

# "THE HARMONY OF PREDESTINATION AND THE FREE AGENCY OF MAN"

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Scripture Lesson - Ephesians 1:3-14

**INTRODUCTION** - The title to this lesson is a paradox; that is, it seems to be a contradiction of terms, but when examined in the light of God's Word, it is found to be absolutely true. The doctrine that man is a free agent and responsible for himself in no way contradicts the doctrine of the sovereignty of God or the doctrine of predestination. As we study this subject together we will find that God predetermined that man would have a will, and would have the freedom to exercise his will.

There are many terms and ideas in the Bible which, if they are considered apart from the Bible message as a whole, may easily be misunderstood and misrepresented. Examples are foreknowledge, sovereignty, eternal purpose, election, freedom, providence, grace. To this list should be added predestination, which has frequently been taken to mean that every person's eternal destiny was fixed, not only before he was born, but before God had ever taken the first step in creation. Such a conclusion, is the results of isolating the term from what the Bible as a whole plainly teaches. Since *"all scripture is given by inspiration of God"* (2 Timothy 3:16) and, since *"it was impossible for God to lie"* (Hebrews 6:18), every verse must be true. There can be no contradictions. Every verse must be in harmony with every other verse. This being true we will proceed with our subject.

## DEFINING THE SUBJECT TITLE

**HARMONY** - Compatibility; agreement; existing together without contradiction.

**PREDESTINATION** - The decree of God from eternity; foreordination, and pre-determination

**FREE AGENCY OF MAN** - Having the freedom and liberty to make decisions and act upon them.

## DEFINATIONS OF OTHER TERMS WE ARE DEALING WITH

**SOVEREIGNTY** - The state of having supreme and independent power and authority.

**ETERNAL PURPOSE** - That which God has set before himself to be accomplished.

**ELECTION** - The doctrine that deals with God's choice/calling of people, nations and/or individuals to accomplish his purpose.

**THE ELECT** - Those called by God to salvation and/or those chosen or called by God to do a special work for him.

**FORE-KNOWLEDGE** - Knowing something before it exists or comes to pass.

**FORE-ORDINATION** - To ordain or appoint beforehand.

I would ask that you read, Ephesians 1:3-14; Romans 8:28-30; 1 Peter 1:2; Titus 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:9; and Ephesians 3:11, where you will find the above words as defined.

Paul points out that our salvation is according to God's eternal will and purpose when he says, *"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children, according to the good pleasure of his will"* (Ephesians 1:5) He once again, in writing to Timothy speaks of God, *"Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."* (2 Timothy 1:9)

In writing to Titus Paul mentions the, *"...hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;"* (Titus 1:2)

## GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

It is evident from the scriptures that God is an eternal being. *"before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadest formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."* (Psalms 90:2) It is equally evident that the eternal God had an eternal purpose.

Now without digressing from the subject, I must quickly inject the truth regarding the sovereignty of God. God is supreme and has independent power and authority. He has three attributes that qualify him as being supreme and sovereign. They are: 1. Omnipotence - The power and ability to do whatever he pleases.

2. Omniscience - The ability to know all things, even before they come to pass.

3. Omnipresence - The ability to be in all places at all times because He is a Spirit.

God had the ability to decree that all men would die and perish in hell. He not only had the ability to decree, He had the right to do so, because he is sovereign. He could have carried out such a decree and still been just and righteous, because when man sinned, he did it willfully and with the knowledge of sin's penalty. However, it was not God's eternal purpose to destroy men in hell, but rather to save them in heaven.

### GOD KNEW WHAT HE WANTED

God knew what he wanted. He knew exactly what it would take to make him happy. In his foreknowledge, he could see multitudes of people, who had been redeemed by his grace, giving glory to his name, and that is what he desired. (This was shown to John, Revelation 7:9-17) So in eternity, before the world began, or ever there was a man, God's desire (his will) became his eternal purpose. Therefore he promised, predestinated and foreordained by a decree that it would come to pass. Brother Moran believes that the true church, the bride of Christ in Heaven, will be the fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God in Christ Jesus.

