

# Predestination

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**OBJECTIVE:** Can God foreknow what will happen in our lives without what happens in our lives not be predestined by Him to happen? This is a question that has confounded for centuries those who believe in the God who knows the future. To the atheist, this question seems to be a contradiction in believing in an all-knowing (omniscient) God in whom Christians believe. How can God ever foreknow what will happen if He has not predestined that such should happen? So with our finite human reasoning, we must delve into what is supposedly a contradiction in the realm of supposed Bible teaching that has confused theologians and atheists for centuries.

## Chapter 1

### » God Knows Everything «

It is true that God is foreknowing. He knows what is going to happen in the future. He foreknows the happening of all events before they happen. But does God individually predestine events to happen because He knows that they will happen? At least, we suppose that He does not **because we would have no free-will if He predestined events to happen against our will.**

Since He foreknows the happening of events in the future, however, does not mean that He of necessity

predestines what will happen. **His foreknowledge does not preclude predestination.**

Our human thinking struggles with this reality of the foreknowledge of God. How can there be any theological or philosophical harmony between the concepts of free-moral agency and God's foreknowledge? It is difficult from a human perspective to consider something as this in our understanding of God. What kind of God is this that can foreknow without individually predestining? How can He foreknow without predestining, and thus, violate our free-will choices?

**The atheist has always argued with the believer that if your God can foreknow all things, but at the same time not destined those things to happen, then the believe is promoting a contradiction, and thus, the believer's God does not exist.**

In order to answer the questions the atheist proposes, we must go back a few years in order to understand God's foreknowledge of the years to come. God was a billion earth years ago in eternity with foreknowledge of our obedience to a gospel that had not yet become a historical event at the time He foreknew we would obey. Foreknowledge would assume that He knew everyone who would obey the gospel. Before the creation, God saw the cross of Jesus because it was in His eternal plan to bring into eternity through the cross those whom He would create after His own image. In the midst of eternity, He planned that He would interrupt existence with the creation of the world. Time would become a part of eternity by the creation of that which would produce history. In other words, time did not exist until this world was created. Time was started only at the time of the words, *"Let there be ...."*

In creation, God whispered into existence **the best of all possible environments that would be the dwelling place for free-moral people.** This set the stage for the gospel of Jesus' incarnational death on the cross for our sins and His resurrection

for our hope. The occasion was then presented to us for a response to the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection.

So here we are, only specks in eternity and the universe, confined to a history-making world that is destined to return to that out of which it was created—nothing. God knew that by the time our individual specks of existence streaked across the history of this world, the cross and empty tomb would have already blinked into history with eternal consequences. Though a brief earthly happening in an eternal plan, the impact of the cross on the obedient believer would have eternal consequences. We have obeyed; **God knew that we would.** But did He predestine that we should respond to the cross through obedience to the gospel? **And if He supposedly predestined us to obey the gospel, then are we truly free-moral people with the power to choose?** Or, are we simply cosmic robots created by a playful deity who is engaged in some diabolical chess game with His created puppets?

**It is difficult from our human perspective to understand how God can know that one will obey the gospel, and yet, not predestine that individual to obey.**

Jesus was crucified before the creation of the world (See Rv 13:8). God had orchestrated His own plan of redemption before the existence of history and time and us. He planned before the existence of the world that we would be destined as members of the body of Christ for eternal existence with Him. His action was foreknown and predestined because He foreplanned the happening of the cross and the existence of the body of Christ. It all happened according to plan.

But how could God in His omniscience foreknow our response to the plan without predestining our response? We presume He knew that we would obey the gospel. After all, does not omniscience mean all-knowing? But now postulations confound us. The purpose of the plan was to lift us from the

confines of a temporary historical existence to an eternal cohabitation with Deity. In other words, **there would have been no creation of the world and us without this purpose being in the mind of God.**

**The only real purpose for our brief earthly existence was to mold us into that which is suitable for cohabitation with God in eternity.**

If we believe that our obedience to the gospel was foreknown, then we wonder why God made all the plans for our salvation? Why all the pain and suffering in an environment that seems to always go wrong? Now we are thinking as humans. We have identified ourselves as the finite beings we are because we do not always understand the workings of God. In fact, we have discovered through the logic of our thinking that if God could not foresee our sin, **then we have denied the need for the incarnation of the One who would deliver us from sin.**

Nevertheless, we wonder why God would create an environment that would involve pain on our part when all He wanted in the first place was eternal cohabitants in heaven. Could He not simply have created us the way we should be, and then go on with eternal heaven without all the pain and suffering of this world? This is a question every Christian must answer. In answering it, we can better understand the purpose for our existence in this world. We can better understand the purpose for evil and suffering in our existence here on earth.

