

Predestination

Part 1

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[00:00:00] Tonight's subject is predestination. So far, we have sung Hymn 141, we've commended ourselves to the Lord in prayer, and we have sung Hymn 247. All three functions preparing us the better to see what Scripture says about this vital matter of predestination.

One of the major propositions that we considered last night at Doncaster, in thinking primarily of foreknowledge, was that, as to blessing, positive and negative, enjoyment and absence, [00:01:11] I'll summarise what was said, and it was confirmed by brethren after the meeting in conversation, that we always need to bear in mind that as far as choice is concerned and blessing is concerned, we are wise to accept that Scripture says, God has fitted some for blessing, others have fitted themselves for destruction. If you want Scripture for that, and of course you must, Romans 9 speaks of those vessels of mercy whom God has prepared [00:02:10] for glory, and also speaks of those vessels of wrath who have fitted themselves for destruction. Now that's the plain teaching of Scripture as I see it. In turning to predestination, to me one of the simplest, most direct scriptural topics that we could consider, consistent in its application wherever it is quoted in Scripture, and yet plucked at random out of its context, and used by many as if it meant something entirely different to what Scripture says. Well, we'll look at it. I would like to start by contrasting two of these concepts [00:03:12] in Scripture. First, I would suggest, election or choice determines the individuals marked out for blessing. Predestination marks out or determines the blessing marked out for those individuals. Two sides of the same coin. I'll say that once more and then move on. Election determines the individuals marked out for blessing and predestination determines the blessing marked out for those individuals. The things that many people quibble about [00:04:04] predestination, they should really relate to election according to the foreknowledge of God, which we looked at last night. But once you've got through that debate, with a clear mind thinking distinctly about the subject of predestination, you need basically to consider four major sections of Scripture. Now, I'll list these for you, and then we look at the examples of the word predestination in each of the four. In Acts chapter 4, we should really read the first 31 verses, verses 1 to 31. In Romans 8, we should read verses 28 to 39. 1 Corinthians 2, verses 1 to 10, and Ephesians 1, verses 1 to 14. Acts 4 uses [00:05:14] the word predestination once. Romans 8, twice. 1 Corinthians 2, once. Ephesians 1, twice. Six times in all. Check with your concordance. I'd be very surprised if you find any examples other than those six. So let us see what the Scripture says. First of all, why bother? 1 Timothy 2, verse 4. God's continuing disposition is that men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. I remember hearing a Christian who'd been trusting the Lord [00:06:09] in a very real way for about 40 to 50 years. Went on average to five meetings a week. Brought up a family in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Blameless beyond reproach in personal life and habit. But after 45 or so years, felt disposed to say, I'm saved and I know it, and that's as far as I've got. Whether true or not, it shouldn't be. It is not the will of God that I

should be saved and know it and then be in the same position 45 years later. It is the will [00:07:12] of God that men should be saved and go on and grow in the knowledge of the truth. It is not an academic matter. It is the will of God that we should make progress in the truth of God. So we need to consider terms like predestination. And let us look then, first of all, at Acts chapter 4. It is not practical to read the first 31 verses, but I will read verses 27 and 28.

The Gospel had been preached at Pentecost, Acts 2. Miraculous blessing had been enjoyed, [00:08:17] confirming that God was with his servants at the beginning of a new dispensation. Chapter 3. Those responsible used of God for the blessing of the man at the gate of the temple were hauled before the rulers of the Jews. And the first 31 verses and more of chapter 4 tell us what went on when the servants of the Lord were put on trial before the national ecclesiastical rulers. The experts had their say. The servants of God, spoken of as unlearned and ignorant men, [00:09:26] had this to be said on their behalf. It was observable that they had spent time in the company of Jesus. And they were the ones, not the ecclesiastical hierarchy, who had this miraculous power to allow the healing of God for man to be manifested and enjoyed. And in that national [00:10:05] context, it has to be said, what about the position of Israel? If they've been put to one side because of their disobedience, will they ever be brought into blessing? And in that context, this word predestination is used for the first time. We've seen it with purpose. We've seen it with foreknowledge. We see it with predestination. That way God marks out individuals, groups or a nation for blessing, he also marks out a blessing for them. Election, according to the foreknowledge [00:11:07] of God, we saw it to be related to individuals, we saw it to be related to the nation of Israel, each in its own sphere. And here, this term in verse 28, it says, all right, all the nations against the nation of Israel, the devil himself, it seems, at times it seems even God is against them. The message is to the nation, don't concern yourself. Since God has marked out the nation for blessing, there'll be a blessing marked out for the nation. The other sides, the two sides of the [00:12:06] same coin. It will all work together for their blessing. I'm emphasising this because predestination is primarily about the blessing. Predestination identifies the blessing. Election identifies those who are blessed. Simple, basic, vital distinction. I think I'll leave that there.

