

# PREDESTINATION AS TEMPORAL ONLY

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One of the most interesting theological finds I have made in recent years is that God's predestinating of us does not seem to have to do with eternal destiny.

God does indeed predestinate us in certain ways. Six times the word for "to predestinate" is used in the NT. Besides the instances of cognates of that very word "proorizo," other "pro" words are found in both Testaments which also show that God makes pre-decisions on various matters. And God sometimes makes decrees, even as kings do, according to Scripture. But my recent study suggests that none of these references has to do with our eternal destiny, but only with other matters.

In order to focus on what Scripture teaches on predestination as I have considered the matter of late, perhaps something should first be said about the four views on predestination which have been developed historically, after which I will discuss predestination as I feel it should be taught. The reader who is acquainted with the subject of predestination might wish not to read what appears here under the topic "The Four Views Historically," and read about the direction my thought is taking as discussed under the heading "Temporal Predestination."

## **The Four Views Historically**

At least four views of predestination have arisen historically-only three of them being major views.

One of these is the view of sublapsarian predestination. This is the view that Adam was free in his crucial sin; but that once he sinned freely, the eternal destiny of each other person in all human history was decided upon by the completely sovereign God. The view should have been called post lapsarianism because it means that after the Fall, or the lapse, the destiny of each person was decided upon by God. This is the view of Augustine, the first theologian, East or West, to teach unconditional predestination. This is an unconditional view because the predestination is not conditioned on whether or not a person meets any condition such as that of repenting and believing on Christ. Augustine believed, strangely, that the number of those humans unconditionally predestinated to go to heaven is equal to the number of angels that fell.

James Arminius believed that Augustine got his idea for the doctrine from the Stoics, and Emil Brunner suggested the same thing. Augustine did read and appreciate the Stoics and he might well have been borrowing from them at this point, for they taught a doctrine that is similar. They taught that there is a law of necessity by which the whole universe and everyone in it functions, and that even God is subject to it. It is possible, also, that in this doctrine Augustine was borrowing from the Gnostics, for they also taught a doctrine that was similar. They taught in general that all individuals are born either with a certain

divine spark of gnosis, knowledge, or that they are simply animal souls born without that knowledge. Some Gnostics believed that some people are "psychics," who can change their eternal destiny; but for the most part, the Gnostics believed that each of us is unconditionally predestinated to receive salvation or not to enjoy it.

Augustine might have needed to be able to read Greek better, for him to be influenced significantly by the Greek writings of the Gnostics. Yet some of his predestination teachings are so similar to theirs that there might have been an influence from them upon his view.' Augustine felt, of course, that he was teaching at this point what Scripture does.

Besides Augustine, Martin Luther taught sublapsarian predestination.

Luther was similar to Augustine in many ways, excepting his doctrines of the church and the Lord's Supper. This usual similarity included the matter of predestination. Luther even said that he did not know which eternal destiny he himself was predestinated to. He said it would undermine our being justified by faith if we could know, i.e. have knowledge of, our predestinated destiny.

Supralapsarianism is another predestination view. It is the view that Adam was not free in his sin, and that even his eternal destiny, along with everyone else's, was determined by God before Adam's creation and even before the creation of the world. This view might have been called prelapsarianism, even as sublapsarianism should have been called postlapsarianism. No one clearly taught supralapsarianism prior to Calvin, and it is not even certain that Calvin did. It seems, though, that his Agreement by the Genevese Pastors teaches sublapsarianism, whereas his magnum opus, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, might teach supralapsarianism. Not making it altogether clear whether Adam was free in the first sin, Calvin certainly teaches at least a sublapsarian view. He writes, "And so also infants themselves, as they bring their condemnation with them from their mother's womb, are exposed to punishment, not for another's sin but for their own."<sup>2</sup> Of reprobated infants Calvin says that ". . . even their whole nature is as it were a seed of sin, and cannot be otherwise than odious and abominable to God."<sup>3</sup>

