

**PREDESTINATION**  
**The Elephant in the Room**  
**Romans 8:28-29**  
**Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**  
**September 30, 2018**

**<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who <sup>28</sup> have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Probably the best known doctrine –**

**- and most misunderstood one –**

**in the Presbyterian Church is the Doctrine of the Elect –**

**- predestination.**

**It's kind of like the cat that shows up at your door  
and won't go away.**

**Sooner or later you have to pay attention to it.**

**So . . .**

**here's the elephant in the room:**

**- has God pre-determined who is saved and who is not?**

**- or is there room in the plan of salvation for free will?**

**Let me start out by saying that:**

**1. I will do my very best to explain the doctrine to you**

**2. You are going to have to choose what you believe**

## **CONTROVERSY:**

**At the very heart of the controversy  
between predestination and free will  
is the question: who gets to heaven and who goes to hell?**

**There are two doctrines that are polar opposites.**

**The first is the doctrine of free will – free moral agency;  
we have been given free will to make whatever choices we want  
and through our choices we *choose* our eventual outcome.**

**If we choose to follow Jesus,  
we will gain entrance to heaven;  
if we choose *not* to follow Jesus, our destination is Hell.**

**The second doctrine is predestination – our fate is sealed;  
predetermined for us;  
both the saved and the lost were “elected”  
before the foundation of the world.**

**This conflict has had a long history.  
And both views claim a biblical basis for their belief.**

## **AUGUSTINE:**

**We have Augustine to thank for giving us classical predestination.**

**He stressed that since the fall of Adam and Eve,  
all humanity was under the curse of original sin  
and could not hope for eternal life with God  
unless God chose us for salvation.**

**He went further – too far in my opinion –**

**- and said that God chose from all eternity  
who would be allowed into God's kingdom  
to replace the fallen angels who followed Satan.  
I guess God had a couple of missing altos and bases  
in the heavenly choir!**

**Augustine was very close to the truth  
when he said the work of Christ  
was to choose to save some sinners  
in order to show God's mercy.**

**But, Augustine went too far for me when he said  
that God chose – or allowed – others to remain in their sin  
in order to show God's justice.**

**CALVIN'S VIEW:**

**And then, along came John Calvin.**

**Calvin defined predestination as the eternal decree  
by which God decided before the foundation of the world  
what is to become of each and every individual.**

**By God's will – and only God's sovereign will –  
eternal life is foreordained for some;  
eternal damnation for others.**

**In other words, God predetermines or foreordains  
that God will bestow certain blessings upon some,  
and certain curses upon others,  
regardless of what they believe or do.**

**And that determination was already made  
and rested solely upon arbitrarily ordained factors  
(of which the individuals know nothing).**

**For example,**

**a teacher might predetermine that all the students  
who enroll in the class will receive grades  
on a random basis having nothing to do  
with their performance in the class.**

**The teacher decides ahead of time**

**all who sit in the first row will receive “A’s,”  
all who sit in the second row will receive “B’s,”  
those in the third and fourth rows will receive “C’s,”  
and so on.**

**The students enter the class at the beginning of the semester  
and take their seats according to various personal choices  
but they know nothing of the teacher’s plan for grading.**

**The grade they will receive has been pre-determined.**

**Anyone with a sense of fairness immediately would conclude  
that the teacher’s system of grading was unfair.**

**Someone might say,**

**“But the students had a free choice of where to sit.”**

**Or, let’s say, the teacher had a list of students beforehand  
and simply, on the basis of going down the list,  
decided in advance what grade would be assigned  
to each student determined by whether or not  
the teacher liked the student’s name.**

**Is this the way we understand how God works?**

**Certainly, God *could* make that decision –**

- but it does not hold true to the Gospel message.

