

PREDESTINE AND ADOPTION AS USED IN THE BIBLE

Predestination is one of the most divisive subjects in the Bible. Proponents use other terms - election, sovereign election, particular redemption, etc. - for predestination but are speaking of the same concept. Here are some statements about this belief:

John MacArthur, 9/14/2019, *Grace to You* letter:

"In simple terms, election is the decisive act of God in eternity past by which He unconditionally chose those who will be saved."

John Calvin "God preordained, for his own glory and the display of His attributes of mercy and justice, a part of the human race, without any merit of their own, to eternal salvation, and another part, in just punishment of their sin, to eternal damnation."

Charles Spurgeon "I believe that nothing happens apart from divine determination and decree. We shall never be able to escape from the doctrine of divine predestination - the doctrine that God has foreordained certain people unto eternal life."

Recently, we looked at election (though not exhaustively) and how it is used in the Bible. It is NOT used in the sense that these men say it is - the *elect* is a group God has chosen before the foundation of the world to be saved. Their understanding doesn't come from the Bible, but from a theological system that reads their theology into the Bible.

Predestination is the same way. The biblical teaching on this subject is actually very simple, straight-forward, and unambiguous. Biblically, *predestination* has nothing to do with "God preordain[ing]...a part of the human race...to eternal salvation, and another part...to eternal damnation." After teaching this subject one of the class members emailed me the following:

Dec. 17, 2018 email: Thank u, Mark, for clarifying in about 5-10 minutes on Sunday what we've been confused about for 30 plus years: predestination! Jonathan and I found what you said very helpful and like....duh....well that's clear. Yep....that's what the text says! How have we never heard this!?!

Predestination προοριζω pro-or-id'-zo, (bold in the verses) in the Greek, is used only six times in the N.T.

Acts 4:26-28

- 26 *The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.*
- 27 *For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,*
- 28 *to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose **determined** before to be done.*

This has to do with God's plan for Jesus and has nothing to do with believers.

1 Corinthians 2:7

- 1 *And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.*
- 2 *For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*
- 3 *And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.*
- 4 *And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:*
- 5 *That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*
- 6 *Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:*
- 7 *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God **ordained** before the ages for our glory,*

This has to do with God's plan of the Gospel, the hidden wisdom, being revealed at a certain point in time and has nothing to do with the "predestination" of believers.

"What is the wisdom of which the Apostle is speaking?...With Heinrici, Edwards, and others, we conclude that St Paul's 'wisdom' is the Gospel, simply." ICC Commentary, Archibald Robertson, Alfred Plummer

"So I suggest to you then that when the apostle talks about the wisdom of God in a mystery, he is talking about the truth that has been revealed to him through the gospel and through the blessing of the unfolding of the revelation of God as it affects Gentiles today." S. Lewis Johnson, SLJ Institute, *The Secret Wisdom of God*

The other four verses are the only times "predestination" is used in regard to believers. And, here is the pertinent point: *predestine* is used exclusively of believers, NOT unbelievers!

We will start with the two in Ephesians.

It is important to study *predestination* and *adoption* together as both are closely united. Birth and adoption are two different concepts in both the physical and spiritual realm. Birth gives life whereas adoption affects an already existing life. Adoption in the Greek means *son placed* not *son made*.

Ephesians 1:5

*having **predestined** us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,*

Notice from the first four verses of chapter one that believers are being addressed. People that are already saved.

- 1 *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, **to the saints** which are at Ephesus, and **to the faithful in Christ Jesus:***
- 2 ***Grace be to you**, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*
- 3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who hath blessed us** with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:*
- 4 ***According as he hath chosen us in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*

Verse 5 says we are predestined to adoption **as sons**. We are predestined **not to be** sons but **as sons**, we already are sons and as sons we are predestined. We are predestined to adoption (we will come back to the doctrine of adoption).

Ephesians 1:10-11

*That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:
In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being **predestined** according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,*

The context of "predestined" in this verse (see verse 10 also) is that believers end result is already established along with an inheritance. The text here is speaking of what God had planned, predestined, for those that are believers, in the future.

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 among many brethren.*

This verse is a close parallel to Ephesians 1:5 and Romans 8:23. Notice those *whom He foreknew*, obviously speaking of believers, God has "predestined" to *be conformed to the image of His Son*. That means we will have a body like his and be like him (this doesn't mean we become God). Our body will be perfect like his, our thoughts will be perfect like his, etc.

Romans 8:30

*Moreover whom He **predestined**, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*

The context of Romans 8:17-39 is the glorification of believers.