Calvin's son-in-law, however, Theodore Beza (1519-1605), who taught so long at Calvin's school in Geneva and was one of James Arminius' professors, definitely taught supralapsarian unconditional predestination. Likewise, it was taught and promoted in Holland at Leyden University by Arminius' colleague there, Francis Gomarus (1563-1641). At the same time, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, some supralapsarians began to teach the view in a slightly changed form: modified supralapsarianism. Here, the view is modified so that there is no positive decree to reprobation; there is only a single decree, through which God elects some, in the whole human race, to be saved eternally-and those passed over go to eternal hell simply because that is their just desert since they sinned in a real way when Adam sinned (there being no positive decree through which God reprobates them). This was taught by some so as to be a bit more soft. Supralapsarians had been accused of reflecting on God's goodness by teaching the so-called double predestination, in which there is a positive decree to reprobate. Giving respect to such criticism, they thought it might better protect God's

goodness if they taught that there was no reprobating decree. The Belgic Confession was quoted, as human freedom was discussed, as pretty much teaching some sort of unconditional predestination, stating also that those not elected simply go to their own place without a reprobating decree. Yet no single significant theologian of those times taught modified supralapsarianism.

A fourth view of predestination is Arminius' conditional predestination. Arminius taught that God does predestinate each individual to an eternal destiny, but that it is based on God's foreknowledge of the individual's free response to or rejection of the gospel. This is sometimes called class predestination: that God predetermines that the whole class of those who freely believe are predestinated to go to heaven, and that it is predetermined that all those who, although given the help of prevenient grace, reject Christ, will go into eternal punishment.

After Calvin and others had made so much of God's decrees, Arminius taught decrees, but changed the order of them. In his Declaration of Sentiments,<sup>4</sup> delivered by him in 1608 before the governmental authorities at The Hague, he discusses predestination with care, seeking to gain permission that his kind of view might be promoted in the churches along with the other view of views. Whereas the supralapsarians taught that the first decree was to save and damn certain individuals and that a later decree was to create them, Arminius taught that God's first decree was to send Christ to redeem sinful people. He said that God's second decree was to receive into favor those who repent and believe. The third decree is that of prevenient grace: to help everyone to do this repenting and believing. The fourth decree, for Arminius, was to save and damn individuals according to God's foreknowledge of the way in which they would freely respond to His offer of grace.

It is interesting that Arminius felt that eternal decrees, which are of course never spoken of in Scripture (only God's plans and purposes are spoken of), should be a part of one's theological system. They probably are not properly part of an Arminian kind of theology. I once suggested this to H. Orton Wiley, and he said that Arminianism does indeed need decrees. Mildred Wynkoop, however, has suggested what I think is correct: that decrees are inappropriate for Arminianism.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Carl Bangs shows in his important study of Arminius<sup>6</sup> that, in a number of ways, Arminius tried to be as conciliating as possible to the Calvinists of his time since he ministered in a Reformed denomination. This might partly account for his use of decrees in his theology. Something else that might have figured in it was his very proximity to the Calvinists: perhaps he was so close to them that he did not have the perspective of distance that belongs to us now, and was not altogether weaned from the views he had earlier expounded.<sup>7</sup>

So Arminius taught that God has already predestinated some individuals to eternal bliss and others to eternal torment, but that it is based on His foreknowledge of their free response to the offer of grace. He taught conditional or class predestination; and he taught

individual predestination based on foreknowledge; and he taught decrees including his fourth.

### **Temporal Predestination**

The predestination teaching which I have of late come to think of as what is surely taught in Scripture, which seems to be altogether Arminian basically, is what might be called temporal predestination. By this I mean the understanding that predestination does not have to do with a pre decision of God regarding the eternal destiny of people, but that it has to do with temporal matters which God graciously decides for believers-only having to do with Christians.

