

SERMON NOTES

Dr. David A. Renwick -- October 14, 2012

Probing Questions: Predestination: Fated by Our Genes?

Romans 8:28-32, 38-39; John 3:16, 10:14-16, 22-30

*'Let us not be ashamed to be ignorant in this matter
wherein there is a certain learned ignorance.'*

John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion Bk.3.Ch.21.1

Definition: Pre-destination = *pre(determined)destination*:

our 'destination' has been predetermined by someone or something else.

Emotional Reaction:

Like it or not? Usual response is '**not**'!

Problem: Predestination and Free Will

1. Fatalism: Does God's predestining eliminate free choice, and thus the validity of moral choice/accountability?
2. Injustice: Is it fair or loving that God should create someone and then choose to send them to hell – especially if they had no choice? Wouldn't this make God to be a horrible tyrant?

Note 1. The Removal Of The Idea Of Judgment Doesn't Resolve The Problem!

Yale Theologian, Miroslav Volf (Keller, p.74)

"If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end to violence – that God would not be worthy of worship."

Nobel Laureate, Poet Czeslaw Milosz (pronounced: *Chefwaf Meewosh*), Keller, p.75

"A true opium of the people is a belief in nothingness after death – the huge solace of thinking that our betrayals, greed, cowardice, murders are not going to be judged; . . . [but] all religions recognize that our deeds are imperishable."

Note 2. The Removal Of Religion Doesn't Resolve The Problem!

The possibility of determinism is not just a religious problem, but is also a scientific and philosophical problem for secular people – None of us had any choice in being born or created! The secular question of nurture and nature remains: are we determined by our environment? Or genes?

Note Francis Collins' Response: *"Genetics does not determine choice, though it influences or limits choice. Otherwise identical twins would be... completely identical!"*

The Biblical View

Like it or not . . . **Predestination is in the Bible** – but not often:

. . . explicitly only in 4 passages (Greek = *pro-oridzo*)

Explicit passages:

1. Acts 4:27-28

27For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus . . .
28to do whatever your hand and your plan had **predestined** to take place.

2. 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 within a large family.
30And those whom he **predestined** he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

3. 1 Corinthians 2:7

But we speak (*of Christ, who is*) God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God **decreed** (= **predestined**) before the ages for our glory.

4. Ephesians 1:5,11

5He **predestined** us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will; 11In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been **predestined** according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will

Other Words Similar to Predestination used more frequently

= *chose/elect, destine/appoint*

1. God Chose Israel: For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has **chosen/elected** you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. – Deuteronomy 7:6
2. Jesus Chose His Disciples: I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have **chosen/elected**. – John 13:18
3. Jesus Said: For many are called, but few are **chosen/elected**." (Matthew 22:14); You did not **choose/elect** me but I **chose/elected** you. (John 15:6)
4. Paul Says: (God) **chose/elected** us 'in Christ' before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. (Ephesians 1:4)
5. Luke Speaks of those "*appointed* (Gk: *tassō*= destined) *to eternal life*." (Acts 13:48)

Human Choice

2. The Importance Of Human Choice throughout the Bible:

Choice is a matter of life and death in the first and foundational story in the Bible (Adam, Eve and the Tree, *Genesis* 2), and elsewhere:

Moses (Deuteronomy 30:19-20) 'choose life'

Jesus (John 3:16) 'whoever believes'

Paul (Philippians 2:12) 'work out your salvation'

Last Book (Revelation 3:20) 'if anyone opens the door, I'll come in'

God's Choice

1. God's choice precedes our choice

*God chooses to create us, whether we want to be created or not!
We have no choice in the matter (Genesis 1)*

2. God's/Jesus' Choice is critical throughout the Bible

God chooses Israel (Deuteronomy 7:6) 'You I have chosen'

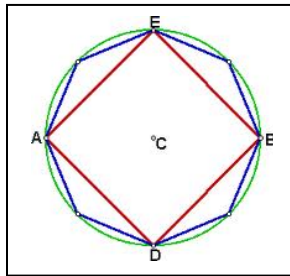
Jesus chooses his disciples – John 13:18

(see other passages above)

Paul – God chooses us to be his people (Ephesians 1:4)

'before the foundation of the world'

God's Choice and our Choices! ... An unresolved Conundrum! Mystery!



The Bible, and the Presbyterian Confessions live with this tension without resolving it. That is, they reject 'fatalism' on the one hand and absolute free will on the other hand. This is not just a theological excuse: there are 'mysteries in Science and Math as well.
e.g., How many straight lines in a circle? None? Many? OR ... Infinite?

The Biblical Importance of Predestination

1. While one verse (Acts 13:48) speaks of those 'appointed/destined to eternal life,' and another speaks of 'objects of wrath made for destruction' (Romans 8:22) **the word "predestination" itself is never used in the Bible to speak about "who goes where eternally."**
2. Rather, in the Bible, *predestination is a word of comfort, assuring that*
 - a. *God has predetermined that those who believe in Christ will reach their destination;-- their full restoration to the image of Christ. What amazing good news!*
 - b. *God's choice of us is stronger than our choice of God.
God's faithfulness to us is stronger than our faith in God. Thank God! (John 10:27-29)*
 - c. *God's will/choice is not capricious or arbitrary: the one who predestines is always the same as the one who sends Christ to us, who is just and fair and who loves to be a Redeemer and Savior.*

JOHN CALVIN

Our theological forefather, John Calvin, warned his readers to treat the matter with humility. To Calvin the two bottom lines remained (1) the right of God to rule the universe as he chose, and (2) the call of God to which we humans must respond by making real choices based on God's promises given to us in Jesus Christ. -- ***'let us not be ashamed to be ignorant in this matter wherein there is a certain learned ignorance.'*** *Institutes*. 3:21.1

SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, 1561 (PCUSA Book of Confessions)

We Are to Have a Good Hope for All. And although God knows who are his, and here and there mention is made of the small number of elect, yet we must hope well of all, and not rashly judge any man to be a reprobate. For Paul says to the Philippians, "I thank my God for you all, because of your fellowship in the Gospel, being persuaded that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:3 ff.).

PREVENIENT GRACE What John Wesley called 'prevenient grace' is remarkably close to the Presbyterian understanding that God's action always precedes and enables human response:

We acknowledge God's prevenient grace, the divine love that surrounds all humanity and precedes any and all of our conscious impulses. This grace prompts our first wish to please God, our first glimmer of understanding concerning God's will, and our "first slight transient conviction" of having sinned against God. God's grace also awakens in us an earnest longing for deliverance from sin and death and moves us toward repentance and faith. (The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2000).

Writings, Articles connected to the Sermon

Clockwork Image: Christian Perspective on Science, Donald M.

Mackay (1997) (late Prof Neuroscience, Keele Univ., England)

"Francis Collins: The Scientist as Believer," Feb 2007

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0702/voices.html>

"How to Cope with Creeping Mechanism," Thomas W. Clark

Sept 2007, <http://www.naturalism.org/determin.htm>

Human Nature: Reflections on the Integration of Psychology and Christianity, Malcolm Jeeves, 2006.

Institutes of the Christian Religion, John Calvin, Book 3: Chs 21-24

Playing God, Genetic Determinism and Human Freedom, Ted Peters, 1997

"Genetic Determinism," <http://www.enotes.com/science-religion-encyclopedia/genetic-determinism/print>

The Reason for God, "How Can a Loving God send People to Hell?"

Timothy Keller, 2008