**God knew that the obedient were destined to eternal cohabitation with Him.** Since this was known even before the creation of our environment (the world), then does this not connect the prefix “pre” to our individual destiny, and thus, we are individually **predestined**? If this is true, then our free-moral choice is canceled. If we are predestined to be saved, then where is our choice? We must never forget that any teaching concerning individual predestination violates the very nature of humanity, that we are all free-moral people with the right to choose.

**If God determined before the creation of the world that we would obey the gospel, then certainly we would have no choice in making a decision concerning the cross of Jesus.**

Somehow, it is difficult for a mind that is confined to time to understand the consistency between concepts as foreknowledge, predestination and free-moral agency.

So we wonder for a moment. **For God to be truly omniscient, then our eternality in heaven, that is based on our obedience to the gospel events, was in His knowledge before any word of creation was spoken.** But how could He know such without destroying our freedom to choose? After all, there will be another reality for those who have not fallen at the foot of the cross—hell. Could the one who refused to respond to the cross lift up his or her head in the destruction of hell and accuse God of being unjust, unfair, . . . **fiendish**? After all, if God foreknew our eternal glory, He also foreknew the destruction of the ones who would not respond to the cross. Therefore, does God's foreknowledge of the condemned preclude that He destined them to be lost? This would make God fiendish.

**God's justice is affirmed by our free-moral choice.** Because we can make choices, God can stand just in the condemnation of the disobedient to hell. He can remain a just God because it was on the basis of choice that the condemned chose not to obey. But how can God foreknow the destiny of every individual without having predestined the destiny of either the saved or the lost? If He foreknows destinies, then what is the use of making any effort to obey? Can freedom of choice have any part in the eternal omniscience of a Being who is not confined to time and history?

We must reason together for a moment. In order for God to be a just God, **we must be truly free-moral people who live in an environment wherein choices can be made.** This presupposes

that an environment must be created that is the perfect dwelling place for choice making. Free-moral ability also presupposes that we have the mental capacity and ability to choose. There can be no preprogramming. There can be no fixing of the tapes or virus in the program. We must be totally responsible for our behavior and accountable for our reactions to divine law.

**True free-moral agency in an environment that allows choices to be made reaffirms the justice of God in the condemnation of the disobedient.**

If our interaction with one another or God during our brief period of testing in time is negative, **none of us can lift up our head in destruction and accuse God for our condemnation.** Because of our free-moral ability to choose, **we are responsible for our own destiny.** But does this not contradict the supposed predestination on the part of God? Why does the responsibility shift from God to us in this humanly supposed contradiction between the existence of God's foreknowledge and our own free-moral choice? Or, is there a contradiction?

Here is the solution to this supposed contradiction. Before the foundation of the world, God planned, and thus foreknew, the community of believers He would deliver from mortality into immortality. **His plan was that His people be those who would respond with faith to the predestined cross.** This community of believers would be/are predestined to eternal cohabitation with God in eternity.

However, **individuals must make a free-moral decision to become a part of the predestined group, the church.**

Since the group (the church) was predestined before the creation of the world to be accepted into eternal dwelling, then those who free-morally chose to become a part of the group are thus inherently destined to heaven. However, **one must make a free-moral decision to become a part of the group before he or she can be destined with the group.**

But does this mean that one is predestined to become a part (member) of the church? Where does free-moral choice fit into this predestination? Where is choice in reference to being predestined as a member of the body? Can we really make free-moral choices to become a part of the church if God foreknows that we will obey the gospel?

The answer is not as complicated as one might first have supposed. We are given a choice concerning the cross. Even before the cross, there was the possibility of faith. We have the freedom to choose concerning our new birth into the community of the predestined. If our response to the gospel is positive, **then we become a member of a predestined body that has been purchased by the sacrificial blood of the incarnate Son of God.** Our positive choice to His gift of redemption places us in the company of all those who are headed for heaven; those who, throughout history, who have likewise responded to God with faith. **We are thus predestined as a part of the body because the body is predestined.**

**We are not individually predestined to become a part of the predestined body, though God foreknew that we would become a part of the predestined body through our free-moral choice of faith to obey the gospel.**

But one might still question how God can do this. Did He not know that our responses to the gospel would be positive? Did His foreknowledge of our obedience, therefore, not preclude the predestination of our obedience? Have we not simply moved predestination back from final judgment to initial obedience? If one is predestined to heaven as a part of the predestined church, then why cannot one be individually predestined to become a part of the predestined church?

The critic may have a point in this matter. However, his point is from a human perspective. After all—we speak with human reasoning—if God foreknew our obedience to the gospel, then was not our obedience predestined? And if predestined, then we have

exercised no free-moral choice. God will still be responsible for our demise in eternal destruction if such be our destiny. He will be responsible because He created us while knowing that we would be destined for eternal destruction. This belief makes God fiendish.