The verb for "to predestinate," *proorizo*, occurs six times in the NT, and there is no counterpart word in the Hebrew OT. These instances are in Romans 8:29, 30; Ephesians 1:5,11; Acts 4:28; and 1 Corinthians 2:7. The KJV translates it as "predestinate" in only the first four of these instances; and as "determined before" and "ordained" respectively in the other two. The ASV has "to foreordain" in all six instances; the RSV changes this to "predestinated" in Romans 8:29, 30; the NASB has "predestined" in all six instances; and the NIV has "predestinated" in Romans 8:29 and Ephesians 1:5, 11, "decided beforehand in Acts 4:28, and "destined" in First Corinthians 2:7.

This means that the Greek word for "to predestinate" is relatively rare in Scripture. Yet there are numerous words with the prefix "pro" in them that have to do with God's or man's predecision to do something at a later time, and they at least relate to the idea of predestination or predetermination. Words having to do with prediction of later events, as in the case of Old Testament prophets, also somewhat relate to the idea of predestination. The preposition *pro* for "before" is used often in the New Testament to refer to what God did or promised or planned before the world was created (see John 17:5; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; Jude 25).<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to what has been understood by most Christians since Augustine's time, it seems to me that predestination in Scripture does not have to do with eternal destiny. All the various predestination theories, sublapsarianism, supralapsarianism, modified supralapsarianism, and Arminius' conditional predestination view, relate predestination to eternal destiny. Yet, in the six places in Scripture where the word is used, eternal destiny is not referred to. In none of the six has God predestinated anyone or any group of persons (believers, unbelievers) to eternal bliss or to eternal damnation.

Take the Romans 8:29, 30 instances of *proorizo*. There we read, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." Here, "predestined," is probably not used with reference to eternal destiny-although perhaps a better possible case could be made for such reference in v. 30, than can be made for such a reference in any of the other predestination passages. This passage states that "those God foreknew," meaning surely those He foreknew would believe, "he also predestined to be conformed

to the likeness of his Son." That is, He pre-determined that the ones who would believe would be conformed to Christ's likeness. Conformed, here, symorphous, is an adjective, from syn (with) and morphe (form)-and the morphe probably refers to the essence of something.<sup>9</sup> The likeness to Christ which the Father predestinates for believers is of course only an approximate one, the kind that relates to what is possible for us as humans with our erring finiteness. The point here, however, is that eternal destiny does not enter into the picture at all.

It is also to be noted that in the next verse the same kind of non-destiny meaning probably obtains. There, "those he predestined" (based on His foreknowledge according to the previous verse), he "called," and the ones He called He "justified," and the ones He justified He "glorified." Here, unlike what obtains in the previous verse, the writer does get around, finally, to a word that has to do with destiny: glorification. So it could conceivably be interpreted that the predestination has to do with destiny-and it does, finally. But the passage states that, having predestined or predetermined for believers, through His foreknowledge (v. 29), that they would freely believe, He called them and justified them-and, perhaps because of His foreknowledge of their continuing as believers, He "glorified them."<sup>10</sup> As mentioned, destiny does get referred to in this passage; but the reference is so much disjointed from what is itself said to be predestinated that this glorification destiny can hardly be said to be what is itself predestinated.

Arminius, and what might be called the authentic Arminians, taught God's foreknowledge of our acts-even as Calvinists always have. It is the Socinians, early, in Protestantism, and what might be called the inauthentic Arminians later (such as the Bostonian personalists), who have denied God's foreknowledge. Arminians and Calvinists have both taught it because Scripture surely does-here in Romans, e.g., and in the various Biblical predictions (especially when people fulfilled them without setting out to do so, as Judas did). So, in Romans 8:30, God foresees that individuals will believe; and in due time, He calls them to Himself in various ways as through preaching and by the Spirit's summons. And as they respond favorably to this call, He justifies them. Then, still based on His foreknowledge (see v. 29) that individuals will keep believing, He glorifies them. Here Paul enlists a number of his grand theological concepts, in a sweeping statement of predestination.

