:10 Jesus says — "*Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*." If everything that happens on earth is God's will, then there is no point in this prayer.

2 Peter 3:9 says that God — '*is patient with us, not wishing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance*.' This is God's will — that everyone should accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour and not be banished from Him for eternity. But 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 says that when Jesus comes again, He will be — '*punishing those who don't know God, and to those who don't obey the Good News of our Lord*

Jesus, [9]who will pay the penalty: eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might.' Everyone who doesn't accept Jesus will go into everlasting punishment when they die. So God's will doesn't automatically come to pass or everyone would be saved. People do perish because God isn't controlling everything. We have a choice to accept Jesus or reject Him. That's free will.

Looking out over the city of Jerusalem, Jesus said in Luke 13:34 – "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem … How often I wanted to gather your children together, like a hen gathers her own brood under her wings, and you refused!*" Jesus had longed to gather the people of Jerusalem to Himself to love them and care for them, but they wouldn't come to Him. He didn't force them to respond to Him – He let them go, even though it brought Him sorrow. He wasn't controlling them. His will didn't come to pass.

We all know that God isn't controlling our thoughts. We know we are free to make our own choices. We can do so because God made us with free will. He has given us the ability to choose for ourselves how we think, speak, act and respond. When things go wrong in our life, it isn't that God has sent the trouble, but that choices have consequences. We can suffer because of our own bad choices or because of the bad choices of others that have impacted us. God isn't controlling everything.

The First Choice

From the beginning, God created people with free will — the ability to choose how to think, speak and act. When He made Adam, He put Him in a beautiful garden and He gave him just one rule. In Genesis 2:16-17 He said to Adam — "*You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; [17]but you shall not eat of the tree*

of the knowledge of good and evil; for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die." Why did God take the risk of putting this tree in the garden? Because He didn't want people to love Him automatically. He wanted people who would choose to relate to Him and obey Him and love Him back of their own free will. So what happened? Adam and Eve broke that one single rule and suddenly their lives were turned upside down and the whole world became corrupted and broken.

Choices have consequences be they good or bad. Everything that is wrong in the world and every tragic or evil thing that happens goes back to this first choice. These events are not the will of God. God grieves over these things even more than we do.

A Real Relationship

Would you want to be in a relationship with someone who was predestined or programmed to love you back? Would you find it satisfying and fulfilling? No — you would find yourself longing for the other person to choose to love you back of their own free will so that you could have a real love relationship with them. It is the same with God. He loves us with unconditional, sacrificial love and He wants us to choose to love Him back. When we do, we enter into a real loving relationship with Him which can bring both Him and us real joy. Nothing will change God's love for us, but we are free to choose how to respond. 1 John 4:19 says — '*We love him, because he first loved us*.'

The Choice between Life and Death

Free will is a vital part of the way God created us and He will never go back on His design — we will always be able to choose how we think, speak, act and respond. In the Old Testament He

gave His people the law — detailed rules to live by. He said that if they obeyed the law they would be blessed which would lead to life, but if they disobeyed, they would be cursed which would lead to death. He said in Deuteronomy 30:19-20 — "*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life, that you may live.*" God honoured the free will He had made them with, by giving them the choice, but because He loved them so much, He then told them the right choice to make — life.

Choose Life

We no longer live under the law, because when Jesus died on the Cross He suffered God's punishment for all our sins — past, present and future, so no-one would have to be punished as they had been under the law. He sacrificed His own Son to suffer the punishment we deserve. That's how much He loves us; how much He wants us to love Him back. That's how much He wants us to receive eternal life with Him. But it isn't automatic. We are free to receive or reject Jesus. That is the choice we have today. Are we going to choose life by accepting Jesus as our Lord and Saviour or are we going to choose death by rejecting Him or ignoring Him? Jesus says in John 3:16 — "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life*."

Once a rich young man asked Jesus what he had to do to find eternal life. You can read this in Matthew 19:16-22 and in Mark 10:17-27. He didn't like the answer Jesus gave him and he walked away sadly. Jesus had looked on this young man with love, but He didn't force him to obey. He let him make his choice and allowed him to go. God does the same with you. He will

draw you with love and tell you all you need to know so you can come into relationship with Him, but He won't force you into it — He will let you make your choice. He will welcome you into His family with open arms or let you walk away. That's real love.

When we believe in Jesus and accept everything that He has won for us through the Cross, then we are born-again and enter into an eternal love relationship with Him. Jesus calls this eternal life. Are you going to choose life or death? God has told you the right answer — choose life. Choose Jesus. He hasn't forced anyone to be born-again, but He is drawing you to Himself with His love because He knows it is the only way for you to find real joy and peace — He is wooing you. But you can choose how to respond. Your response has not been predestined by God.

