

A Question About Predestination

Talk of 'predestined' I was chatting the other day and someone said "If God knows who those are that will become His followers, does that mean that those who don't (those that are not predestined) are just automatically doomed to Hell. "So, does evangelism just reach those who are supposed to hear and the rest are left behind. I would have thought that evangelism was there to reach as many others as possible - irrespective of those whom God has predestined - surely there is a chance that there are those, who are not predestined, who will hear and turn.

While the question is a good one to ask, it starts in the wrong place. It starts by assuming too much. It assumes that people deserve something better than what they're getting, specifically hell. And God is presented as the bad guy who does something wrong in putting such wonderful people as you and I, into a supremely terrible place. You see, the beginning is all wrong. Let's get the beginning right and then the rest will fit better and be true.

None of us, not even Mother Theresa, have done a single thing that makes us look good in God's eyes. We are sinners from birth. We are haters of God and haters of everything that pertains to God from the factory to the scrap heap. When we do something that we think is good, like help an old lady that we don't know across a busy road, God sees not the good but the evil – the attempt to do something to make us worthy of heaven and look good in God's eyes and right there is the problem – wrong motive, push 'me,' make me look good, fool God into thinking I'm not so bad after all, work for brownie points, in God's eyes or in the old ladies eyes or in my own – it's me, me, me. Good deeds with a wrong motive are bad deeds and that's just the good stuff I try and do, let alone the bad stuff that I do with wrong motives. Michael Jackson got it right, "I'm bad, I'm bad..." All the way from start to finish of this short life, every action seemingly good or clearly evil is performed with the wrong motive and therefore God's got it right, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23) and "no-one is righteous, no, not one" (Rom 3:10).

If we really get that, then the rest fits. Every human being deserves punishment for the godless evil that they have done – everyone, no exceptions. God says that the payment for sin, even a single one (James 2:10), is death (Rom 6:23) not being wiped out of all existence, but eternal condemnation. We may have some objections to that (because of our sinful hearts, we certainly do) but if its God's laws we've broken and God is both the injured party and the righteous judge, then I guess we've totally had it, and every one of us at that. We all rightfully deserve and get hell. God is rightfully just and perfectly within his rights to condemn every one of us to hell. AND HE DOES.

But in just a very, very few cases, God does something different. In fact, he does something altogether surprising. Because God is not only just but is also merciful, He "justifies the ungodly" (that's a really fascinating concept from Rom 4:5). Now we're beginning to get something of a proper idea of what seems to be unjust – not that God sends some to hell, but that some get to go to heaven when they like the rest of the human race don't deserve to be there. God amazingly chooses some out of all this morass of God haters and lifts them out and washes them and calls them justified (that is 'declared righteous') and calls them children and treats them like His own. Why on earth, would a God of holiness do that? Because it shows God up for who He really is. It makes God look good. In fact, it makes God look just as He really is, a God who is good and does good (Ps 119:68) which is world's apart from me trying to make myself look good when in fact, I'm not.

Now out of all these going to hell, how does God choose who will go to heaven? Notice the way the question is asked. This is the biblically accurate way to ask this question. It's the exception that any go to heaven not the exception that some go to hell. That may seem pedantic, but the difference is massive. I trust you see that. Anyway, let's get to the question. On what basis does God make His choice as to who is going to go to heaven from all these that rightfully shouldn't be there at all? Well, put bluntly, God simply chooses according to his own purpose. That's what Eph 1:11 says, "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.." He chooses whom He wants. We know that this choice is not based on the merits or intrinsic value or any aspect in the person chosen. We find that stated many times because we still tend to think that there's something in me that caused God to choose me – something good or of particular usefulness to God more than someone

else. Not so. We're told that many times because we have such a hard time accepting that truth. Paul corrects the Ephesian church with this; "by grace you have been saved, through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9). Paul states the same to the church in Rome; "though they were not yet born and had done nothing good or bad – in order that God's purpose in election might stand, not because of works but because of His call... so then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy" (Rom 9:11,16). John's gospel says the same, "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn 1:12-13). That means that before we ever choose to become disciples of Jesus, God chose us to become His disciples. Jesus chose and found his 12 disciples, they didn't seek out and choose him. He chooses and He calls and He makes that calling effective leading to the salvation of those who were to be saved and are. That's not easy for us human beings to process especially when all of our experience tells us otherwise. For instance, you may say, "I remember confessing my sin and praying and trusting in Jesus – me." Jesus says, "No, it was me; for 'no one comes to me unless the Father draws him' (Jn 6:44), 'I chose you' (Jn 15:16)." It is a serious error to base any belief on human intuition rather than on God's authoritative Word for we are easily deceived.

Moreover, some understand the foreknowledge of God, as God looking down the corridor of time to see which people will choose him and on the basis of their choice then chooses them. But if people are so corrupt in their fallen state, such that they are even described as being dead in their sin (Eph 2:1) no one is able to choose God nor do they want to. Their 'free will' is unbreakably bound to always choose sin and never God or the things of God. Moreover, how is God a sovereign creator if his will and choice are bound by the will and choice of His creatures? Those who hold to this view of God's foreknowledge, readily agree that God is indeed sovereign, but cannot be sovereign over their salvation, which means then that if God is not sovereign over all even their salvation, then God is not sovereign at all. And the Bible claims God is over all (Ps 103:19; 115:3; 135:6; 2Chr 20:6).

I'm sure you see that when the Bible uses the word 'foreknowledge' (1Pet 1:2) or 'foreknew' (Rom 8:29; 11:2) it cannot mean that God knows beforehand what a person will do and bases his choice on theirs, but must refer to the intimate knowledge that God has of every person by the fact that He has a predetermined plan of every event in each person's life (Ps 139:3-6, 16) even appointing the process by which a particular person will hear of Christ, and granting the faith needed for that person to repent and believe in Jesus and to keep them in that same faith to the end (Jas 1:25; Jn 8:31; Rom 2:7; Phil 1:6; Heb 12:2).

This means then that there are some who hear the gospel and it makes no sense to them whatsoever and they go away and don't seek God and don't find Him. And that there are others, who hear the gospel and it lands deep in the soil of a heart and takes root such that they do seek after God and find Him and that that seed grows strong and produces a life of value to God. **That's exactly what the Bible says happens (1Cor 1:18; 2:14-16; 2Cor 4:4-6) and the reason those who can't hear and understand and turn to God is never ever stated as because they are not the elect of God, but because "the god of this world has blinded them" (2Cor 4:4).** Thus, no one will be able to accuse God that they are in the sick condition of sin and death and condemnation because God did not elect them, but rather the truth is that, "people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil" (Jn 3:19).

So people will never ever come to faith unless God predestines or elects them to salvation (Eph 1:4; 2Tim 1:9) and Christ pays for the sin of these particular people (Jn 10:11; Act 20:28; Eph 5:25-27) on the cross and the Holy Spirit convicts of sin (Jn 16:8) God grants faith as a gift (Rom 3:24-25) leading to true salvation and perseverance in that faith (Jn 10:27-29).

The means by which people come to faith is by hearing the word of God (Rom 10:17). We do not know who the elect of God are therefore we must preach the word to everyone (Acts 2:39) and trust the results to God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.