What we continue to wonder and postulate is if there is any consistency between foreknowledge and free will without God having individually predestined us to either heaven or hell. Can foreknowledge and free will exist without a logical contradiction? Can God foreknow our obedience or disobedience without having predestined either? If He thus foreknows our individual obedience, then is there room for free will?

Admittedly, these contemplations confuse those who are limited to time and history. And we all are so limited. If we understood all, then we would be God. Therefore, **on this subject we must allow God to be God**. Must we understand all that He is or all that He understands in order to affirm that His existence is not a logical contradiction? Certainly not. If we presumed we should know everything about God before we believe in God, then we are seeking to elevate ourselves to be as God. What we are actually doing is bringing God down to god, and again, creating a god after our own imaginations, or better, our own finite ability to understand. We are wanting a god we can comprehend, one we can figure out, and thus, compute his workings. You can have such a god.

As for us, however, we will take the One we have difficulty trying to calculate with our finite mentality. We will take this God because we understand that we will never be able to figure out the one true God who is higher than our greatest thoughts.

Therefore, we will settle for our own understandings of what the Infinite has revealed to us through His word of revelation. He planned before the creation of the world that His community, the church, would dwell with Him in eternity. Thus, the church is predestined to eternal glory.



**All those who individually choose to become a part of this predestined group are thus predestined to eternal glory as a member of the body.**

In this way God can foreknow our destiny. His justice will stand in reference to those He has foreknown who will obey the gospel because they made individual choices to become a part of the predestined church.

We must think of this from God's perspective in eternity before the creation of this environment. God foreknew our choice before we existed in order to choose. From our human perspective this may sound like preprogramming. But remember, we are not God. **He can foreknow without us being preprogrammed.** Simply because we do not understand this, does not mean that it is not true from God's perspective.

Some have simply ignored the issue by saying that **God chose not to foreknow.** It is believed by some that in order to spare us of our frustrations concerning this humanly determined logical contradiction, God simply said to us that He really never knew in the first place. If the condemned in eternity so accuse Him, He can respond by saying to them, "I never knew."

But this seems to be a convenient theology of gymnastics to escape from our frustrations to understand the omniscience of God. So we ask the question, **Would not God have to foreknow first that which He would decide not to know?** If so, then we are back to where we started.

Simply because we cannot sort through our finite thinking and understanding of God's foreknowledge without presupposing individual predestination, we must not frustrate ourselves, and thus accuse God of "willful ignorance." After all, if He has chosen to willingly not know our destiny, **then He is not omniscient.** So why would God choose not to know simply because we cannot understand His foreknowledge? Are we again trying to create a god

we can understand, one that chooses ignorance in order to accommodate our inability to comprehend that which pertains to Deity?

So we have not figured it all out. The fact that we are writing on the subject with a host of others who have written on the same subject is evidence that there are no final answers, and no declarative statements of revelation to bring answers to all our questions. But this is again proof that we are on the right road. We believe in a God whose ways are beyond our finding out.

**We believe in a God whose ways continually challenge us to wonder and postulate; One that makes us continually realize that we are still human.**

## Chapter 2

### » Biblical Predestination «

Man is still a free-moral being. This means that he must take ownership for his own behavior. This also means that he will be responsible for the results of his behavior at the final judgment. Since this is true, therefore, we cannot be individually predestined to either heaven or hell. Nevertheless, the Bible does discuss the subject of predestination. However, it is in the context of the free-moral choice of people that the biblical teaching of predestination must be understood.

Herein is a discussion of the foreknowledge of God and the predestination of the church in reference to eternal destinies. In order to understand what the Bible teaches on these subjects, it is best to state first some of the misconceptions that are taught concerning the election and predestination of the saints. These misconceptions motivate us to investigate the subject, for we live in a world that is greatly affected by misinterpretations concerning predestination.

Some have misunderstood the Bible subjects of election and predestination in the sense that they affirm that the Bible teaches that one

is **unconditionally** elected and **individually** predestined. These two beliefs are linked. Those who promote such teachings affirm that **before we were born**, God individually chose, or elected, those who would be saved. The salvation of those who were unconditionally elected would be without any conditions on their part. In other words, they would need do nothing in order to be chosen since their election took place before they were born.

This teaching assumes that one was elected to eternal life without any free-moral choice. His or her obedience was predetermined by God before creation. Because of this unconditional election, individuals are automatically predestined to eternal life. In other words, we are to be saved because God personally and individually chose us to be saved before our birth. Salvation does not depend on our individual choice, but on God's individual election.

