

# Biblical Concept of Predestination

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The purpose of this essay is to identify and briefly consider the set of ideas, or aspects that together compose the concept of predestinate presented by the Apostle Paul in scripture. It does not present a comprehensive explanation of the doctrine of predestination. To accomplish that task requires extensive explanations of the full meaning of each aspect of predestinate. This essay stops well short of that ambitious goal. It represents an effort to examine the simple meaning of the plain language Paul used when he wrote on the topic of predestination.

It is submitted for the reader's consideration in the hope of accomplishing three things. They are: 1. Identify the aspects Paul attributed to the concept of predestinate. 2. Show that Paul provided a logically valid explanation that in all its aspects presents God's entire revelation of the concept of predestinate. 3. Encourage readers when they encounter explanations of predestination to consider whether they omit one or more of the aspects Paul provided; and, therefore do not conform to the concept of predestination God revealed to Paul.

The Oxford English Dictionary United States English version provides this definition from the viewpoint of philosophy for the word concept: "*An idea or mental picture of a group or class of objects formed by combining all their aspects.*" I use the philosophy oriented meaning of 'concept' to consider the aspects of predestination since philosophy is the study of knowledge. Its primary interest is to discover how knowledge is known truth. This definition fits the objective of understanding Bible doctrines. The Bible contains truthful examples and explanations of all the aspects of various doctrines because it is God's revealed word and God is truth.

The first thing we must do in order to understand the concept of predestination is determine its aspects or parts; which is sometimes referred to as its context. This can be discovered by considering how the word is used in the Bible in connection to other subjects. With predestinate this is pretty simple since it is used only four times in two books of the New Testament, both of which were written by the same author. (Elsewhere in scripture other terms are supplied for the same Greek word by the KJV translators. I will address those a bit later.) The Apostle Paul used predestinate twice in Romans Chapter 8 and predestinated twice in Ephesians Chapter 1. The fact that we have a single author and the location of the word is closely spaced both times he used it makes identifying the aspects (or context if you prefer) of predestinate a bit easier than with some other Bible topics (such as baptism, for instance).

Romans 8:29 reads: "*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among **many brethren.***" Verse 30 continues the thought; "*Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*" Since Paul provided no new meaning or qualifier to the word 'predestinate' in verse 30 we understand it has the same meaning in both verses. It appears Paul employed repetition as a literary device to draw attention to the connection of the five things he mentions verses 29 & 30. This was likely done to imply the five things "**work together for good**" which is asserted in Romans 8:28.

In verse 29 Paul tells us God predestinated that many people who are '*brethren*' to Jesus would be made like Jesus. The only other thing we learn about predestinate from these two verses is those who were predestinated were foreknown of God, called, justified and glorified. All of these things are associated by a common object. The object is ***whom***; which refers to the people Paul characterized as "***many brethren***." Paul equally associated the pronoun "***whom***" to foreknown, predestinated, called, justified and glorified.

However, it is important to understand the common thread of the object "***whom***" does not mean all five things are aspects of predestination. The subject in the sentence is "***He***" who is identified as God in verse 28. Paul indicates God applied all of these things to the same object; but the things He applied are not all the same thing. Predestination is not the same thing as God's foreknowledge. It is not effectual calling. It is not eternal justification. It is not glorification. These things work together. A needle, thread, and thimble work together to achieve a common purpose of sewing material, but they each have their own distinct characteristics and purpose.

So now we know that predestination applies to many people who are "*brethren*" and has to do with them being made like Jesus. But Paul doesn't tell us what he means by the phrase "*conformed to the image of his Son*." It is likely he didn't because explaining the details of predestination was not a primary focus of the Roman Letter.

However, a few years later Paul wrote another letter, this time to the Church at Ephesus. In this letter he also mentions predestination. What he wrote to the Ephesians is consistent with what he wrote in the Roman letter. He is still talking about people who are predestinated by God. But this time he tells us a bit more about what God predestinated for them.

In Ephesians 1:5 Paul indicates these people are "***predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself***." This phrase raises an interesting point. Paul also mentioned adoption in Romans 8:21, just a few sentences before he mentioned predestination. He wrote that God devised a "*glorious liberty of the children of God*" who are "*waiting for the adoption, to wit the redemption of our body*." (See Romans 8:20-23.) From this we understand the adoption God predestinated will redeem the bodies of His children to glorious liberty. When we add this to what Paul said a few verses later in Romans 8:29-30 we understand the phrase "*conformed to the image of his son*" has to do with the redemption of our bodies to glorious liberty.

God's children are predestinated "*by Jesus Christ to himself*." This phrase suggests predestination is a closed concept of God's foreordination and predetermination: It is by God and to God. God alone predestinated "***by Jesus Christ***." This likely refers to Christ performing the necessary task of atonement to bring about what God predestinated. It also refers to the resurrection when Christ will come a second time to redeem the bodies of those for whom He suffered and died. When Jesus comes again God will redeem those whom He predestinated "***to himself***." This indicates God is sovereign in predestinating: Everything God predestinated occurs by Jesus Christ, as a consequence of His work. It is all directed to God, to the praise of God's glory by making those who receive its benefits accepted in the beloved.

