

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Resurrection: Predestinated to Adoption

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 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. (Ephesians 1:3–6, KJV 1900)

If we compare all of Paul's New Testament letters, we discover that most of his letters were written with significant purpose. In most cases, that purpose was to correct some form of bad behavior or bad doctrine, belief and teaching. In this perspective, Ephesians stands apart in that we see no rebuke or correction in the letter. Ephesians come to us as pure affirmative gospel. We see no detours from the affirmed truth of the gospel into rebukes or corrections of error. Beginning to end, Ephesians reports the positive truth of the gospel. Some fifty or sixty years later when John wrote to the Ephesian Church (Revelation 2:1-7), the Holy Spirit warned the church that she faced the danger of His judgment because she had left her "first love," a term that refers to her most important love, not merely to first love in chronological terms. Even the soundest and strongest of churches consists of flawed humans who may lose their focus on godliness and confuse life's true top-most priority. If the Ephesian Church in Revelation left their true first love, what had they chosen as their wrong first love? If you think of your life in the trenches, day to day, not just on Sunday, what is the single most important thing in your life? Family? Career? Financial security? Your reputation in the eyes of the people who are important to you? Let's put the question in slightly different terms. If someone tracked every minute of your life for a week or a month or even a year, aside from sleep, what would they discover occupies the most of your time? If another person could perform a similar audit of your mind, where would they discover you spend most of your mental energy?

The Bible doctrine of predestination is often misunderstood and misused. On one hand, many people look up the meaning of the word "Predestination" on Wikipedia or some other populist media or dictionary. The populist definition associates the word with fatalistic determinism, the idea that God has willed every event that occurs, logically forcing the abominable idea that God has willed sin and all of the depraved actions of evil men. Scripture emphatically rejects this idea. (Jeremiah 7:8-11, 19:5, 23:24-32, 29:23, 32:35; 1 John 2:16) This false idea of fatalistic determinism, though embraced by a confused few who think of

themselves as Christians, is rejected by most. Sadly, the fatalistic extreme idea influences many naïve believers to reject any thought of predestination, even Biblical predestination that distinctly contradicts and refutes fatalism. One extreme, fatalism, causes an opposite extreme, rejection of any belief associated with the word, despite the word appearing four times in the King James Bible as something that God did.

This confused state of affairs makes it incumbent on us to search for and to state as clearly as possible the Bible's teaching on this doctrine. In some form, the King James Bible uses the word a total of four times, twice in Romans 8 and twice in Ephesians 1. In these four instances, the word is used precisely and consistently, and never to indicate that God wills all events including sin. Romans 8 summarizes God's grand purpose for His beloved and chosen people, culminating in our adoption, "...to wit, the redemption of our body." (Romans 8:23) In this context, the redemption of our body refers to the Second Coming and our bodily resurrection. Folks who are inclined toward the fatalistic determinism view of predestination will chop up the verses in Romans 8 and interpret "...all things work together" in Romans 8:28 as referring to every event that occurs. They hold that God either purposes to use an event in some way for good, or He refuses to allow it to occur at all. Thus, the moral dilemma of fatalism rests solidly on the shoulders of these people. Double speak and word games abound in the typical attempts to dodge this dilemma, but all such attempts fail for the idea in fact does place the blame for sin and wickedness squarely onto God. Within the last year, I was researching a particular idea on the internet and ran across a website that serves to exemplify this error. The author of the website specifically stated that at times God intervenes and prevents a man from sinning, as when God prevented Abimelech from committing adultery with Sarah. (Genesis 20) The author continued his thoughts with the allegation that at other times God "purposes" the sin of adultery, in which cases the sin occurs. Based on the fixed moral Law of God as revealed in the Ten Commandments, God "Purposes" to use our godly

conduct, not violate His own Law with adultery or any other sin.