The logical conclusion to the doctrine of unconditional election of individuals is unconditional predestination to eternal life. Those who believe in unconditional election and predestination must and do believe that those who are not predestined to eternal life are thus predestined to destruction in hell. It is only logical to conclude that if one is not elected to life, then he or she is elected to destruction. Since God has already made the elections, there is nothing one can do to change his or her destiny.

This foreordination teaching has also been expanded by some to include the material world. In other words, before the world was created, God set in order of occurrence the events of all humanity. Everything has been unchangeably set in order and left to fate. Nothing can be changed from its predestined occurrence. What happens in the physical world in relation to our lives happens because God foreordained that it should happen. As citizens of the world, we are left to the predetermined occurrence of all things. We are thus destined to either calamity or good fortune.

The teachings of individual foreordination and

predestination of man and events **necessitates the belief that no saved person can fall from grace.** Such teachings also **assume that no unsaved person can possibly be saved.** No natural catastrophe can be avoided by the prayers of the saints. Everything has been predetermined by God and is set in order for occurrence throughout history.

The Scriptures do not teach the above doctrines that lead one to a fatalistic view of life. Fatalism is the disposition that since one can do nothing about what is going to happen, then he or she must simply resign to live a life without any concern for what happens. If one has no choice concerning his or her life and destiny, why offer any prayers?

Though this teaching may appeal to some, **the Bible teaches that the prayers of the righteous do accomplish much.** There are some vital teachings in the Bible that give hope for a better future. **Through prayer things can change.** We are not relegated to a world of hopelessness. We are not condemned to a fate over which we have no power to change through prayer.

Some very important concepts in the Bible deal with the teachings of election and predestination of the church. Before the creation of the world, God elected and predestined the church as a group for eternal life.

**Before the creation of the world, He established a universal plan of redemption through Jesus for individuals to free-morally choose to obey the gospel in order that they be elected out of the world at the final judgment.**

This plan of salvation is true simply because we are free-moral individuals. Since we are free-moral and able to make choices, God's plan of salvation is applicable to all people. Every person on earth has a right to become a part of the group (the church) that God has chosen for eternity.

When considering the events of history, we must

not view God as helpless, nor our prayers as futile. **God can change history in response to our prayers.** He does work for the benefit of the saints.

God's true character contradicts the false teaching concerning the individual predestination of the wicked to hell. **God is a God who does not wish that any perish** (See 2 Pt 3:9). This very desire means that anyone can be saved if they so choose to respond to the gospel of God's grace. However, this salvation is conditioned on the obedience of individuals to respond to the gospel. God's appeal to the lost is evidence that His nature is one of benevolence, not revenge. We do not serve a fiendish God.

**Before the creation of the world, God predestined the church as a group for eternal life.**

We must constantly keep in mind the above important point as we study through this subject. The Bible does teach predestination. But it is **the group of the saved** that has been predestined, and thus, will be elected and called out of this world for eternal heaven.

### **A. The Chosen & Elected Church**

The church was chosen and elected for eternal dwelling before creation. Before the creation, God foreordained (unchangeable predestination) that He would eternally save the church. Therefore, He unchangeably predestined the church to eternal salvation.

**All individuals who would respond to the gospel and become a member of the church would be predestined as a part of the church to eternal salvation.**

Individuals are predestined to eternal heaven only insofar as they continue as faithful members of the predestined group, the church.

One becomes elected (chosen) to eternal life by his or her positive response to the gospel. We are first called by the gospel into the fellowship of the

chosen (See 2 Th 2:14). Once one is obedient to the call of the gospel, he or she is predestined to eternal life as a member of the church. **When we obey the gospel, therefore, we become a part of the group that will be eventually called (chosen, elected) out of the world for eternal dwelling in heaven.** Each person must thus make an individual choice to become a part of the group that God will, as a group, choose out of the world for eternal salvation.

In order to understand the terms “elect,” “chosen,” and “called,” we must view God’s work from an eternal standpoint with time and history as only a brief blink in His eternal plan. Of course, it is impossible to understand how God can so view time. Nevertheless, we must give it a good try.

Before creation (the foundation of the world), **God foreplanned, and thus, foreknew the eternal destiny of the church.** He would save His people. Therefore, **He “foreplaced” Himself in final judgment, looking back to all the inhabitants of the world, and then selected those who would dwell in heaven.** He would select those who in history would respond by faith to His grace.

In this way, He could foreknow before creation those He would elect in final judgment. He would **choose** them out of the world of sinners for heavenly dwelling. Therefore, the church from this viewpoint of God is the “elect,” “called,” and “chosen.” In the end, the church will be **elected** out of the world, **chosen** for eternal dwelling and **called** into heaven. As we read of the called, elected and chosen in the New Testament, we understand from such terms that which God will do at the final judgment, not what He is individually doing to individuals in the present in relation to obedience to the gospel and becoming members of the church. Neither should we understand such terms from the viewpoint of God individually choosing and electing people before the creation.

