

# SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

## PART 38

### KEY TERMS: PREDESINATION, PART 2

Romans 8:29–30<sup>29</sup>For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined [προορίζω] to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;<sup>30</sup> and these whom He predestined [προορίζω], He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Concerning predestination, these verses are informing us that God determined to appoint those who believe in Christ to be like Him, that is, “to become conformed to the image of His Son” which is ultimately what we know to be our glorification salvation. This Scripture is not telling us that God chose believers in eternity past to be believers. These are eternal security Scriptures and not justification salvation Scriptures. This truth is being presented to us in the sanctification salvation section of Romans and not in the justification section. It is, however, important to note that sanctification is not mentioned as a separate God guaranteed process in these verses. That is because the truths presented here are God’s responsibility to accomplish; believers have a role to play in their own sanctification; therefore, sanctification isn’t part of this chain. Believers can fail in their responsibilities; God cannot and will not fail to accomplish His declared ends. “Why is this [sanctification] missing? May I suggest that the reason for this is that while positional sanctification is true of all believers in Christ, progressive sanctification is *not* absolutely guaranteed in time for every believer. Though God desires all believers to grow in a holy life, progressive sanctification may not occur because of the possibility and reality of carnality, unfaithfulness, worldliness, and even the sin unto death” [Dennis Rokser, “Is Salvation Forever or Can It Be Lost?” in *Freely by His Grace*, p. 250].

William Perkins, a Puritan theologian, perverted the biblical text by interpreting this verse to include sanctification when it clearly does not. This is the result of the doctrines of predestination and election and the misinterpretation of Matthew 24:13.

Matthew 24:13<sup>13</sup>“But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

If God chooses who will believe and be saved, then the saved one must endure to the end because if he does not do so, he has proven he is unchosen and unsaved. Perkins claimed this Romans 8:30 had “four degrees of decretal execution: calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification” [Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, p. 126-128]. However, sanctification is not in this verse for the reasons we just presented but in this system, sanctification must be accomplished by God because any human failure in sanctification proves the person to be non-elect and Matthew 24:13 is untrue; the elect must persevere to the end. Since we know this interpretation of Matthew 24:13 is incorrect, his premise is incorrect from the start and that leads to teaching people false doctrine. In the

same way, predestination and election are incorrect from the start the way they are defined in this system.

It is easy to observe that one's assurance of salvation is simply destroyed in this system. Assurance cannot be found in Christ and based on God's promises as they are revealed in Scripture, but instead must be found by looking instead at one's behavior, obedience, faithfulness, and perseverance. No one can know for certain they are of the elect before they die because the possibility they might fail is always present in people who still retain their sin nature. That's where the horrible problem of Christian fruit inspection originates.

We can be assured that God is going to do these things in our lives. He knows believers beforehand and He has appointed them to be like Christ and ultimately He will glorify them although the grammar here is such, past tense, that the glorification is so certain that it is considered to be already accomplished. If you go all the way back to verse 18, you will note that our future glory is the subject in this context; it is not about unbelievers becoming believers.

Rokser explains these verses very well. "Every believer in Christ is eternally secure because it is the PURPOSE of God the Father to *glorify* every believer in Christ....God, without violating our human volition and without negating negative consequences to bad choices, is determined to work all things together for our spiritual good and to His own glory....In God's omniscience and sovereignty, He foreknew and predestinated every believer to a predetermined end, 'to be conformed to the image of His Son.'...God's purpose from eternity past is to bring believers to full spiritual maturity and conformity to Christ in order that the Lord Jesus Christ would have the preeminence and glory due His name....The same individuals whom God foreknew He also predestined, called, justified, and glorified" [Dennis Rokser, "Is Salvation Forever or Can It Be Lost?" in *Freely by His Grace*, pp. 249-250].

If God predestined every act that will happen within the bounds of history, then the question must be asked, does this system of theology claim that God is the author of sin? Most Calvinists reject that concept and claim that God allowed sin but that He did not cause it, however, some of them recognize their system demands the admission that God did indeed foreordain sin. Some of them agree that God predestined sin but then inconsistently argue that He didn't cause it to occur. They can get into some very complicated philosophical arguments trying to prove that God decreed sin but didn't cause Adam to sin in the first place.

Rather than allowing for the fact Adam had the freedom to sin and rebel against God, Boettner claims that God predestined him to commit the sin that led to the fall of mankind. "Even the fall of Adam, and through him the fall of the race, was not by chance or accident, but was so ordained in the secret counsels of God....In fact the plan for the whole course of the world's events, including the fall, redemption, and all other events, was before God in its completeness before He ever brought the creation into existence; and He deliberately ordered it that this series of events, and not some other series, should become actual" [Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, p. 234]. God knew Adam would rebel but it does not necessarily follow that God caused him to rebel. Then Boettner

falls into the inconsistency that so often characterizes theology when it departs from literal hermeneutics. He denies that God caused Adam's sin even though he wrote the opposite. "Yet God in no way compelled man to fall. He simply withheld that underserved constraining grace with which Adam would infallibly not have fallen, which grace He was under no obligation to bestow. In respect to himself, Adam might have stood had he so chosen; but in respect to God it was certain that he would fall. He acted as freely as if there had been no decree, and yet as infallibly as if there had been no liberty" [Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, p. 235]. Where in the Bible does it say there was "constraining grace" upon Adam prior to his sin and rebellion? This is possibly an imposition of 2 Thessalonians 2:7 in which the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit that operates to restrain sin after the fall occurred. This is the only ministry of restraining grace the Bible identifies and this ministry was not in operation before the fall. Again, this is theology imposed into the text in order to support a particular doctrine which, in this case, is predestination.