**OPPOSING CALVIN:**

**There are those who opposed Calvin:**

**Arminius, Wesley, and numerous others  
who modified or directly opposed Calvin's interpretation.**

**These opposing views strongly stressed  
the free will and free moral agency of every person.**

**Fortunately for Presbyterians,  
there is another model for foreordination,  
predestination, and election.**

**It is the "general" or the "criteria" view.**

**For example, take the same teacher mentioned above.**

**The teacher would *predetermine*  
what knowledge and what skills should be expected  
on the part of the students.**

**It then would be predetermined  
that those who achieve this knowledge or these skills  
to a better than 90% degree would receive an "A,"  
while those who developed them to better than 80%  
degree would receive a "B,"  
and so on.**

**Then, when the students came to class,  
the teacher would attempt to communicate  
what the students were expected to know  
and the skills they were expected to develop,  
and would assist them as much as possible**

**in learning and developing.**

**This is the model presented to us in the Bible.**

**CONCLUSION:**

**The bottom line is this.**

**All these theological ideas are rooted in one solid, bedrock belief  
at the heart of Reformed (Presbyterian) theology:**

**God is sovereign.**

**God's love is larger than we can imagine  
or to which we can apply human reason.**

**It's all about God's sovereignty –**

**- God being in charge –**

**and God finding a way to love human beings**

**into becoming who they truly are: children of God.**

**How it all works is a mystery**

**that we can never fully make sense of with our human reason.**

**It's like trying to look at the broad vast universe**

**with the cheap telescope you bought at Radio Shack:**

**you know there's a lot more there,**

**but this is all you can see with your eyes.**

**I know this to be true,**

**because we bought one of those cheap telescopes.**

**First of all, the image is upside down.**

**Second, it is no better than a pair of binoculars.**

**There is far more out there**

**than we can see through my cheap telescope.**

**Theology, I'm sad to say, is the cheap telescope**

through which we try to see – and understand – God.  
and with your unreliable eyes;  
God is the vast expanse you're trying to see.

The plain teaching of Scripture is  
that election is conditioned by our response,  
or failure to respond,  
to God in faith and obedience.

It is not – cannot be - conditioned by God's arbitrary choice,  
before we are even born,  
as to whether we will be saved or lost.

That is totally out of harmony  
with the overall expressions of Scripture  
regarding the care and concern of God and Christ,  
and of their actions in order to save us from our sin.

For me, Calvin's view cannot stand  
against the whole of the Bible's teaching  
concerning God's plan for salvation.

The Bible is clear, in my opinion,  
that God wants everyone to be saved;  
that Christ died as a ransom for all;  
that the invitation and call is extended to all;  
and that whosoever wills may respond.

Therefore, any thoughts on predestination  
must be understood and interpreted in harmony  
with the biblical concept that God is love.

In my opinion,  
Reformed theology – and Presbyterian thought –  
must include an understanding  
of the sovereignty of God.

**A sovereignty that allows God to predetermined,  
preplan, and foreordain that all individuals who  
choose to respond to God's grace  
and seek to live lives of faith and obedience.**

**That is not something we can attain without God's grace –  
without God first calling us to accept God's grace.**

**We cannot wake up one morning  
make the decision we want to go to heaven  
and bind God to *our* decision.**

**It is God who makes the first move  
by *calling* us to a life of faith.**

**God's love is always to seek good for every human being.**

**Human beings are the ones who reject this goodness,  
and we reject God's call to us over and over.**

**When we question the extent of God's love –  
when we deem someone else as unworthy of God's grace –  
- it is because we are looking through a cheap telescope.**

**We fail to see how God's love might be operating  
even in the lives of people who look for all intents and purposes  
to be totally anti-God.**

**And that's the point – the important point.  
We can't know who's on God's team,  
and our mistake is thinking we do.**

**We exclude people for all sorts of reasons,  
based solely upon our own biases.**

**Often, we base the judgement of someone's goodness  
based on personal experience with that person;  
- if that person has offended us  
it is because that person is a *bad* person.**

**We exclude people because of their political affiliations  
- gender preference  
- race, etc.**

**The list is long and it's ugly.  
And you can rest assured you are on someone else's list!**

**Because of the sovereignty of God,  
we don't get to decide who goes to heaven  
and who doesn't.**

**I can't even *choose* to go to heaven.  
God has chosen it for me.**

**So, the bottom line is this:  
The doctrine of election applies to all people potentially,  
but to no one unconditionally.**

**PRAYER:**

**Sovereign God, let us be thankful for Your willingness to forgive us  
and to include us in Your family. Help us to see You working in the  
lives of others – all others. Help us understand You better through  
our prayer and study. Draw us ever closer to You. And let us share  
the love of Christ with all who cross our paths.**