That this is probably not an Augustinian-Calvinistic teaching of the predestination of some, the elect for whom Christ died, to glorification, is shown by other teachings in this very chapter of Romans and in other Pauline writings. As Paul opens up what we have marked as chapter 8, he states that the ones who have "no condemnation" are the ones among us who are "in Christ." He goes on in vv. 3-4 to say that we who are "in Christ" are not simply predestinated whether or not, but that God has "condemned sin" in himself and in us, "in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit." And, that believers are not predestinated in the sense of eternal security, is shown by what he asks late in the chapter, after making the two references to predestination in vv. 29, 30. He asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ" (v. 33). "Trouble" won't, nor

"hardship," nor "persecution." Nothing will. It is to be noted, though, that these things will not be able to separate us from Christ's "love." A person might in persecution or whatever, fall from saving grace as Simon Magus did (Acts 8:9-24); but even if one does fall from regenerating grace, he or she is not separated from Christ's love. Christ still loves even the apostate person who crucifies Christ freshly by rejecting Christ (see Heb. 6:4-6).

The two instances of cognates of *proorizo* in Ephesians 1:5, 11 (*proorisas*, v. 5 and *prooristhentes*, v. 11) are similar to the two predestination words in Romans 8:29, 30: they do not relate to eternal destiny. In Ephesians we have one of the Bible's richest areas of predestination teaching. While only two actual words for predestination appear in the epistle, the idea of God's having made certain pre-decisions is prominent. Paul first states that he is an apostle "by the will of God" (v. 1), which reminds us that he said elsewhere that God "set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, . . . (Gal. 1:15).

Then he says in 1:4 that "he chose us in him before the creation [foundation NASB] of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." Thus, before creating the world, God decided that the ones who would freely believe would be chosen, and that they would be "holy" and "blameless." Nothing is here said that has to do with our eternal destiny. Paul goes on to a stronger word than "chosen." He says in v. 5 that what God "predestined," or predetermined, was that we would be "adopted as sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the pleasure of his will...." And in v. 11 he says, "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory."

Several things are to be noted here. In v. 5 the predestination is not to heaven or hell, but "to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ." That is, God pre-determined that those who would believe-the believing being mentioned in v. 13-would be adopted as His children. In v. 11, the predestination is again not to destiny, but "in order that we . . . might be for the praise of his glory." The "we" here is probably a reference to Paul himself, for his next words seem, in distinction, to refer to his readers, as he says, "And you also were included in Christ." Again it is to be noted that they were not included willy nilly according to an unconditional election. Paul says, "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you . . ." (v. 13). They were included in actual fact after they "heard the word of truth" and after they had "believed."

The other two of the six New Testament Greek "to predestinate" passages need to be considered. The Acts 4:28 one reads in the NIV, "They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." This is similar to the KJV in not rendering as "predestinate." The ASV (RV) has "to foreordain" here as in all the six "to predestinate" (*proorizo*) passages. The RSV renders "to predestinate."

The instance of a cognate of *proorizo*, "to predestinate," here, *proorisen*, does not have to do with a predestination to one or the other of the two eternal destinies. Peter and John

had been released by the authorities, and when they had gone "to their own people" (v. 23), these believers praised God that "they," the authorities, "did what" God's "power and will decided before hand should happen." The predestination therefore had to do with God's pre-decision, based on His foreknowledge, that the apostles would go forth freely, being permitted to do so by the authorities. Nothing whatever is said or implied that has to do with eternal destiny.

In the First Corinthians 2:7 passage, where the same form of the predestination word appears, *proorisen*, the NIV reads, "Now we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began." The KJV here has "decrees" as does the RSV but the NASB renders "predestined." Again, it does not relate to either of the eternal destinies. Paul is simply saying that he and others "speak a word of wisdom among the mature [perfect ones]" (v. 6), "that has been hidden"-which word "God destined," or predestined, "for our glory before time began" (v. 7). The passage shows that God planned to offer the gospel even before He created man, as Arminius taught, in what he called God's first decree which was to send Christ. It implies God's foreknowledge that we humans would sin and would need redemption. It has nothing to do with a predecision to give heaven to some individuals and hell others.

