

## What difference does Predestination make?

The Bible uses several words to describe God's active involvement in and control over His creation, including *foreknowledge*, *election* and *predestination*. If you read the Bible, you cannot avoid seeing that God is portrayed as being actively in control of this world and of its creatures. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* says boldly that "God, from all eternity, did. . . ordain whatsoever comes to pass." (III:i). What in God's word led the authors of the *Confession* to use such strong language?

### I. Sovereignty is a Defining Characteristic of God

Solomon says in *Proverbs 19:21* that "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." (cf. 16:9; 20:24). We make plans, decisions and take actions, but God is sovereignly at work behind all that we do, and it all happens according to His plan.

In the Old Testament the God of Israel is quite different from the gods of the other nations because He makes "known the end from the beginning." He says, "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. . . What I have said, that will I bring about." (Isaiah 46:10,11). This quality of ordaining the future is a *defining characteristic* of who God is. That is why sovereignty must be understood and accepted. *To worship God we must know Him as the scriptures themselves define Him, anything less tends toward idolatry.*

## II. God's Sovereignty is Our Greatest Source of Comfort

Do things happen by accident or design? Though many Christians claim to believe that God is sovereign they continue to speak of accidents and mistakes that happen beyond the scope of God's plans. The Bible says that nothing happens apart from God's design. Jesus said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father." The smallest things in life are ordained by God. Even the things we attribute to pure chance are decided by the Lord (cf. Proverbs 16:33).

This truth gives us tremendous confidence in the face of adversity. When disaster strikes is it a comfort to think that Satan got his way, or that God is working toward a purpose? That is the hope expressed in Romans 8:28,29a:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.

God works for the good of his children *in all things*. Satan does not run amuck in this world, he simply does the evil that God will allow him to do. Why does God allow him to do evil at all? Sometimes to test, sometimes to discipline, and in the case of unbelievers sometimes to judge. But the central point is this: *there is a purpose to trials and suffering only if they come to us from God*. If trials and suffering are the results of "accidents" or "mistakes" then there is no comfort available. Our God is not caught

off guard by anything. He is active, not reactive. Our status in his kingdom is said to have "been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." (Ephesians 1:11).

### III. Our Final Destination is Secure

Even the act of salvation takes place according to God's plan. In the *Revelation of John*, John speaks of a book in which the names of believers are written, called the *Lamb's Book of Life*. This book was sealed and written "from the foundation of the world." (cf. 3:5; 5:9; 13:8). No one, it is written, can erase a name from the book, and no one can break its seals except Christ Himself. The believers eternal fate is securely in the hands of Jesus. He says, in John 10:28:

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; on one can snatch them out of my hand.

Our fate is completely secure in Christ. This truth should be a source of great comfort, never a license to sin. God's predestination is never to become a cause for laziness or fatalism. The mystery of His will is just that, a *mystery*. We must not get into the business of second-guessing God or blaming Him for what happens in this world. He made us to be responsible moral persons who make real choices for which we are accountable. Predestination is always a comfort in the Bible, but never an excuse.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

*Westminster Confession of Faith* (III, V, IX)  
*The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, L. Boettner  
*Trusting God*, Jerry Bridges

*KEY QUESTIONS:*

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