



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 148

Predestination – The word “predestination” comes from the Greek compound word “proorizo,” meaning to define or determine in advance. In theology predestination is used in two main senses – first, in a general sense to refer to the eternal decree of God, that is, God’s foreordaining of all things and events in history (Acts 4:28; 1 Corinthians 2:7); and second, in a more specific sense to refer to God’s decision or election, made in eternity past, regarding the final destination of people. It is with this second, more specific sense of predestination that Romans 8:28-30 is concerned with.

Predestination is not a word or doctrine invented by Calvin or the Reformed church, rather it is a word found in the Bible (Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:5, 11), and a doctrine throughout the Bible (Acts 13:48; Romans 8:33; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:1). All major Christian churches in history have held to some form of this doctrine. So the real question is not whether predestination is biblical, but whether we correctly understand what the Bible teaches about it. The most popular view of predestination is known as the prescient view, to know beforehand, teaching that God’s choice of saving or not saving people is based on His foreknowledge of human decisions. That is, God looks into the future, sees how people will respond to the gospel, and based on that makes His decision, predestinating people to heaven or hell. This view is a “conditional” predestination, because God’s choice is based on human decision or faith. It is also known as the Arminian view, and similar versions are held by the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The other main view of predestination, known as the Reformed view, is an “unconditional” predestination, where God’s choice is not based on any human decision, but on God’s eternal and sovereign decree. This is the minority view in churches and among Christians today.

Foreknowledge – The word “foreknowledge” comes from the Greek compound word “proginosko,” meaning to know in advance. In the New Testament the word knowledge has two distinct meanings. First, it means to have an intellectual awareness of something or someone. In Romans 1:21 Paul is saying that everyone has enough information about God, through His general revelation, to know that He exists. Second, it means to have an intimate or deeper knowledge of something or someone. In 1 Corinthians 2:14 Paul says that natural man, being spiritually dead, does not know God intimately, personally and spiritually (Matthew 7:21-23). Also in verses such as John 10:14 and 1 Corinthians 8:3 “ginosko” is used to signify a special and personal relationship between God and His people. These clearly refer to a redemptive knowledge, and not just an awareness of something. We see this even in the Old Testament, with the Hebrew “yada” (Genesis 4:1; 18:19; Jeremiah 1:5; Amos 3:2; Hosea 13:5).

In Romans 8:29 Paul is speaking of this second, richer meaning of knowledge, that is, God making a decision to enter into an intimate relationship with us, and to love us in a special way. Thus, RC Sproul explains, “We could reasonably translate this text [Romans 8:29], “Those whom he foreloved [those whom he knew in a personal, intimate, redemptive sense from all eternity] he predestined.””

Furthermore, Romans 8:29 is not talking about God foreknowing people’s actions, but foreknowing people – “Those whom He foreknew He also predestined.” This denotes God’s personal knowledge of certain people, deciding in eternity to set them aside as objects of His love (Ephesians 1:3-5; 1 Peter 1:1-2). Also in 1 Peter 1:20 the same word is used of Jesus, where God in eternity past entered into a special covenant with His Son, who was ordained, chosen or set apart to be the Savior of His people, the elect.

In reality, in the Arminian view, God doesn’t really elect or predestinate anyone to be saved, as He is just able to see the future, observe the actions of people, and then just confirm or write them down, as in the Book of Life (Revelation 13:8). He becomes a glorified secretary, recording what people decide, and remains a mere spectator, passively anticipating the fulfillment of these decisions. This view prevalent in churches dishonors God and His attributes, and is clearly contrary to the teachings of the Bible.