Ephesians 1:5 also tells us why God predestinated. He did so "*according to the good pleasure of his will*." The term "***good pleasure***" is a translation of the Greek word εὐδοκία (eudokia). It supplies the

added dimension of delight to the motive of agreeable will. The reason "good" was added by the translators of the KJV is to more accurately characterize the quality of God's motive to predestinate as delighted pleasure. This means God was delighted to predestinate his children to be adopted by the redemption of their bodies to be raised in glorious liberty that conforms with the image of Christ.

The final mention of ***predestinated*** in the Ephesian letter reveals a few more details. In Ephesians 1:11, Paul states: "*In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*" Verse 11 is a clause in a compound sentence that begins in verse 7 and continues to the end of verse 12 I won't look at the whole sentence for the sake of space and since not doing so won't take away from our focus on the concept of predestination.

In verse 11 Paul associates predestination to an inheritance. The phrase "***obtained an inheritance***" alludes to the Jewish custom of choosing by casting lots. It is translated from the Greek word κληρώ (kleroo). It is defined in Thayer's Greek/English Lexicon as: "1) to cast lots, determine by lot; 2) to choose by lot; 3) to allot, assign by lot; 3a) on to another as a possession; 4) in NT: to make a lot, i.e. a heritage, private possession." This meaning suggests predestination applies to those whom God chose. Paul's language is supported by Moses' statement in Deuteronomy 32:9 "***For the LORD'S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.***" When considered with Ephesians 1:5, we understand the inheritance here pertains to those who are "*predestinated unto the adoptions of children.*"

The phrase in verse 11, "***according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will***" infers God is sovereign in predestinating. When considered with Paul's statement in verse 5, that God predestinated "*by Jesus Christ to himself,*" this statement informs us God's sovereignty includes Him actively working to accomplish what He has predestinated. From this we understand predestination is more than God prearranging circumstances so something is sure to occur. Rather, God actively works to accomplish what He predestinated. This means: whatever God has predestinated, He alone actively and directly brings to pass.

So, what have we learned about predestination? We know that only the Apostle Paul wrote about it and he did so just twice. By examining context in the places it is discussed by Paul, we understand the concept of predestinate is composed of seven aspects. The seven aspects are:

1. God predestinated people.
2. God predestinated they be conformed to the image of his Son.
3. God predestinated they be His children by adoption.
4. God predestinated they have glorious liberty by the redemption of their bodies.
5. God was delighted to predestinate people.
6. God acted sovereignly when He predestinated by Jesus Christ to Himself.
7. God actively and directly works alone to accomplish what He predestinated.

This is not to suggest predestination is the only concept of God having foreordained or predetermined. In fact, there are many passages that indicate God predetermined other things and actions. For instance, the statement by God in Genesis 1:26 "***let us make man in our image***" implies He predetermined to make man before actually doing so.

Another example of God predetermining and even foreordaining is the atonement. In Acts 2:23, Peter states, "***Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.***" This phrase indicates God prearranged Christ would give himself over to the hands of wicked men; whom God knew, based upon the time, place, and circumstance of Christ's incarnation, would crucify Him. The Greek word translated "***delivered***" in Acts 2:23 is ἑκδοτος (ekdotos). It means: 1) given over, delivered up; 1a) to enemies, or to the power, the will, of someone." The word '***foreknowledge***' is from the Greek word πρόγνωσις (prognosis). It means: "1) foreknowledge; 2) forethought, pre-arrangement." (This is a different form of the word and has a different meaning from '***foreknow***' as used by Paul in Romans 8:29) Peter did not say God predestinated Jesus would submit to crucifixion at the hands of wicked men. This is because God's predetermination and predestination are not identical in all aspects.

The word *predestinate* is translated from the Greek word προορίζω (proorizo). It has a general meaning of predetermination. It is a compound of two words: πρό (pro); means before; and the meaning of *ορίζω* (horizo), which means: To define; to mark out the boundaries or limits (of any place or thing) to determine, appoint; that which has been determined, to appointment, decree; to ordain. The meaning of these words together carries the thought of predetermining limits or boundaries. In addition to Romans chapter 8 and Ephesians chapter 1 *προορίζω* (proorizo) is used two other places in scripture. It is used once by Luke in Acts 4:28 (*determined before*) and once by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:7 (*ordained before*). In both places the KJV translators used different phrases to interpret the word.

In a general sense, setting limits or boundaries is what God did when He predestinated. Of all the possible outcomes of His foreknowledge of those whom He loved, He predestinated they would be conformed to the image of Christ. The same general aspect of the meaning of *proorizo*, as setting limits or boundaries, applies to its use in Acts 4:28 and 1 Corinthians 2:7, but in these verses, it is not applied to people; therefore, it is missing at least one aspect which Paul used to distinguish the concept of predestinate. Actually, several aspects Paul revealed in Romans 8 and Ephesians 1 that together form the concept of predestinate are missing from these texts.

