



August 17, 2008

Predestination 3: What Election?

Are there statements in the Bible that, if taken at face value, appear to teach that only those who are “chosen” or “elect” will be saved? The answer is yes. In the same way that the doctrine of salvation by belief only can be made to appear scriptural, so can the idea of predestination. We will look at some of these statements as they appear and will not discuss the greater context until next week. The important point to note here is that misinterpretation is possible and has been done by some of the most notable minds in religious thinking. We will discuss the influences that may predispose us toward the wrong interpretations at the end of the series but for now we will present the material that may lead to the wrong conclusion. The scriptures refer to the “elect” and speak of the chosen. This idea has become a staple not only in religion but also in fiction as well as stories revolve around prophecies, chosen ones etc. All of which, in my opinion, have been greatly influenced by the Bible. We find that Abraham was called as the father of a nation that would be special in light of the purpose for which it would be established (**Gen 12**), and this nation was to be special and keep the name of the Lord alive in the earth (**Ex 19.5**). In the New Testament the wording becomes more specific. During a time of tribulation that came upon the nation later in AD 70, Christ speaks of the providence of God shortening those days for the sake of the elect (**Matt 24.22**). He warns of false Christ’s and prophets who would be able to fool even the “elect” (**Matt 24.24**). Finally at the conclusion of the warnings he speaks of the salvation of the “elect” (**Matt 24.31**). Paul speaks of the “elect” in his letter to the Romans when he states, “**Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.**” (**Rom 8.33**). Peter speaks of Christians he is writing to as the elect according to the foreknowledge of God and the sanctification of the spirit. (**1 Pet 1.1-2**). The terms “predestinate” and “predestinated” only appear a few times in the New Testament. Paul speaks of the predestination of

those justified through Christ when he states, “**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.**” (**Rom 8.29**). Paul goes on to talk of those who were predestinated as being called by God (**Rom 8.30**). It is not hard to see how we should desire to be “called” by God if we assume that there are a limited number of seats available for salvation. Paul, speaking to the Gentile Christians at Ephesus, states, “**Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.**” (**Eph 1.5-6**). Later Paul once more affirms this in **Eph 1.11**. If we look at these statements alone without attempting to reconcile them to their greater context, which, in this case, happens to be the entire Bible, we would have to conclude that there are those who God has foreknown from the beginning of time and therefore has appointed them as the “elect” so that they will receive a “call” from God and be able to do what God wants them to do. This idea at one extreme is depressing, in that it limits the desire to try to seek God, although if we want to we must be one of the elect and therefore are obeying a hidden call. On the other hand it has prompted such extremes as stories of a high school girl having hallucinatory experiences in which God, appearing as a spike haired punker, would set her on missions that did not appear to have any tangible purpose, or an alcoholic suicidal cop who is chosen to do God’s bidding as part of a “second chance”. There are some who have stated that they have been called by God but their activities and life fall far short of what we read in the scriptures. How do we make sense of this? Are we doomed to be righteous and saved no matter what, or are we wasting our time serving God if we happen not to be one of the “elect”?

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