



Does the Bible Teach Predestination and Election? by Sellers S. Crain, Jr

All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.

The doctrine of Predestination and Election came out of the reformed movement of which John Calvin, a French Theologian, was a leading proponent. Calvin's book called **The Institutes of the Christian Religion** sets forth his Five-Fold Theology which is summed up with the word **TULIP**. A discussion of this theology:

- **T - Total Heredity Depravity**: meaning, every person is born in sin and is depraved as a result of the fall of man.
- **U - Unconditional Election**: God elects or chooses who will be saved and who will be lost before they are born. This has nothing to do with God's foreknowledge of who might come to salvation. The lost are damned and destined for hell.
- **L - Limited Atonement**: Jesus died only for the elect.
- **I - Irresistible Grace**: the elect, are chosen by God, and the Holy Spirit supplies grace to them until they repent and are born again.
- **P - Perseverance of the Saints**: the elect can never lose their salvation. They are eternally secure: Once saved always saved.

Any denomination with the name *Reformed* or *Presbyterian* and some *Baptist* follow Calvin's theology. His Five-Fold plan of salvation was adopted by the **Synod of Dort** in the Netherlands (1618-1619). This council consisted mainly of *Dutch Reformed* Theologians.

They came together primarily to counter and combat **Arminianism**. This doctrine was an effort to counter Calvinism by describing the relationship of God's Sovereignty and man's free will. This doctrine was based on the teaching of a Dutch Theologian name *Jacobus Arminius* (1560-1609), who had formerly been a student of Calvin. Forty-five Reformed ministers who had adopted Arminius' theology presented a document called **The Five Articles of Remonstrance** to the States General of the Netherlands in 1610. The followers of this document's doctrine were later called **Remonstrants**. The five points outlined in this document are:

- **Partial Depravity**, which in contrast to Calvin's doctrine, accepts the fact of being born sinners, but we still have the opportunity to seek God and be saved.
- **Limited Election**: God only selects those He knows will choose to believe.
- **Unlimited Atonement**: Jesus died to save all men who would choose to believe in Him.
- **Resistible Grace**: God's call of grace can be received or rejected. It is entirely left up to the individual's free will.
- **Conditional Salvation**: A saved person can lose his or her salvation by a failure to remain faithful.

Another document which has had a major influence on this doctrine is **The Westminster Confession**. In 1643 the Long Parliament during the English Civil War called together 171 primarily Presbyterian and Puritan clergymen at Westminster Abbey for a Synod, referred to as the Westminster Assembly. For this reason, it was viewed primarily as a Presbyterian Confession of Faith. They were originally drafted to lay a foundation for the Reformed Church of English. In 1646 the assembly presented **The Westminster Confession** to the Parliament which approved it. It states:

III. By the decree of God for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.;

IV. These angels and men thus predestinated and foreordained are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished. (Schaff, Philip, **The Creeds of Christendom**, Vol. 1, p.762).

Since this doctrine is accepted by a large number of Protestant denominations, such as *Presbyterian*, *Congregationalist*, and some *Baptist*, as least in an adapted form, it leads to the question of whether or not the Bible teaches it. The Bible unquestionably teaches Predestination and Election (Scriptures:

Acts 2:23: Him being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God...;

Romans 8:29-30: For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son....;

1 Corinthians 2:7: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory.;

Ephesians 1:4: He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...

The word predestination itself does not appear in Scripture, but forms of the word appear four times (**Romans 8:29, 30**; **Ephesians 1:5, 11**). The word "ordain," for example, occurs 41 times, and the word "elect" (chosen or selected) occurs 27 times. Elect means to "pick or choose for one's self; a choosing of one out of many." While one writer says "A sharp distinction between the two words is not warranted from Scripture, but there is distinction to be made." "This distinction," he says, "concerns the fact that 'elect' is always a positive designation in Scripture (**Matthew 24:31**; **Titus 1:1**), and predestination is used more broadly (**Acts 4:27-28**)."

While both predestination and election are taught in scripture, Calvin's theology is not. Our responsibility is to learn and adhere to the Biblical doctrine and to avoid any doctrine whose roots may be traced back to man's theology rather than from God's word. There are many aspects of predestination in the Bible such as Christ being the Redeemer of the world, (**1 Peter 1:18-20**), and the appointment of the final judgement (**Acts 17:31**; **Hebrews 9:27**). This article will concern itself with predestination and election as they concern our salvation.

Did God predestine some to be saved and some to be lost? Yes!

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. Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will. (**Ephesians 1:4-5**)

From this passage we can conclude that:

1. God predestined and adopted His spiritual children who would be the heirs of eternal salvation (**Romans 8:16-17**).
2. That being true we must conclude that some will be lost and others will be saved.

Without really completely understanding this passage, and others related to this subject, some have concluded from this that some were arbitrarily selected by God to be saved and others, lost and there is nothing they can do to change that. Is such a conclusion warranted?

Paul could not have meant God arbitrarily or unconditionally decided on these two issues. Such a conclusion would contradict many other passages of scripture which teach that salvation is universally available to all men. (**Matthew 11:28-30; John 3:16; 8:24; 1 John 2:2; Romans 10:13; Titus 2:11; Hebrews 2:9; Revelation 22:17**). Such a doctrine would contradict passages that teach man's involvement in his own salvation. (**Acts 2:40; 13:46; Romans 6:16-18; Philippians 2:12**). Unconditional predestination and election would contradict the passages that speak of the goodness and just nature of God. (**Acts 10:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9**).

Paul did not teach unconditional predestination and election. Let's examine Paul's statement closer (**Ephesians 1:1-14**). "According as He has chosen us in Him [Christ]..." (**Ephesians 1:4**). "In Him suggest" location. This means that only those who are in Christ are the ones predestined to be saved. The ones who are predestined to be saved are those who are willing to be "conformed to the image of His Son..." (**Romans 8:29-30**). We are all called in the same way by the gospel of Christ (**2 Timothy 1:9; 2 Peter 1:5-11**).

God did not unconditionally predestine individuals, but rather predestinated a class of individuals who would be saved. From before the world God determined that those who would be in Christ would be saved. From the beginning God's plan of salvation, was Christ coming to this world to be our sin offering. (**1 Peter 1:20**) This interpretation is consistent with the rest of Scripture.

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ... (**1 Peter 1:2** KJV).

Expressed in this passage are four aspects of human salvation: God's plan, Jesus Christ being chosen by those who would be saved, sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and man's obedience. **Peter** expands these four aspects in the rest of the chapter: God's foreknowledge (**1 Peter 1:3-5, 10-12, 20**); the individual's obedience (**1:13-17**); Christ redemption (**1:18-19**) and the sanctification of the Holy Spirit (**1:22-25**). The Bible teaches that God had predestined the saved, and the lost, of humanity, but to say this involves individuals removes individual responsibility.

Many make the mistake of applying the election and predestination of Romans, especially in the ninth chapter, to individuals instead of to nations, and to eternity instead of to this life. God elected Isaac and Jacob to the lineage of Christ, and not to eternal life, and rejected Ishmael and Esau from the same office not to or from eternal life. (John G. Shaver, **The Manila Light**, December 11, 1977)

Those found in Christ, having been obedient to His will, God will save by His grace, (**Hebrews 5:9; Ephesians 2:8-9**) Those who do not know God, having been disobedient to His will, God will punish. (**2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; 1 John 2:3-5**) God has made every conceivable provision for men to be saved, but our eternal destiny is in our own hands. (**Acts 2:40**). We save ourselves by being obedient to God's redemptive plan. (**Philippians 2:12**)

--- Sellers S. Crain, Jr., November 2020