The right interpretation of any passage of Scripture requires our study of the passage in its context. In the case of "all things" in Romans 8:28, we could not definitively qualify the term by Verse 28 alone. However, a brief review of the context discloses that Paul uses this same general term, "all things," in Verse 32, "...how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" In Romans 8:32, Paul tightly links "all things" to what God gives to us through His not spared Son. Even the most devoted of fatalists would shirk at claiming that Jesus' death causes sin and all of the wicked actions of wicked men. However, if we follow Paul's line of reasoning, the contextual meaning of "all things" must be consistent. Whatever Paul intended by "all things" in Verse 28 must be the same as "all things" in Verse 32. The term in Verse 32 can only refer to the benevolent gifts of grace that God provides for all of His chosen people through the substitutionary death of His Son for us. Thus, "all things" in Romans 8:28 cannot mean every event that occurs, as claimed by the fatalistic determinists.

If we examine Paul's use of "predestinate" in Romans 8:29-30, the point will lead us directly back to Verse 23 and the "redemption of our body." While God commands His children to strive in this life to increasingly conform our minds and conduct to Jesus and His example, these passages always involve a command, not an indication of divine and exclusive cause. We may slowly change increasingly like the image of Jesus if we steadfastly look to Him and to His "...things which are not seen...things which are...eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18; Paul's development of 2 Corinthians Chapter 3 in which we may be changed increasingly into the image of Jesus if we steadfastly behold "...as in a glass (Mirror)" the image or example of Jesus that we see in Scripture) All of God's children do not so steadfastly look at Him. In the context of Chapter 3, Paul reminds us of very religious Jews who sincerely ignored Jesus and steadfastly looked at Moses' Law instead. In so looking, these people covered their eyes from seeing Jesus and His glory, and therefore could not transform their lives to the image of His glory. Paul specifically reminds us that no fatalistic determinism was involved in this situation. **If** these people turn their hearts to the Lord instead of Moses, "...the veil shall be taken away." (2 Corinthians 3:16)

In Romans 8:29-30, however, Paul indicates that God has predestinated everyone whom He foreknew in electing love and everyone whom He shall glorify at the Second Coming by their bodily resurrection "to be conformed to the image of his Son," at which time He shall "...be the firstborn among **many** brethren," not the few who find the narrow way and the strait gate of the righteousness of faith. This context deals with the adoption of our physical body at the Second Coming to the sinless

image of our Lord Jesus Christ. God's predestination here refers to "whom," people, not "what," sinful acts of men.

In our study passage, Ephesians 1:3-6, Paul specifically states what he infers in the Romans 8 context; God predestinated **us**, people, not sinful events, to the adoption of sons. Our spirit or soul was changed at the new birth; similarly, our body shall be changed at the Second Coming and our bodily resurrection. What God does to the spirit or soul Scripture calls "born again," literally, "born from above." Our body shall not be born again at the resurrection; it shall be adopted into the family of God at that glorious event.

...according to the good pleasure of his will. God's will is not psychotic, at times revealing His goodness and at other times revealing a mirror opposite diabolical being who secretly dabbles with sin and every sort of wickedness to supposedly bring good out of sin. God's will is fixed, always good and reflecting His pleasure that Scripture always associates with His righteousness, never with sin.

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In Scripture, God's grace saves us from sin. It does not play games with sin. If we accept Jesus' analogy of a tree always consistently producing one and only one kind of fruit, we cannot—and shall not—accept the idea that God is responsible, either directly or indirectly, for both righteousness and sin. We shall have eternity with God in heaven to praise the glory of His grace that caused or made us fully and wholly, body, soul, and spirit, "...accepted in the beloved."

...that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. In this thought "should be" does not define a duty, but rather a purpose or objective, God's final objective for His chosen and beloved children. Paul states God's election and predestination in terms of God's ultimate objective, an objective that we shall only realize when He raises our bodies from death and fashions them to the likeness of His beloved Son. God's ultimate objective in predestination is not ever man's sin, but always the resurrection of His beloved children so that, body, soul, and spirit, we shall be "...holy and without blame before him in love."

In its ultimate simplicity, then, God's predestination deals with what He has done to secure our final bodily resurrection, the grand culmination of all His purpose and grace, at which time we shall be "holy and without blame before him in love." Rather than wrestling with the immoral dilemma of fatalism and calling it God's "purpose," Scripture reminds us. Do you object to the Lord's return and your resurrection in His image, beloved by Him and "holy and without blame," so that you can suitably praise Him for eternity as you desire, but cannot fully accomplish now? Of course not! Then, my friend, you do not object to Biblical predestination, for that is its meaning.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor