

Q & A

Week 1: May 27, 2020

Q Predestination and free will . . . how does this work?

- **The Bible teaches that God made you with a will that is free to make real choices.**
 - What the Bible says
 - “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.” (James 1:13-14)
 - “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.” (Deuteronomy 30:19)
 - Myths and Bad Analogies
 - Myth #1: Calvinists/Reformed theologians don’t believe in free will.
 - It depends on what you mean by “free will” (*absolute or natural?*).
 - “God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor, by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good, or evil.” ([Westminster Confession of Faith 9.1](#))
 - When we speak of the “bondage of the will” we are speaking of a moral bondage—an inability to choose good because our wills are *enslaved* to sin (Romans 6:6).
 - 2 Peter 2:19—“They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.”
 - Romans 6:6—“We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.”
 - Bad Analogy #1: The Robot. God does not “program” or “override” your will.
 - Myth #2: Predestination is the same thing as determinism. *Or* Calvinists/Reformed theologians people are fatalists.
 - Determinism (or fatalism) teaches that because everything is determined (or fated) to turn out a certain way, including all our choices along the way, nothing you do really has any significance or value—you’re just the next domino in the line.
 - Determinism (or fatalism) is the outcome of a *materialistic (Godless) or pagan* view of the universe.
 - The “Fates” in Greek mythology were more powerful than the gods. The spun out people’s lives like a thread, determined each one’s length, and then cut it at the point of a person’s death. The gods could not change what the Fates had determined because they were not sovereign.
 - If there is no God (or if God somehow submits His will to His creation), then your choices are determined by your nature and nurture (your genes, upbringing, experiences, and the chemicals and electrical impulses they work together to activate in your brain).
 - God’s sovereignty is the only way to *escape* determinism/fatalism ([WCF 3.1](#))
 - Bad Analogy #2: The Missile.

- **The Bible teaches that God from all eternity has decided everything that happens.**
 - Our understanding of the world and everything in it has to start with the bigness of God.
 - What the Bible says
 - About all things:
 - Ephesians 1:11—“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”
 - About “chance” events:
 - Prov. 16:33—“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.”
 - About the relationship between God’s decree and human choice:
 - Genesis 50:20—“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”
 - Acts 2:23—“This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”
 - Acts 4:27-28—“For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”
- **The Bible teaches God’s sovereign predestination includes individuals’ salvation.**
 - Predestination is the backstory of free will. *God set his love on His people from all eternity with the intention that they would become truly free in Christ.*
 - Ephesians 1:3-6, 11—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. . . . In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”
 - Predestination makes free will possible. *We would not freely choose God if God did not act first to set our wills free.*
 - Ephesians 2:1-2a, 5—“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. . . . But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.”
 - John 6:37, 44a—“ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. . . . No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”
 - Predestination does not depend on free will.
 - No *conditions* for God’s electing love.
 - 2 Thessalonians 2:13—“But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”
 - Rom. 9:11-16—“Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” *So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*”
 - Predestination not based on foreknowledge. (No “middle knowledge.”)
 - 2 Timothy 1:9—“Who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.”
 - What about Romans 8:29-30?—“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

- **The Fourfold State of Man** ([cf. WCF 9](#))

- 1. Innocence: Able To Sin (Man as created, but before the Fall)
- 2. Sin: Not Able Not To Sin (Man as fallen; your will in bondage to sin)
- 3. Grace: Able Not To Sin (Man as redeemed, but not yet glorified—still battling sin)
- 4. Glory: Not Able To Sin (Man in heaven with God, perfectly holy)

- **The relationship between predestination and free will is mysterious, but not irrational.**

- We shouldn't expect or demand to understand it comprehensively
 - Romans 11:33-36—"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.
- We should not rebel against it
 - Romans 9:20-21—"But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?
- We shouldn't try to inquire into what God hasn't revealed, but to obey what He has revealed, using the wills He has freed from sin for obedience.
 - Deut. 29:29—"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."