Some theologians during the European Protestant Reformation Movement had a limited view of God’s

work in eternity. They thus viewed the terms “called,” “elect” and “chosen” in reference to people being individually predestined to be saved and brought into the church. They believed that God did this before the creation. However, the New Testament teaches that because God foreknew His work in judgment, **He could refer to members of the church as the “called, “elect” and “chosen” out of the world in final judgment.**

Because God knew before creation that the members of the body of Christ would be called, elected and chosen for eternal life at the final judgment, the members would in the present be predestined to heaven. They are thus called, elected and chosen in prospect of being such when Jesus comes again.

Some of the Reformation leaders wrongly assumed that God individually predestined people to be saved, and thus, elected and individually called people into the church. The truth is that because God foreknew the eventual eternal salvation of all those in the church, **the church group would be elected out of the world, called into heaven and chosen for eternity.** The church group is now called, chosen and elected because the church will be called, chosen and elected for eternal dwelling at the final judgment.

In reference to our existence and confinement to time, these terms are often difficult to understand. However, we must understand them from God’s perspective in reference to eternal heaven, not our existence in time. Therefore, we are the present elect because we will be elected in final judgment for eternal dwelling because of our obedience to the gospel. We are the chosen because we will be chosen out of the world when Jesus comes again. We are thus the “called,” not only because we have been called into the predestined group by the gospel, but there will be another calling at the end of time when God will call all the saints home.

This sheds light on the meaning of what Paul

wrote in **2 Thessalonians 2:14**. Paul wrote, *“To which He called you by our gospel for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* “You” in this passage refers to the Thessalonians in general, **not specifically to individuals**. Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonica. Many responded. As a group, therefore, the Thessalonians were called into obtaining the glory of Jesus.

We must not simply look at this calling in a present context, but in an eternal context in the sense that Christians have been called into eternal life that they now have in Christ (See 1 Jn 5:11). In other words, **God is presently calling people into heaven through the gospel**. God sees the calling through final judgment, though we can see it only from the perspective of time when one obeys the gospel by immersion. Our understanding of the calling, therefore, is truly “short sighted.” Nevertheless, we must view one’s obedience to the gospel from an eternal perspective, not simply as a time-oriented event.

## B. The Foreknown & Predestined

**God foreknew and predestined the saved.** Paul wrote,

*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. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified* (Rm 8:29,30).

We must ask if Paul was saying in the preceding text that God first chose those who would be justified, and then, predestined them to eternal life? Was such done without the free-moral choice of the individual? In order to answer these questions, consider the following:

### 1. Foreknowledge and predestination

**God’s foreknowledge does not presuppose**



**unchangeable predestination.** We must not think that because God foreknows something, He automatically and unchangeably predestines that which He foreknows. God can know the occurrence of all events of history without having destined those events to happen. We might ask, “How can He do this?” From the standpoint of being a human, it is not an easy concept to understand. But we must remember that we cannot confine God’s ability to the limits of our imagination. He is a God who is greater than our thinking.

In order to understand—or at least begin to understand—consider this from another perspective. A man knows what has happened in the past, but this knowledge did not cause those events to have happened. **Now God knows what is in the future, but this knowledge does not cause those things to happen.**

This is may be a weak illustration. But we must keep in mind the fact that God knows the future of all events. We cannot understand this. But the fact that He does know all future events **does not necessitate predestination of that which He knows.**

It is easy to see that we have moved beyond our ability to fully understand this principle. Therefore, we must remind ourselves that we are not God. We cannot understand all that is within the omniscience of God. However, this does not mean that God cannot foreknow the future without having predestined it.

**We cannot allow our inability to understand to limit God’s ability to foreknow without predestining. If we say He cannot foreknow without individually predestining, then we are attempting to bring God’s being and work down to our level of understanding.**

If we do the preceding, then God is no longer God, but a god we have limited to our minds. And any god we conceive in our minds can be manipulated to do whatever we so choose. This god is thus not worth believing.

Consider another illustration. Suppose all history

of the world were recorded as a video. And suppose that the operator of the recording device is as God who can run the video forward to see what is in the future. The operator can also reverse the video to see the past. He can change the future because of things that happened in the past. He can replay the video as many times as possible. He can review the prayers of the saints in order to edit the future. He can, of His own will, edit the future because of an individual's obedient actions at any one time in the video.

Does this seem hard to believe? Possibly so. However, keep in mind that we are struggling to comprehend something that is beyond our complete understanding. God is in control of the video device. He can push the edit button to change the future because of prayers and events that happen in the present and in the past.