### THE DETERMINATE COUNSEL

If God was to accomplish his will and carry out his eternal purpose, he must have a plan. Remember, at this point, this was only in the mind of God, (in the planning stage) so God called a counsel meeting. Peter said that Jesus of Nazareth was *".... delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,..."* (Acts 2:22-24)

A counsel is a meeting of two or more persons, convened for consultation and deliberation. The word "determinate" means, "having definite limits". The counsel was composed of God the Father, God the Son; and God the Holy Spirit. The only subject on the agenda was, "How can the will and purpose of God, to gather together a people who have been redeemed by his grace and conformed to the image of his own son be accomplished?" After deliberation, it was agreed, that the only way it could be accomplished would be for Jesus, God's own Son, to come into the world, become a man, condemn sin in the flesh, die on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice, shed his blood as an atonement, and then break the chains of death by the resurrection from the dead. The results of this counsel was that God predestinated that the only way a person can be saved is through his Son Jesus Christ. Thus the plan of salvation was pre-determined and fore-ordained before the foundation of the world.

### THE FIRST STEPS IN THE ETERNAL PURPOSE

STEP #1 - From the Book of the Beginnings we read, *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."* (Genesis 1:1)

STEP #2 - *"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..."* (Genesis 1:26) *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."* (Genesis 1:27)

Image and the likeness are two words to express the same thing. Each one makes the other more expressive. It means that of all the creation, man bears the nearest resemblance to God. Man was not made in the likeness of another creature, but in the likeness of his creator. But even so, there is an infinite difference between God and man. God did put some of his honor upon man by creating him after his likeness and in his image, (Psalms 8:4-5 and Hebrews 2:7-8) but Jesus is the only who is the express image of his person (Hebrews 1:3), and this is because he has the same nature. (John 10:30) What does the phrase, image and likeness mean? *"God is a spirit"* (John 4:24); God is *"the Father of spirits"* (Hebrews 12:9); He *"formeth the spirit of man within him"*. (Zechariah 12:1); *"The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord"* (Proverbs 20:27); and, when man dies, *"the spirit goes back to God who gave it"*. (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

These things being true, it means that man is a rational, moral, spiritual being, who lives in a physical body of flesh, and has an intelligent, immortal soul. Man was created full grown and completely mature. He was endowed with knowledge; no schooling was needed. He had understanding; he could reason. He was upright and finitely holy; had no sin in him, neither in his physical body or his spiritual nature. He had a will, with the freedom to make choices, to act upon those decisions, but was responsible and accountable for his actions. In other words, Man was created a free moral agent.

The difference between Adam and you and me;... Adam was a "free moral agent";... you and me are "free agents"; the difference being, with Adam the evil influence was from without. With us, inordinate desires are within, along with the evil influences that are without. The likeness being that God made all men "free agents".

**STEP #3 - "...Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish (fill) the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion... over every living thing that moveth upon the face of the earth."** (Genesis 1:28) The fact that God gave man dominion and authority over his creation is proof of "free agency".

Further proof is found in the disobedience to God's moral law. *"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."* (Genesis 2:16-17) Paul tells us that it was *"...by one man's disobedience that many were made sinners..."* (Romans 5:19) So we see the free agency at work; the law, the penalty, the freedom to choose, the choice made, and the results.

### **THINGS PREDESTINATED**

It would be utterly foolish to imply that nothing has been predestinated or fore-ordained by God. However it would be equally foolish to contend that all things have been predestined and permanently fixed from eternity.