Besides these six instances of cognates of *proorizo* in the New Testament (there being no counterpart Hebrew Old Testament word), there are as mentioned earlier, numerous Hebrew and Greek Bible words with the prefix "pro" in them and that relate to what either God or humans decide ahead of time to do.<sup>11</sup> Yet not one of them that I have checked indicates that God predecides individual destiny.

Further, what is here being called temporal predestination does not have to do with decrees of destiny, or with what are often called unalterable decrees of destiny-Arminius and Wiley notwithstanding. While Scripture speaks frequently of "decrees" and "edicts" of "a king or a ruling body," and of their being unalterable as in the case of those of the Medes and Persians (cf. Ezr. 6:11; Est. 8:8f; Dan. 6:8)<sup>12</sup>-it only rarely speaks of God making decrees of any kind. And when it does, they are not decrees as to eternal destiny. They simply have to do with His rulings. Thus we read, "Then the Lord made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them" (Ex. 15:25). Here God's decree is simply a law such as kings often made. Thus we read that a decree is the same as a covenant:

He remembers his covenant forever

the word he commanded, for a thousand generations,

the covenant he made with Abraham,

the oath he swore to Isaac.

He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree (1 Chron. 15:15-18).

In another rare instance of a decree as related to God, it again is simply a ruling of His. We read, "Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them" (Rom. 1:32). Here the ruling is not an arbitrary, inscrutable, and mysterious one, through which destiny is decided without regard to the individual's actions. It regards "those who do such things" as are referred to in the list of sins just mentioned in vv. 29-31. God decrees a "disaster" (1 Ki. 22:23; 2 Ch. 18:22; Jer. 40:2), a famine (2 Ki. 8:1), and other such matters, but the decrees are simply His rulings, or His agreements; and they usually announce what will happen on earth according to whether the people are obedient or disobedient.

So predestination, according to what I seem to be finding lately, does not have to do with eternal destiny; and the few Biblical references to God's decrees do not refer to destiny either. Both predestination and the decrees (and the various other pre-decisions on God's part) have to do with this present life.

So predestination, according to Scripture, does not have to do with eternal destiny, but with temporal matters. Also, even God's pre-decisions, where cognates of *proorizo* do not appear, do not have to do with such destiny—nor do God's decrees.

These understandings which I have come to recently are only espoused tentatively at the present time. I am so respecting of the church in its long-standing theological debates that I am slow to conclude that the various views of theologians on predestination, for many centuries, were all incorrect. But this is the way I find myself viewing this matter at the present time, as I am open to be taught differently by the interpretations of my sister and brother peers who might take pen in hand, as in the Wesleyan Theological Journal, to point out to me my errors.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>See U. Grant Browning, "The Influence of Greek Thought Upon Christian Theology Through the Medium of Gnosticism," B. D. thesis, Nazarene Theological Seminary, 1957, pp. 133-137.

<sup>2</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 8th ed. trans. John Allen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), I, 1, 8.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, I, 1, 8.

<sup>4</sup>See James Arminius, "Declaration of Sentiments," *The Works of James Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956).

<sup>5</sup>Mildred Wynkoop, *Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1967), pp. 101-105.

<sup>6</sup>Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971).

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 71, 350-355.

<sup>8</sup>The NIV is being used unless otherwise noted.

<sup>9</sup>See Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament, Vol. 3, Romans*, (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press, 1974), p. 166.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, p. 167.

<sup>11</sup>A study of many of these is contained in I. Howard Marshall, "Predestination in the New Testament" in *Grace Unlimited* ed. Clark Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), pp. 127ff. (see also David J. A. Clines, "Predestination in the Old Testament" therein).

<sup>12</sup>See article "Decree," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979). I. 909