Anyway, look at the first 13 verses and satisfy yourself that that is so. Romans 8. Now, if you only read verse 30 and say, whom he did predestinate, you can then challenge me and [00:13:02] say, ah, surely this is identifying people for blessing. That is summarising what has gone before. The detail is given in verse 29. Whom he did foreknow. Identifying those who receive their blessing. He also did predestinate. He also did mark out for blessing, and this is the blessing, to be conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Then it picks up this cumulative, progressive argument, moreover, whom he did predestinate, then he also called, and so on. I don't like challenging people, being [00:14:05] aggressive, trying to dominate your thinking. I won't say I challenge you or I defy you, but I will say I'd be very, very surprised if you could show me a scripture which says God predestinated some to believe the Gospel and he predestinated others not to believe the Gospel. You won't find it. Believing the Gospel, trusting the Lord, is on the line of the responsibility of man, not mentioned in relation to predestination. Predestination is all of God. Marks out a sphere of blessing you and I could never deserve, never work [00:15:05] for, never gain by achievement. Thank God for that. What a pitiful thing it would be if it was something that you and I could work for and strive for and then say, I've done it, I'm there. What a pitiful thing it would be. But to say God has ever had in mind a blessing so wonderful that you couldn't even conceive it with your natural mind, never mind achieve it, and God is going to freely bestow it upon you. In fact, before the world was formed, before time began, before the beginning of creation, God had marked out this blessing for you. Tremendous thing. That's predestination. If anyone suggests to you [00:16:10] that the

Bible or brethren teach that some people are predestinated for salvation and some people are predestinated for destruction, ask them to show where it is in scripture. They won't be able to do it. Wonderful, positive blessing, predestinated, marked out in advance to be conformed to the image of his Son. Positive, not connected with responsibility, a privilege bestowed, a blessing endowed, a dignity conferred by God, predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son. And is it so we shall be like thy Son? Good question, isn't it? Is [00:17:15] it really possible? Oh, the scripture says yes, indeed it is, because God has marked it out in advance for you. With a view to the Son being absolutely pre-eminent, the firstborn, first in rank, outshining all, personally, positionally, that he might be the firstborn of many brethren. One of the many reasons this scripture gives why, while [00:18:02] he is not ashamed to call us brethren, it would be most improper for us to call him brother. Firstborn among many brethren. Now that, I understand, is the teaching of Romans 8, 1 Corinthians chapter 2. We should really take account of the first ten verses. I will read from verses seven to ten. No doubt about it, in looking at such matters, we are considering some of the deep things of God. The natural mind cannot enter into them. We have to think carefully when the word we is used in scripture. Who was writing? Who he was writing on behalf [00:19:05] of? Who he was writing to? I think it's fair to say that when he says we or us in this section, he's talking about we or us apostles. The special position they were in as the recipients of the revelation of God by the Spirit from an ascended Lord, with a view to communicating it to the general body of Christian believers, as they did, as we have in the canon of scripture. And in this section, where he speaks in a general way, end of verse nine, about the things which God hath prepared, God's preparation, God's marking out, he uses these words again.

[00:20:03] Verse seven, we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory. This word ordained, check it in the concordance, again, is this word predestinated, marked out beforehand. Notice, no suggestion of saying God ordained beforehand that some should believe the gospel, whether they wanted to or not. Doesn't say God prevented others from believing the gospel, even if they did. That's how some malicious persons would speak or suggest that predestination means, that whether [00:21:03] people like it or not, some are forced to believe the gospel against their wishes, others are prevented against their inclinations from believing the gospel. That never comes into scripture. But again, in a positive way, God, in his infinite eternal wisdom, hath so wrought from himself that a scheme of blessing, even of glory, has been marked out in advance for those upon whom he has set his love, ordained before the world unto our glory. This is the beginning of an epistle where it's necessary to enter into details of sordid things, disorder, [00:22:06] moral disorder, pride of heart, things that should never be amongst men. But in this cosmopolitan city of Corinth, where people from all over the known world used to gather, where all sorts of moral filth was displayed, the apostle is led by the spirit to say, don't get bogged down by the filth of this world. God has marked you out for glory. Wonderful thing.

