

ROMANS (8:29)

Predestined to Choose

PART 37 – MAY 29, 2005

PURPOSE & REASON

Last week we read Romans 8:28.

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. – Romans 8:28 NIV

As you may recall, this promise has two conditions:

1. It is for “those who love him”
2. *And* those “who have been called according to his purpose”

Q: And do you remember what his *purpose* for His loved ones is?

A: To restore our God-likeness by refining our Christ-likeness.

In today’s verse, Paul defines this purpose, gives us God’s reason, and reveals just how we can know that God is in control of all things, for this good.

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. – Romans 8:29 NIV

The purpose: “To be conformed to the likeness of his Son”

The reason: “That he might be the firstborn among many brothers”

- God wants Jesus to stand out as the *firstborn* in his Kingdom.

And [Jesus] is ... the firstborn ... so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [Christ] ... – *Colossians 1:18-19 NIV*

You see, Christ-likeness is not the *ultimate* goal. It’s part of the plan, but there’s a reason behind it and for it. The ultimate goal is the exaltation of Christ as God. God designed and destined believers to share Christ’s glory, so that his glory would be reflected and magnified in the countless mirrors of those who have been conformed to his image.

Q: Will you be one of those mirrors, reflecting his glory?

Before you were ever created, it was an established fact whether or not you would be one of “those he foreknew”. I call it an established “fact” because all knowledge is based on *fact*; fact is not based on knowledge.

- As humans, we are mostly limited to “after-knowledge”.
- Whereas, an eternal God has unlimited “foreknowledge”.

But that doesn’t change the fact that a fact has to exist *before* it can be known; whether it’s foreknown or after-known. It’s like watching a rerun of I Love Lucy. You *know* she’s gonna stuff those chocolates down her blouse! She hasn’t done it *yet*, but your foreknowledge is based on an established fact.

- God foreknows the future fact of your decision for Christ.

All that to say, his foreknowledge doesn’t establish whether or not you come to Christ, he’s just pre-aware of what you will do.

PREDESTINED

- And those God foreknew, “he also predestined”.

Some people believe Paul is indicating that God *chooses* who will accept and who will reject Christ as their Savior. But that ignores an important aspect of this passage. Remember, this was written exclusively to/for believers (those who *love* him and are *called* according to his purpose). So Paul isn’t referring to a “choice” of who’ll be *saved*, but to a “destiny,” pre-appointed for those who are “foreknown”.

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son ... - Romans 8:29 NIV

- The destiny of every believer is to become like Christ.

God’s “ultimate goal” of magnifying Christ’s glory by sharing it with those who would reflect it, was established before the foundation of the world was set.

CALVINISM & ARMINIANISM

The problem with the answer I just gave you, is that it seems to place God’s sovereignty secondary to man’s decisions.

Q: Do we make decisions because of God’s will, or does God set his will according to our decisions (that he foreknows)?

In [Christ] we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will ... - Ephesians 1:11 NIV

Q: Doesn’t all of history have a preordained plan and purpose?

All of history is woven together by trillions of individual decisions. If those decisions aren’t under God’s sovereign control, than how can the flow of history be?

Q: What would've happened if Pilate decided to pardon Jesus?

To answer this, *Calvinists* contend that God has predetermined control over every aspect of human existence. And they even extend this to who does and doesn't receive salvation.

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. – Acts 13:48 NIV

But *Arminians* say that this makes us kind of like puppets. They question how God could judge those who weren't "appointed" if he was the one secretly controlling everything. And they point out all of the scriptures that tell us to take personal responsibility for our decisions and actions.

... choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... - Joshua 24:15 NIV

I believe the Bible is very clear that God has total control over *everything*, including all of our decisions and actions ... so, I guess I'm a Calvinist.

But, I also believe the Bible is clear that we have a personal freedom of choice that God ordained for us to make on our own ... so, I guess I'm an Arminian.

HOLY STING

You see, I think it's both. I believe that our self-determining acts are caused *and* uncaused at the very same time. This isn't a contradiction ... it's a paradox. We just have to answer a simple question:

Q: How does God predestine and predetermine *every* choice ever made, without infringing on our freedom of choice?

Q: If the police set up a sting (a drug bust), and a crook makes a drug deal, are his actions caused or uncaused?

A: Both; but from different perspectives.

- The cops did everything they could to make sure it went down exactly as they had pre-planned. It was caused.
- The crook made the choice to break the law. It was uncaused.

In fact, if the crook could prove (from his perspective) it was caused, it would be entrapment; and he *couldn't* be condemned.

Q: Do you know what entrapment is?

A: The act of luring or tricking someone into performing a previously or otherwise un-contemplated illegal act. For instance, a female vice squad officer posing as a hooker, can't call out and solicit; she must wait to be *solicited*.

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. – James 1:13-14 NIV

In this way, God can predetermine and predestine the outcome of any and every given situation by manipulating the circumstances and foreknowing the feely chosen decisions of all involved.

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. – Acts 4:27-28 NIV

Q: Was their decision to crucify Christ caused or uncaused?

A: From God's perspective, caused. From Pilate's, uncaused!

LOVE BUBBLES

Now picture a historical timeline. On it (like a string of pearls) are these biospheres, with a human inside each one. Each bubble is exactly when and where God preset, preordained, pre-established, and predestined it to be.

- We don't choose when we're born, where we're born, who we're born to, or our genetic make-up, or the situations and circumstances that surround us on a daily basis.

And every person is where they need to be to make the free choice (he foreknew) that'll carry out and confirm his perfect, sovereign plan and purpose.

- This is God's perspective ... and it's very *caused*.

Now, inside this bubble of grace, God has sovereignly created a miraculously unique environment; an environment of free choice. God's influence presses in, yet never overriding our will. Temptation presses in, but not more than we can withstand. These two "atmospheric pressures" have to exist in order to offer us options. And we are *forced* to make a free choice.

- This is our perspective ... and it's very *uncaused*.

Q: Why would God go to such lengths to protect our free choice?

A: This is perhaps God's greatest creation: a mechanism to bring forth authentic, heart-felt, freely chosen love (from nothing)!

- These are love-bubbles!

To have children who genuinely love him – not just *act* lovingly toward him – I believe God gave us the capacity to reject him. If love is coerced, programmed, or guaranteed, it is something else (such as duty or obligation or automation).

- And God created us to recognize and desire so much more.
- That's why I believe that we were predestined ... to choose.