Pink makes the argument that God predestined Adam to fall but this fact was hidden in God's secret will and Adam had no knowledge that he was predestined to fall; therefore, Adam was culpable. Pink maintains that Adam would not have been culpable if he had possessed prior knowledge that he was destined to fall. "Had God revealed to Adam that it was His purpose for sin to enter this world, and that He had decreed that Adam *should* eat of the forbidden fruit, it is obvious that Adam could not have been held responsible *for* the eating of it. But in that God *withheld* the knowledge of His own counsel from Adam, his [Adam's] accountability was not interfered with" [A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, pp. 284-285]. I compared Boettner with Pink here simply to illustrate the inconsistency within this theological system from one theologian to another in their attempt to explain predestination and sin. Boettner explained his theology by resorting to the lack of God's restraining grace while Pink fell back on the secret counsel of God to explain it. Because their interpretation is driven by theology, theologians operating within the system are free to present what they think should be true as biblical fact. This is resorting to philosophical religious reasoning to confirm one's theology rather than exegeting the text to prove it. There is no biblical proof for the positions these men are presenting as theological fact. It is also interesting to note they do not agree. When theologians make up their own set of rational, philosophical facts to support their theology, each one is free to come up with his own theology independent of everyone else.

We can argue from now until the cows come home about how much freedom mankind since Adam has had to make choices but Adam had a truly neutral will. Whatever freedom to make decisions we have or do not have today is beside the point. Adam did not have a sin nature. He could have freely chosen to obey God and the historical scenario that has played out since would have been different. But that wasn't the choice Adam made and God knew beforehand what Adam's choice would be and he established a plan to deal with it. That plan has been working itself out since Adam's fall. To suggest that Adam was predestined by God to fall is a theological leap that I think goes beyond the bounds of Scripture. As an aside, this is akin to our belief concerning the Kingdom offer God made to the Jewish people through Christ at His First Advent that it was a genuine offer that could have been accepted. They could have accepted the offer but God knew they wouldn't and His plan was accordingly

established. The major difference is that Adam was not operating from the position of possessing a sin nature; the Jews, of course, did have a sin nature.

Some theologians do believe predestination necessarily includes the foreordination of sin. “The Bible especially declares that the free acts of men are decreed beforehand....The Scriptures teach that sinful acts, as well as such as are holy, are foreordained [Hodge, like Warfield following him, uses the cross work of Christ as Peter presented it in Acts 2 to justify this statement but as we have already noted, normative theology should not be developed from this specific situation which was a once for all time work]....The crucifixion of Christ was beyond doubt foreordained of God. It was, however, the greatest crime ever committed. It is therefore beyond all doubt the doctrine of the Bible that sin is foreordained....Our great ground of confidence, however, is the assurance that the judge of all the earth must do right. Sin is, and God is; therefore the occurrences of sin must be consistent with his nature; and as its occurrences cannot have been unforeseen or undersigned, God’s purpose or decree that it should occur must be consistent with his holiness” [Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:543-548]. As I’ve mentioned here in the past, it seems that interpreting the Bible according to theology rather than according to literal hermeneutics leads to some inconsistent and even irrational conclusions. In the midst of writing the things I just read, Hodge wrote that God is not the author of sin. “...as he neither causes sin, nor tempts men to its commission, He is neither its author or its approver. He sees and knows that higher ends will be accomplished by its admission than by its exclusion, that a perfect exhibition of his infinite perfections will be thereby effected, and therefore for the highest reason decrees that it shall occur through the free choice of responsible agents” [Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 1:547-548]. It is interesting to note that a man who believes every act that occurs in history was predestined to occur can make the claim that men can commit free acts.

I find this theology confusing. If God predestined every act in history and if He foreordained sin, then how is He not the cause of sin? If predestination is true, then how are people free to commit free acts of the will? Of course, these theologians have answers for these things but they have to resort to philosophy and theological presuppositions to answer them rather than resorting to biblical exegesis. And, in fact, much of the philosophical support for this system of theology is based on Plato and Aristotle via Augustine [see David R. Anderson, *Free Grace Soteriology*, pp. 343-370]. Plato’s priority was the unseen, spiritual, immaterial world but Aristotle’s priority was the material, empirical world of nature that we can observe around us. His emphasis was on reason and logic and his methods were important to the formation of the Reformer’s theology. As you can imagine, that has proved to be not a good thing.