

Predestination: The Decree of God before Time

Predestination is biblically, thoroughly and thoughtfully defined and described in chapter 3 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith:

Chapter 3: Of God's Decree

Paragraph 1

God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree (Isaiah 46:10; Ephesians 1:11; Hebrews 6:17; Romans 9:15, 18; James 1:13; 1 John 1:5; Acts 4:27, 28; John 19:11; Numbers 23:19; Ephesians 1:3-5).

Paragraph 2

Although God knoweth whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything, because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions (Acts 15:18; Romans 9:11, 13, 16, 18).

Paragraph 3

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ, to the praise of his glorious grace; others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of his glorious justice (1 Timothy 5:21; Matthew 25:34; Ephesians 1:5, 6; Romans 9:22, 23; Jude 4).

Paragraph 4

These angels and men thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished (2 Timothy 2:19; John 13:18).

Paragraph 5

Those of mankind that are predestinated to life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any other thing in the creature as a condition or cause moving him thereunto (Ephesians 1:4, 9, 11; Romans 8:30; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Romans 9:13, 16; Ephesians 2:5, 12).

From these five paragraphs we can draft several summaries that should help us obtain a better understanding of the doctrine of predestination.

- 1. God's decree is a single divine plan; made without dependence upon the counsel of others or prescience that encompasses everything that would ever happen down to the minutest detail (paragraph 1-2).**

2. **God's decree does not deny individual freedom or responsibility, nor does it deny the necessity and mystery of secondary causes in bringing to pass the will of God** (paragraph 1).
3. **God's decree includes the unmerited and unsolicited election of a limited number of people to be redeemed by a divinely granted faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ** (paragraph 3, 4, 5).
4. **God's decree to elect a certain number of salvation is not simultaneously an act to elect a certain number to damnation** (paragraph 3).

Is the Doctrine of Predestination Biblical?

In the humble opinion of the Berean Elders the answer is yes. The Elders believe that the preponderance of Scriptural evidence leads to the conclusion that God planned all the details of history as well as the identity and number of the redeemed elect. We openly acknowledge that predestination, both its truth and breadth, are debated amongst evangelicals. However, despite the debate we are humbly confident that the Scriptures teach the reformed position on predestination.

Is the Doctrine of Predestination Rational?

If the use of the word rational is really an inquiry about the scrutability of predestination, then we must say that predestination is not rational. Predestination is God's self-revelation to created man about His own character and ability. Because man is a reasoning being (made in the image of God) he can understand God's revelation of His own mind and work. However, because God is infinite and man is finite, there is an element of inscrutability about God's predestination. Man simply cannot plumb the depths of God's decrees to completely understand or explain how the Lord can decree all things and not violate the freedom of man. It is beyond mankind to completely understand. However, that doesn't mean that the doctrine is irrational. The doctrine of predestination is rational because God taught it. God is not irrational. If He revealed it then mankind is to believe it; even if it is hard or impossible to understand.

The doctrine of the Trinity of God is another example of a rational, but inscrutable divine self-revelation. Can we explain the Trinity? No. Is it irrational? Some would say it is. What does the Scripture teach? It teaches us that God is one Being existing in Three Persons. It is a mystery and it is also a truth. Predestination is a doctrine that is also mysterious and true.

A Helpful Thought about Predestination

The Scriptures, which are God's Words to mankind, teach that God Himself is directing history to a particular and desired end. Ultimately, the decreed end is a glorious and eternal display of His glory. The Lord began everything and directs everything toward that end. He is in control. The fact that there is an end in the divine mind necessitates absolute control over everything in the now. If such is not true then the end cannot be guaranteed. As the Reformers were fond of saying, **"One far-off divine event toward which the whole creation moves."**

A quote from the Bloomington Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bloomington, Indiana doctrinal statement is helpful at this point,

Since the finite creation through its whole range exists as a medium through which God manifests His glory, and since it is absolutely dependent on Him, it of itself could originate no conditions which would limit or defeat the manifestation of that glory. From all eternity God has purposed to do just exactly what He is doing. He is the sovereign Ruler of the universe and "does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou?" Daniel 4:35.

Conclusion

The Elders hold to the Reformed understanding of predestination. We do not hold to this doctrine with a callous disregard for souls or individual responsibility. God faithfully and mercifully revealed that man is accountable for his thoughts and deeds (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). God also instructed His people to pray for the lost and as they zealously share the gospel because prayer and preaching are secondary causes He uses to gather in the lost (Romans 10:13-15).