Romans 10:9-10 says — '*if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10]For with the heart one believes resulting in righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made resulting in salvation*.' If you have never accepted Jesus, then you can choose to do so today. Believe it in your heart and declare it sincerely with your mouth and you will be born-again. You have then become God's child — a member of His family. And you have entered into eternal life which will continue with Jesus for all eternity.

So What Is Predestination?

The word 'predestined' occurs in the Bible just four times — twice in Romans 8 and twice in Ephesians 1. We'll look at all four verses. 'Predestined' can be defined as God deciding in advance what will happen and making it happen. That doesn't seem to fit with the free will He has given us, so how does this work out?

The answer is in the first of the four verses, in Romans 8:29 — *'For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn amongst many brothers.*' God didn't predestine everyone to be saved or not be saved or some to be saved and some not. He predestined those He foreknew — those He knew in advance would accept Jesus of their own free will. God hasn't planned everyone's eternal destiny, but He has always known who would accept Jesus and who would reject Him. There is a huge difference. You have free will and can freely make your own choice for or against Jesus and so can everyone else. God doesn't force us to choose Jesus, but He knows if we will.

So who has He predestined? Read Romans 8:29 again – '*For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son*.' He has predestined those He has always known would accept Jesus.

What Has He Predestined?

God has predestined that we should become like Jesus. Wow! When you are born-again God gives you a brand-new spirit which is just like Jesus. But your soul (your mind, emotions and will) still needs to be transformed. As you grow as a Christian, renewing your mind in the truth of God's Word, your soul will start to become more and more like Jesus. Romans 12:2 says — '*Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God*.' No-one will get to be totally perfect in their soul in this life, but when we die, the transformation which had begun in our soul here on earth, is immediately completed and we will then be perfect and whole in our soul as well as our spirit. 1 Corinthians 15:52 says – '*the*

dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed.' We will finally be what we were predestined to be — just like Jesus.

Now read the second verse about predestination in Romans 8:30 — '*Whom he predestined, those he also called. Whom he called, those he also justified. Whom he justified, those he also glorified*.' The sequence is Foreknew > Predestined > Called > Justified > Glorified. God knows whether you have chosen or will choose Jesus or not. If you have chosen Him or do choose Him then this process is predestined for you. God calls you to follow Him and be in relationship with Him and serve Him. He then justifies you — Jesus took the punishment for all your sin and, when you are born-again and receive the forgiveness He won for you on the Cross, you become justified. In God's eyes you are 'just-as-if-you'd' never sinned.

And then He glorifies you — He gives you a brand-new perfect spirit that is just like Jesus. What a wonderful process. Who wouldn't want that?! This is predestined for all born-again Christians and it is our spiritual reality whether we know it or not and whether we believe it or not. But we still have free will after we are born-again and we can choose to live our lives according to what God has done in us or we can still go our own way. To experience the reality of all that God has predestined for us, we have to believe it and co-operate with it.

The third verse about predestination is Ephesians 1:5 — '*having predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his desire*.' God has predestined those He foreknew would be born-again, to be adopted into His family. This is what He desires for all people — to become His children so He can be their Father and love and care for them. But only those who accept Jesus experience it.

The fourth verse uses the word 'foreordained' instead of 'predestined' in the WEBBE translation in Ephesians 1:11 – '*We were also assigned an inheritance in him, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who does all things after the counsel of his will*.' As God's adopted children, we are heirs of all He has and all He has won for us through Jesus. Romans 8:16-17 says — '*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God; [17]and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him*.' This inheritance isn't dependent on whether we deserve it or not or on us earning it. God has already assigned it to us. It has our name on it. It's already ours and one day we will see the full reality of it when we die and enter into the glory of God.

The Good News of Predestination

Romans 8:29-30 says — '*For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn amongst many brothers. [30]Whom he predestined, those he also called. Whom he called, those he also justified. Whom he justified, those he also glorified*.' It is such good news that, when we are born-again, God predestines us to be like Jesus and calls us and justifies us and glorifies us. It's true whether we believe it or not and whether we feel it or not. But He wants us to cooperate with Him in believing this wonderful truth so that we might know its reality in this world as well as in the next.

You have free will — God will never override that. But you have a reality that is so wonderful and powerful to step into. Let's choose to live our lives as God's children — foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified. Hallelujah!

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Is God determining how your life goes?
Has He predestined everything?
Has He chosen whether you are saved or not?
Or do you have a choice?
Are you free to choose Jesus or reject Him?
Are you free to live your life the way you want to?

Find the answers and be encouraged.



Katherine Hilditch has been teaching in local churches for many years. In 2013 she wrote her first booklet and since then has written many more. She created her website to make all the booklets freely available to everyone. They can be read online or printed out. Katherine's threefold purpose is to help people understand more about Jesus and all He has done and won for them, to encourage them to go deeper in their relationship with God and to provide material to help them share their faith with others. To read her story and find all the booklets go to –

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