God also sees history as we would view a photograph. We see a photograph that is a picture of a split second of time. We see it in an instant of time. All of history that occurred in the split second of time the photograph was taken is there before us to review. We can sit and ponder the photograph for hours, making decisions concerning its content. God could possibly see history from such a perspective. He sees history in an instant simply because He is omniscient. He knows all history, and thus, views the video of history as we would view the photograph. But His knowledge does not presuppose that all history is set and cannot be changed. He can change the future in response to the prayers of the saints and an individual's response to the cross. God responds to our prayers on behalf of the cross.

Because we have come to God through the cross, we have both the cleansing of our sins and the privilege of approaching the Father through prayer in the name of Jesus. Therefore, God views all history, and especially His children, through the cross of Jesus.

God sees the history of mankind **through the**

**cross** (See Rm 3:25; Hb 9:15). This one event in history changed the destiny of thousands in the future. It solved the sin problem of thousands of faithful people of God in the past. **God will change the eternal destiny of any individual who responds in a positive way to the cross of Jesus.** Before the foundation of the world, He could know our obedience in response to the cross without predestining such to happen. The cross was predestined. However, those who were to respond to the cross in obedience to the gospel were not predestined. The cross of Jesus simply became the occasion for men and women to make a choice concerning their salvation.

If God had already individually predestined the elect to be saved, then we would wonder why there would be the cross. **Why would Jesus need to empty Himself for those who were going to be saved anyway?** Did God simply put on a stage show in order to amuse those who were going to heaven anyway because He had already elected them to salvation? But we must also ask, Why the cross, if God could foreknow the individual obedience of those who would respond to the cross? Now we are getting to the point.

**God could know our free-moral obedience to the cross without having predestined such to occur. Simply because He can foreknow free-moral choices on the part of man does not necessitate that those choices be predestined to happen. If they were predestined to happen, then there would have been no free-moral choice on the part of the individual.**

But how could God foreknow our individual choice to respond to the cross without having predestined such to happen? This is the point with which we must deal. But we should never come to any conclusion that the cross was only an exhibition of the love of God.

## **2. God desires that all people be saved.**

Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:9, *"The Lord is not slack*

*concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Pt 3:9).

It is God’s desire that all should obey the gospel. This is in the meaning of what Jesus said in Matthew 22:14: *“For many are called, but few chosen”* (See Mt 19:30; Mk 10:31; Lk 13:30). Regardless of the desires and universal call of God, not all have responded to the gospel call. Nevertheless, the many who do respond are “called” by the gospel. Many are given an opportunity, but not all accept the gospel of God’s grace.

Paul wrote,

*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. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified* (Rm 8:29,30).

Paul said in Romans 8:29,30 that God destined that every member of the church should conform to the image of Jesus. However, God has allowed people the choice of responding to His call through the gospel in order to conform to the image of His Son.

Most people, unfortunately, do not respond to the call of the gospel. As a result, the unresponsive are not justified by the cross. It was God’s predestined plan that the saved would be those who conform to the image of the Son. However, He has allowed each person to choose whether he or she will conform to the image of Jesus.

In the context of **Romans 8:29,30**, the word “called” first refers to those who have answered the immediate call of the gospel to come out of the world (See 2 Th 2:14). The church is composed of those who have responded to the call of the gospel. Therefore, they are the called. However, the called by the gospel are actually also being called into heaven. They will be so called because the church

will be called out of the world into the eternal dwelling of heaven at the final judgment.

Paul is emphasizing an important biblical truth in **Romans 8:29,30**. God can and did foreknow those who would obey the call of the gospel. All who did obey, would voluntarily conform to the image of Jesus, for one cannot become a Christian unless one crucifies himself or herself (See Rm 6:6). It is then as Paul says, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”* (Gl 2:20). Those who accept the call, are justified by the blood of Jesus (See 1 Co 6:11). They willingly conform to what Jesus requires of them.

Here are the important points of Romans 8:29,30 to remember:

1. Romans 8:29,30 is not talking about God predestining people **to** obey Him. It is discussing the predestination of those who **do** obey Him.
2. Those who remain obedient will be eternally saved.
3. The order of God's actions necessitates foreknowledge before foreordination.
  - a. God foreknew the obedient.
  - b. God, therefore, foreordained that the obedient would conform to the image of His Son when they bring their lives into submission to His will.
  - c. **The predestination of the obedient, therefore, began after they were obedient to the calling.** They were first called by the gospel, and then, predestined.

Before God created the world, He planned that men and women should conform to the image of His Son. Those who did conform, would become a part of the group of people called the church. They would conform to the image of Jesus because they would become the disciples of Jesus. This group of disciples would thus be destined to eternal salvation. Because God foreplanned this did not mean that He predestined people to become members of the church. One must free-morally choose to respond to the gospel. Therefore, God cannot be held accountable for the negative response of all those

who do not become a part of the predestined group called the church.