In Acts 4:28, we find the phrase; "*For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.*" The text refers to the scope and nature of what Christ would endure at the hands of Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel to accomplish the atonement. By His own judgment and actions, God predetermined the limit and He set the boundaries on the things which Jesus suffered. He did so by choosing the time, the place, and the circumstance of Christ's incarnation. By choosing the time and place for the atonement, God set limits as to what, how, and by whose hands Jesus would suffer for our sins. To the exclusion of any other time or place, the Savior came to first century A.D. Judea; which was an occupied province of the Roman Empire. With the consent of the Jewish people and by the insistence of corrupt Jewish civil and religious leaders, He was judged by Roman Gentiles. Based on false accusations that He was an insurrectionist against Roman authority Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea, sentenced Jesus to die by crucifixion. Crucifixion was Rome's most painful form of capital punishment. It was imposed only on the most serious and ignoble malefactors.

God limited the duration of Christ's suffering by determining what was necessary to satisfy His wrath. In Romans 9:28, Paul interprets Isaiah 10:22-23 to mean the atonement was a short work: "*For he will*

*finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.*" The phrase "**cut it short in righteousness**" refers to God's righteous judgment that the duration of Christ's suffering before He died would be cut short. In other words, the length of time of His suffering was limited by God to be less than it normally took for someone to die by Roman crucifixion and certainly less than eternal suffering in consequence of eternal condemnation. The methods the Romans used to crucify someone were intended to maximize both the intensity of suffering and its duration before death occurred. God limited the duration to only that time necessary to fulfill the requirement of satisfying His wrath. Once that was accomplished, Jesus gave up the Ghost and returned to the Father. In terms of Roman crucifixion God "**cut short**" the duration of Christ's suffering.

In comparison to God's punishment for sin, which is eternal condemnation, the time it took for Christ to fulfill the requirements of the atonement was short. It was a short work. When Jesus had fully suffered for our sins, He returned to the Father. By His own hand and counsel God "**determined before**" the limits of what and for how long Jesus would suffer.

In I Corinthians 2:7-8, Paul mentions the mystery of God's hidden wisdom in regard to Christ's incarnation and the atonement. The words *mystery* and *hidden* are used by Paul to indicate God kept secret the circumstance, person, work, and purpose of Christ's coming from those involved in His crucifixion. Its details remained generally hidden until the Apostles began preaching the Gospel. In the same context, in verse 14, Paul indicates the significance of His person and work remains hidden to all who lack the ability to receive spiritual things. "*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*"

God kept hidden His wisdom contained in the details of the Covenant of Grace which He "*ordained before the world.*" In the "*fulness of the time*" Jesus came to redeem all whom the Father gave Him in the Covenant by His suffering and death (see Gal 4:4-6). Until John came preaching "*repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" and told his followers "*behold the Lamb of God*", the person and work of Christ was generally hidden. Even then, God's wisdom to have Jesus "*save his people from their sins*" was not understood until the gospel was preached and received with power from the Holy Spirit beginning at Pentecost. (See Acts Chapter 2.)

Jesus came to earth having "*no reputation*" among men; and the "*princes of this world*" considered him neither God nor king. He was God incarnate as the Son of God, but they knew him only as Mary and Joseph's son. Christ came to atone for those God chose in Him by His suffering and death; but the rulers saw Him only as a political threat to their power and authority. His purpose in coming was to bring glory to God's people by saving them from their sins; but they did not believe He could save Himself, much less anyone else. By keeping this a *hidden mystery* from those who crucified the Savior, God limited what would have otherwise occurred. This is indicated by Paul's emphatic declaration, "*for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*" This statement was neither supposition nor conjecture, but a statement of fact; that had the rulers known the details of God's hidden wisdom, they would not have crucified the Lord.

Why did the KJV translators choose to use other terms for *προορίζω* *proorizo* in Acts 4:28 and I Corinthians 2:7? They chose different terms because these texts do not include all seven aspects of the

concept of predestination that are supplied in Romans Chapter 8 and Ephesians Chapter 1. For instance, neither text refers to God predetermining the final disposition of His children in conformation "*to the image of his Son*" to a "*glorious liberty*" by the redemption of their bodies. Nothing in Acts 4:28 suggests God was delighted to predetermine the necessary scope and duration of Christ's suffering in order to appease His wrath. Likewise, nothing in I Corinthians 2:7 indicates God delighted in keeping hidden the details of the person, work and purpose of Christ's coming from those who crucified Him. Finally, nothing mentioned in Acts 4:28 suggests God actively participated in the activities that produced the suffering and ended with the death of Christ.

In the absence of some of the aspects that together form the concept of predestination presented in the Roman and Ephesian Letters, the KJV translators chose other terms to convey different concepts. Their informed choices and prudent restraint should serve as a lesson to us who have significantly less understanding of the original languages of the Bible. If men who were the acknowledged experts of their day in both linguistics and exegesis exercised cautious restraint to avoid confusing the concept of predestination with other concepts of God foreordaining and predetermining, we might well do the same. In other words, where scripture is silent, we should have the good sense to do the same.

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