God has "predestined" believers thus he has called them, justified them, and will glorify them. This verse does not teach that we are "predestined" to be saved. Believers are "predestined" to be glorified one day and God has called, justified, and glorified them. It would be wrong to equate "call" with predestination. There are plenty of verses that say God has "called" all men and yet not all respond. There are passages where men resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They were "called" but didn't respond positively.

Predestination, when it applies to people, has to do with believers being one day glorified. It has nothing to do with unbelievers being predestined to be saved. Yet, this is what many believe. A study of the above verses would argue against this belief. Predestine(d) or predestinate should always be used in the way the Bible uses it, speaking of believers and their ultimate destiny which is heaven and their glorification.

Adoption

What do most commentators say about adoption?

"The remaining four references describe how New Testament believers become children of God through his gracious choice. The full scope of God's salvation past, present, and future is seen in adoption."

Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology - Adoption

"Similarly, bringing a person into a family by means of adoption is done by choice and out of love...As God adopts those who receive Christ as Savior into His spiritual family, so should we all prayerfully consider adopting children into our own physical families." Gotquestions.com

"Adoption in Christ is the way God chose to create His family even before He created the world (Ephesians 1:4-5)."

Holman Bible Dictionary

"God is the Father of those whom he adopts into his family, who are born again into his family, and no man hath any right to believe God to be his Father except through the new birth, and through adoption." Charles Spurgeon

Use of "adoption" in the Bible

Romans 9:4

Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;

huiotesia from *huiós* = son + *títhemi* = to place is literally *the placing of one as a son*

"And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn:" Exodus 4:22

God has a glorious future for Israel (chapters 9-11) when He will place Israel as the head of the nations with many blessings.

Romans 8:15

*For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but **ye have received the Spirit of adoption**, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*

What is the "spirit of bondage"?

compare this with

"Ye have received the Spirit of adoption"

Ephesians 1:5

*having **predestined us to adoption as sons** by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,*

Who is the "us" that has been predestined to adoption?

Have these been predestined to adoption "**to be sons**" or "**as sons**." What is the difference?

Galatians 4:1-5

speaks of the same truth that because we are sons we will receive the adoption.

- 1 *Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;*
- 2 *But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.*
- 3 *Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:*
- 4 *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,*
- 5 *To redeem them that were under the law, that **we might receive the adoption of sons.***

What is the adoption?

Romans 8:23

clearly tells us what the adoption is.

Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

Adoption is the redemption of our bodies. In other words all believers, "*we...who have the firstfruits of the Spirit*", are "predestined" to have a glorified body one day. This is eternal security. It takes place when we are resurrected.

What does Adoption really mean? It does not mean what we usually take it to mean. Neither does it mean the "adopting of a child." Adoption in the Bible does not mean the same as the word Adoption when used in relation to the legal transaction of receiving into the family as a son or daughter, a child who has been born of other parents. Evidently the translators failed to find a word in the English language that would express to us clearly, the full meaning of the transaction of God Almighty, when God by a divine act, placed a certain destination and position for the believer. The translators have used the word Adoption as the only word at their disposal, to express this act of God.

Adoption means to be "Son Placed", not "son made". You are made a Son the moment you are saved by God's grace. Now, as a son there are certain privileges and benefits God by His sovereign acts has provided for those who are saved. No one has been son placed as yet. One time you will be. You belong to the Lord Jesus Christ now, just as much as you ever will. You have not arrived at the goal which God has predestinated you to-which goal is Adoption.

Andrew Telford, Subjects of Sovereignty, Berachah Church, Philadelphia, PA, page 10-11

"The distinction between an infant (nerios), a dependent and somewhat older child (tekna), and a mature son (huios) are important distinctions that Paul maintains whenever these words are present in his discussion of the believer's position in Christ. Again, Paul's use of 'adoption' in Romans 8:23 cannot be logically understood to mean 'an act by which a person takes another person into his family.' The great majority of commentators have merely fed the cause of Calvinism by failing to think logically about these key passages regarding the believer's future glory. Their influence has made many to suppose that God's predestination of the believer unto adoption means that some people are chosen for heaven before they are born, while others are 'sovereignly passed over.' Not only has this error added more chaos to the already existing quagmire of Christian apologetics, but it has sacrificed an opportunity for all Evangelicals to reflect upon the hope of the believer's future glorification. And so we watch the tail wag the dogma instead of seizing the opportunity to teach the subject of adoption properly. This is the unfortunate direction of the Church, at least the status of the American Church at present. And the same spirit which animates the failure to discern true wisdom in this matter has compounded many other similar errors. In short, all this goes a long way toward explaining the weakness of proper thinking in today's Evangelical Church and of key doctrines that have ended up redefined in the Calvinist's hands."

Daniel Gracely, Calvinism: A Closer Look, pgs 394-395, Revised & Enlarged Edition, 2009