The important point to remember is that if God has individually called and predestined people for whom He has shown respect, then we run into all sorts of contradictions in the Bible. We may not be able to answer all the questions. And certainly, we do not know all the answers when discussing the omniscience of God. However, we do know that an interpretation is wrong if it forces us into contradictions with clearly stated truths in the Scriptures.

We may not know all the answers, but we will not allow wrong answers to drive us to senseless contradictions. The Bible does not contradict itself. It is people who contradict themselves in their efforts to twist the Scriptures to conform to their own lifestyles or religions that they have created after their own desires. If a particular theology has become the identity of the heritage of a particular religion, then it is difficult for some who are associated with that religion to deal with the contradictions that lie within their theology.

### Chapter 3

#### » Predestined Through The Church «

We come now to the importance of the church, keeping in mind that the word “church” refers to the people of God, not some organized system of governance. **The church is the called out assembly of people who have free-morally made a decision to respond to the gospel.** In response to the gospel, the church has submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus. It is the church that God has already foreplanned He will elect or choose out the world for eternal dwelling. He can do this because He foreknows. Therefore, the church is the chosen.

The members of the church are the elect who have been predestined unto eternal life. If one chooses to become a member of the church, then he or she as a

member will be destined for heaven. Therefore, **one must individually choose to become a member of the chosen in order to be destined to heaven.**

**Ephesians 1:3-14** is a very important statement of Holy Scripture concerning the foreknowledge and predestination of God. Paul affirmed that ...

*He [God] **chose us in Him before the foundation [creation] of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having **predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ ... in whom 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****** (Ep 1:4,5,11).*

It is important to understand a principle here that Paul was emphasizing in the context of Ephesians 1. He began in verse 3 by stating that all spiritual blessings are **in Christ**. The metaphor “in Christ” refers to **relationship**. Being “in Christ” is a covenant relationship that is established between the obedient and God through the mediatorship of Jesus. In one’s established relationship with Christ, God applies all spiritual blessings in reference to one’s salvation. Now follow the term “in Christ” (“in whom”) throughout the context of verses 3-14.

### **“IN CHRIST”**

1. We are **chosen** “in Him” (vs 4).
2. We are made **accepted** “in the Beloved” (vs 6).
3. We have **redemption** and **forgiveness** “in Him” (vs 7).
4. All things are **gathered together** “in Christ” (vs 10).
5. We have obtained our **inheritance** “in Him” (vs 11).
6. We are to the **praise of God’s glory** “in Christ” (vs 12).
7. We have **trusted** “in Him” (vs 13).
8. We have **believed** “in Him” (vs 13).
9. We are **sealed** with the Holy Spirit “in Him” (vs 13).

At least one thing is clear from Paul’s statements in Ephesians 1. He was discussing the disciples relationship with Christ and the blessings that result from conforming to the image of Christ. Paul metaphorically used the Greek word **en** (in) in order to explain the relationship each member of the

church has with Christ. One is in Christ in the sense of being within the realm of salvation that Jesus provides through His redemptive blood.

As we study through Ephesians 1, we must keep in mind what is **not stated** in the context of the chapter.

- ▶ **Paul does not discuss the predestination of any world events.**
- ▶ **Paul is not talking about the predestination of any individual apart from the predestination of the church as a whole.**
- ▶ **Paul is not discussing the predestination of any individual to hell.**
- ▶ **Paul is not talking about anyone being predestined to become a member of the church.**

Therefore, we must be careful not to read into this context of Ephesians any of these often preconceived ideas that have confused too many on this subject. We must keep in mind that **Paul's discussion is about the group of the saved, that is, the church.** It is this group that is headed to heaven as a result of God's foreplanned efforts to save people through the gospel of the Son of God.

God foreordained that individuals become a part of the church group through obedience to the gospel. When people obey the gospel, therefore, they are added to the church as members (See At 2:47). It is the church as a group is the body of those who have been predestined to eternal dwelling.