1. God did predestinate, from eternity, that he would have a body of redeemed people. (Ephesians 1:3-6) The number was not determined.
2. God did predestinate, from eternity, that this would be accomplished through the death of his Son, and by his grace. (Ephesians 1:4; 5-7).
3. God did predestinate, from eternity, that individuals could become children of God, by adoption, through Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 1:5)
4. God did predestinate, from eternity, that those who are saved will be conformed to the image of his dear Son. (Romans 8:29)

The plan of salvation was thought out, based on the foreknowledge of God, and ordered by him in such a way that it would be wholly (entirely) of grace, *"...for by grace are ye saved, through faith..."* (Ephesians 2:8). This plan to redeem and save would be available to all, *"...whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."* (Revelation 22:12). Yet salvation would be compulsory to none, *"He came unto his own, and his own received him not, But as many as did receive him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on his name."* (John 1:11-12)

This is the only way that the carrying out of the eternal purpose would bring glory, honor, and pleasure to God. We are redeemed by the blood of Christ, who was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world. (1 Peter 1:18-20)

When we read from Ephesians, chapter one, *"he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world..."* v. 4; and *"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself..."* v. 5; and *"... being predestinated according the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:"* v. 11; and *"... to them who are the called, according to his purpose."* (Romans 8:28); We are not to conclude that God has picked out certain persons, back in eternity, and determined that they would be saved, while at the same time withholding his grace from others. But what the scripture is teaching, is, that every person

who has been saved, and every person who will be saved, are saved by the method and means that God predestinated, and foreordained that persons must be saved; that is, in Christ, through Christ, and by Christ.

### THE HARMONY OF PREDESTINATION AND THE FREE AGENCY OF MAN

God predestinated, from eternity, that whosoever will repent of their sins, and believe in Jesus with all the heart, will be saved and go to Heaven.

God also predestinated, from eternity, that whosoever will not repent of their sins and believe in Jesus with all their heart, will die in their sins, and go to hell. This doctrine is consistent with the free agency of man, the sovereignty of God, predestination, fore-ordination and every other doctrine of the Bible. The harmony of predestination and the free agency of man, which some people consider incompatible, even contradictory, can be found.

### WHAT ABOUT ELECTION?

We read about election and the elect. These terms refer to individuals, and sometimes to groups of individuals, even to nations, which have been chosen by God to carry out his plans.

All saved persons are referred to as *"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 1:2) *"But ye are a chosen generation..."* (2 Peter 2:9) Notice that election is according to foreknowledge. We read, *"For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son..."* (Romans 8:29) Please note however, that the Bible nowhere speaks of election according to predestination.

### ANSWERING THE LIMITED ATONEMENT DOCTRINE

The so-call limited atonement doctrine is the result of misunderstanding what the Bible teaches about election and predestination. This doctrine teaches that before the creation, in eternity past, God elected, or made choice of certain individuals, choosing beforehand those who would be saved; and that these certain elected ones are the only ones Jesus died to save. This false doctrine teaches that those so elected were predestinated from eternity to be saved; and that they will be saved; and that they cannot keep from being saved.

The same false doctrine teaches that all who were not so elected and predestinated, in eternity, cannot be saved, because Jesus did not die for them, only the elect. According to this heresy, before a child is born, God has already determined his eternal destiny.

### CONCLUSION

The harmony of the Bible is that *"... Jesus... by the grace of God should taste death for every man..."* (Hebrews 2:9) *"Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.* (Romans 5:18)

The doctrine that God deliberately withholds his grace from some who are lost, the non-elect, is in direct conflict with the New Testament teachings of God's eternal purpose in Christ Jesus. The gospel is addressed to every accountable sinner! All men everywhere are commanded to repent! (Acts. 17:30) God is not willing that any should perish! (2 Peter 3:9) God would have all men to be saved! (1 Timothy 2:4) *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."* (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

The clear teaching of the Bible is that God made man a "free agent" giving him the freedom to make choices, including the freedom to come to God through Jesus for salvation, while allowing him the liberty to reject God's mercy, and God's only plan of salvation. And while many are lost and perishing in their sins, I truly believe that *"...nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth, but his own inherent depravity and voluntary rejection of the gospel..."* (New Hampshire Confession of Faith, Article IV.)