What an encouragement to the feeble few at Corinth, compared with the mass of the population, [00:23:05] to be able to say, these master builders of this world will never understand that the people who are marked out for glory is not the rulers of this world, but by their inentities. Look back to chapter 1, verses 26 to 31. Now, these are the people about whom in chapter 2, verse 7, he says, these are the people for whom God has marked out this blessing, even glory. Verse 27, foolish in the eyes of this world, weak in the eyes of this world. Verse 28, base, despised, things which are not, things, people of no account [00:24:01] to the master builders of this world. These are the people, he says, that God has marked out for blessing, not only for blessing, not to escape eternal judgment by the skin of the teeth, they're marked out for glory. He says, this is the hidden wisdom of this world. Don't be too disturbed if you're never invited to the Queen's garden party, pleasant though it might

be. Don't get too disturbed if your name is never entered in the lists of those submitted for honour according to this world. The God of glory has marked you out for glory. Wonderful thing. I'm not despising what men look to, what men confer, that's [00:25:04] their sphere, their world, and it's what they have to enjoy. But, Paul says to the Corinthians and he also says to us, predestination determines a blessing marked out in advance, before the world was made, God has glory in mind for you. Ephesians 1, count of the first 14 verses of chapter 1. From near the beginning of verse 4, God should be looking for the words, distinguishing in our minds, verse 4, choice or election, we've been chosen. Verse 5, predestination, end of the verse, his will. Verse 9, his will, his pleasure, his purpose. Verse 11, [00:26:11] predestination, his purpose, his counsel, his will. Interrelated, and yet we can distinguish things that differ. Check, test this proposition against this chapter. Does the predestination point us to the blessing marked out for those whom God has chosen? Verse 5 literally predestinated us unto sonship. Verse 11, an inheritance, a blessing. An inheritance is always marked out in advance, isn't it? Before the death of the testator. An inheritance, which is [00:27:06] the fruit of predestination, according to the purpose. All goes back to the source. God has ever had in mind that there should be those who are blessed in association with Christ. Predestination details and determines the blessing that they will enjoy. Not only conform to the image of God's Son, but sons before his face. Highest dignity that could be conferred, sonship before the Father. As children of God, we've been brought into [00:28:03] a wonderful, intimate relationship. As sons, we have had conferred upon us immense dignity. Notice the distinction in terms between children and sons. It comes into several scriptures in the epistles. Here we are, verse 5, we've been predestinated, or God has predestinated us unto sonship by Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus came into the world, entered into manhood, that he might enter into death, that he might be raised from among the dead, that he might ascend where he was before, exalted a prince and a saviour, that in him, in his present [00:29:01] exaltation, that God might link with him those who've been predestinated to share with him, as we say, a son's blessed place. Again, the distinction necessary, he the son, we many sons. It might be worth saying that almost always, in speaking of the dignity conferred upon Christian believers, irrespective of sex or gender, we have sonship conferred upon us. In the resurrection, the Lord said, there's neither male nor female. An apparent exception, [00:30:01] we may as well read it, 2 Corinthians 6, is it? 2 Corinthians 6, verse 17, come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Why, if what has been said is true, that we are all sons, positionally, before God, why is there this exceptional reference to sons and daughters? First of all, I suppose, in simplicity, it's a quotation from the Old Testament and comes through in that way. [00:31:02] But I think there's another reason. We are not here speaking or reading of something which is positional, but something which is moral. Keep clear of the dirty world. Have nothing to do with it. Be ye separate. Have nothing to do with it. And because this is subjective and moral, not objective and positional, it is sons and daughters, rather than speaking of sonship in a positional way. Think about that. It's the only suggestion that I can make. It's moral and therefore subjective on our side by way of moral response, and it is appropriate to include a reference to the female as such, very much in line with what you will have [00:32:05] considered when you study the offerings from time to time. Well, that's my suggestion. And generally, Ephesians 1 is the norm, that not only male believers, but all believers, are those upon whom, not because they believe, although it's true of those who believe, but in parallel with their belief in the Gospel, God, in his wonderful grace, says, I've set my love upon you. I've attached you to Christ. I've made you suitable to be related to him. He is the Son. You are sons. You will enjoy the dignity of sonship in my presence. And Ephesians 1 goes into that in verse 5. Verse 11, In whom let us rejoice again, not in ourselves, [00:33:08] not in our work, not in any way by our achievement, because we are in him. Again and again in Ephesians, almost 30 times, all that we have is because God has included us and associated us with his beloved Son, and

that which is right for his Son is seen to be enjoyed in proper measure by those who are Christ's. An inheritance marked out in advance. The inheritance is predestinated according to his purpose. Predestination, the end. The blessing marked out according to his purpose, the origin, how it all started in the heart and in the mind of God. I suggest predestination, looked at in its immediate context and in the [00:34:10] context of Scripture as a whole, is a relatively straightforward subject to study. If we keep out of our mind all the erroneous things, all loose things that people say from time to time, where we base what we believe on what Scripture says, there should be no difficulty at all. That being so, we can sing together with deep thanksgiving, Hymn 296. Firstfruits of thy new creation, faithful, holy, may we be, joyful in thy full salvation, more and more, conformed to thee, changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place, then to worship [00:35:06] and adore thee, lost in wonder, love and praise. 296.