When one becomes a member of the church, **he or she becomes a member of a predestined group.** Consequently, one is predestined because he or she is a member of the predestined church. **We are not predestined to become members of the church.** Once one is a member, he or she is thus **conditionally** predestined to heaven. The condition for salvation is faithfulness to the Firstborn of the group. Ephesians 1:3-14 emphasizes the blessings



of the church. The following are Paul's major points of emphasis:

### A. Chosen In Christ

**God chose Christians in Christ (in the church) before the creation.** Paul stated, *“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world”* (Ep 1:4). God ordained that in Christ the blood of Jesus would continually cleanse the faithful of all sin (1 Jn 1:7). Jesus did this in order that the members of the church be presented before Him without spot or blemish (Jd 24). The condition for continual cleansing of sin is that **one faithfully walk in the light of the truth.** Revelation 2:10 is true: *“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*

**We must understand that the faithful, from the position of the Lord Jesus in final judgment, will be “chosen” out of the world, and thus now, in view of the final judgment, the members of the body of Christ are in prospect, the “chosen.”**

In order to better understand the above, we must view ourselves in the future looking back to the world's inhabitants, especially as a member of the body of Christ. In viewing all those of the world from the perspective of judgment after death (See Hb 9:27), who would God **choose** for heaven (See Hb 5:8,9)? **He would choose the obedient.** And in reference to our dispensation of time, He would **choose** the church. Therefore, Christians are those who are chosen from our time-oriented perspective. They are the chosen of the world because of the omniscience of God's foreknowledge of what He will do in final judgment.

One will be chosen for paradise after death because he or she is **in Christ**, not outside Christ. Therefore, one must now make a free-moral choice to become a part of those whom God will eventually choose out of the world for eternal heaven. This is why the Holy Spirit used the word “chose” in reference to the

church. **We are the chosen now because we will eventually be chosen for eternal dwelling in the final judgment.** Christians are the chosen because they have freely-morally chosen to obey the gospel.

Our difficulty seems to be in understanding how God could have chosen one before time, before the existence of the church, without predestining one individually to become a member of the church. The fact is that in His omniscience He did, and thus, Christians were chosen for eternal glory as the church before the foundation of the world.

Regardless of whether we fully understand this is not the point. There are some things that God will do in reference to the church that we do not now fully comprehend. We walk by faith, not by sight. Therefore, we fully trust in God that He has and will work all things according to His eternal plan.

We are thus chosen by God because we are **in Christ**, not in order to come into Christ. One must free-morally choose to become a part of Christ in order to be chosen for heaven by God at the final judgment. Christians are thus chosen in Christ because they will be chosen. They will be elected to heaven because they have personally and free-morally elected to become a part of the elect.

## B. Elected For Sanctification

Peter said that Christians are ***“elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”*** (1 Pt 1:2; see 1 Pt 1:19-21). Jesus purchased the church (those in a covenant relationship with God) ***“with His own blood”*** (At 20:28). The church was purchased and sanctified. All those who become members of the church, therefore, are purchased and sanctified. God foreknew this because it was His plan ***“before the foundation of the world”*** (Ep 1:4). Any who would free-morally choose to come into a covenant relationship with the blood-bought church, are thus purchased and sanctified.

God saw before the creation of the world His

position of choosing and electing His people out of the world at the time of the final coming of His Son. In looking back after the final coming, He would elect those who would go away into eternal life (See Mt 25:46). Before the world was created, therefore, God foreknew those who would obey the gospel. Therefore, in time—at this time—the obedient were indeed “elect” because God would eventually elect them from all the inhabitants of the world to go to heaven.

However, **one must free-morally elect to become a part of the group (church) that God will elect out of the world in final judgment.** Christians are thus elect now only in view of the fact that they are now a part of the church that God will eventually elect at final judgment for eternal dwelling.

### C. The Predestined Church

Jesus gave Himself for the church in order *“that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church”* (Ep 5:26,27; see also Ph 2:15; 1 Pt 2:24). The church is predestined to eternal salvation because it has been purchased and cleansed by Jesus. **All those who choose to become a member of the cleansed body of Christ are thus predestined to eternal salvation.** One must choose to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus in order to be a part of the cleansed (See At 22:16).

### D. Conditional Predestination

Because of Jesus’ death, Paul said that Christians will be presented *“holy and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith grounded and steadfast and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel you heard”* (Cl 1:22,23; see 1 Co 15:1,2).

Those who continue faithful, therefore, will be presented holy and blameless before the Father when they come into judgment after death. They will be presented in such a manner because of the saving

grace of God (See Ep 2:8,9). Nevertheless, we can fall from grace (See Gl 5:4). We can go astray and return to the sin of our former life (See 2 Pt 2:20-22). For this reason, our salvation is conditioned on our continued faithfulness in living the gospel.

In Ephesians 1:3-14, therefore, **Paul revealed the predestination of the church as a group.** Before creation, or before the foundation of the world, God predestined that the church would be saved. God predetermined that He would save the church that Jesus would purchase with His own blood.

**Christians will be saved, not because they are individually predestined to be saved, but because they free-morally choose to become a part of the predestined church. Once one makes a free-moral choice to obey the gospel, he or she is predestined to eternal life if he or she remains faithful to the call of the gospel. One thus has a choice to become a part of those who are destined for eternity.**



## ABREVIATIONS OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

## NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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