

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Predestination Represents God's Will, Not Ours

*Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: 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. (Ephesians 1:9–11, KJV 1900)*

Over the years I have often referred to the error of a few who isolate Romans 8:28 from its context, making "all things" work for their personal good. In this view, they ignore Paul's clear definition of "all things" in Romans 8:32 as referring to what God gives us through His not spared Son. As I ponder the passage before us, it occurs to me that this errant view represents the epitome of selfishness, subjecting even God to the person who holds the view. "God is working for my good, so whatever I do, I can rest assured that He has 'permitted' it and intends to use it for His glory." With this belief, a man can--and many advocates of the idea in fact do--rationalize any and every sin he chooses to commit. In both the Romans 8 and the Ephesians 1 context, the emphasis resides in God's glory and purpose, not our personal benefit or gain. In neither context do we find any implication that God either directly or indirectly causes sin or that He "Orchestrates" or manipulates sin so that the sin produces a supposed "Greater good." When God warned Adam of the consequences of violating that simple law, He did not in any way imply to Adam that Adam's violation would actually result in a greater good for humanity. He warned Adam of one consequence of his violation; he would die.

Occasionally advocates of fatalistic determinism will cite our present study passage and emphasize their belief that God "...worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." From this point, they catapult their belief into the amoral idea that God in some way orchestrates or manipulates every event that occurs for good, in the end, "For my good." Just as they obviously ignore Romans 8:32, in this context, they ignore Ephesians 1:10. For a brief moment, ponder the wicked actions of wicked men whose sinful infamy is recorded in history. Also ponder the wicked acts of people whom you have known. Consider the man or woman who ignores the vow of faithfulness made to God in marriage and who cruelly and habitually abandons that vow, all the while claiming that he/she did nothing wrong. When a person so sins, Scripture never allows the sinner to pass the buck and blame God for the sin. And Scripture emphatically does not ever indicate that God either directly or indirectly caused the event because He intends to in some way

orchestrate or use it for His glory or, far more fancifully, use it for good to the sinner who chose to consciously ignore God's moral Law and indulge his/her sinful appetite as their ultimate personal "Good." Paul refers to such a mindset with intense rejection, "...whose god is their belly." (Philippians 3:19)

Within any specific context that we study, the integrity of Scripture requires that we apply a consistent meaning to words and terms, not change their meaning as we wish. In our present context, Paul states that God works all things "...after the counsel of his own will." In the Ephesians 1:10, immediately prior to this verse, Paul also used the same term. In that verse quoted below, what is the meaning that Paul applies to "all things"?

*That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one **all things** in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.*

Whatever Paul may intend by his use of "all things" in Ephesians 1:11 must agree with his use of the same term in Ephesians 1:10. Does God intend to gather together all of your and my sins into one in Jesus at the Second Coming? Preposterous! Those "things" that God presently works according to the counsel of His own will are the same "all things" that He shall gather together in one in Christ Jesus at the Second Coming.

Think of Paul's reference to our gathering together in one in Christ. At the Second Coming, our bodies shall be somewhere in this world. Our soul and spirit shall be in glory with the Lord. Neither our body without the soul and spirit, nor our soul and spirit without our body constitute "Us" as a whole person. Less that the personal "me," a dead body or a bodiless soul and spirit are incomplete "things." However, Paul comforts us with the glorious truth of the Second Coming when the Lord shall "...gather together in one..." those "things" back to the complete persons whom He redeemed by His unspared Son. Thus, Paul's point is not that God manipulates every sin that occurs according to some hypothetical "Secret will" by which He supposedly contradicts every moral law He ever

gave to man, but that God has purposed and shall complete His purpose for everything necessary to wholly redeem every one of His beloved children at the Second Coming.

In our study passage, Paul refers to what God has in store for His children as an "inheritance." Our being in heaven finally, body, soul, and spirit, is not a reward or a partially earned bounty. It is an inheritance. That means we shall be there because of a family relationship and because God included us in His will, not because of our will. Think about the logic of an inheritance. If people may will themselves into an inheritance, why don't you will yourself into the inheritance of Bill Gates? Bill Gates determines who is included in his will, not you or I, and not our will. Likewise, God chose the people whom He would include in His will, and that choice was based on His merciful grace, not on your or my will or good works.

*...not of works, but of him that calleth. (Romans 9:11b)*

*So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. (Romans 9:16)*

A common idea of our day holds that God looked into the future, knew who would believe, who would be "willing" to Him and to His will, and who would obey Him; supposedly, based on this foreseen good in them, God chose them. Paul's points in these verses refutes this idea. Past or future, God's election is not based on our works but on God who calls His own to Himself. Our election, and thus our eternal salvation, living for eternity with God in His glory, is not of those who will, nor of those who "run" the Christian race the best. It is all of God who shows mercy to save anyone at all. God chose the specific people whom He would save, and He chose not to save them based on their will, or willingness or their works and running the Christian race. He chose all whom He did choose based on His mercy and His will.

One of Scripture's most powerful lessons on God's election builds on the life of two Old Testament men, twin brothers, Jacob and Esau. No better example could exist. Both men were born into the same family at the same time. And, to be candid and faithful to the historical lesson in Genesis, both men demonstrate sinful traits that leave them equally undeserving. Do not search Jacob's life for deserving righteousness. You won't find it. After using Jacob and Esau as an example of election and of non-election in Romans 9, Paul leads us to the one logical conclusion that Scripture consistently affirms. God's election of anyone is not based on anything good that that person supposedly did, but on His own loving mercy.

A second point requires our emphasis. God's election, as described in Scripture, is not limited to a handful of people out of the mass of humanity who happen to look like you, agree with you, or

whose personality is compatible with yours. God's election as set forth in Scripture is broadly inclusive, not pathetically exclusive. (Revelation 5:9; 7:9. Notice in Revelation 7:9 that the number of redeemed, "...a great multitude, which no man could number..." is directly contrasted with the finite number, 144,000, whom John identified as the "...sealed servants" of God. (Revelation 7:3) I rejoice that Scripture's promise of the inclusiveness of God's election might surprise a number of folks who view election as exclusive, but always including them and their favorites.

Even the passages that affirm a large number as being included in God's election categorically reject the notion of universal salvation of all humans. "...out of" leaves no doubt; God didn't elect all of humanity to eternal salvation.

In Scripture "predestinate" has to do with the final outcome of God's choice of those whom He in mercy loved and chose to save from their sins. The Greek word translated "predestinate" in the King James Bible defines the setting of limits in advance, not the unbridling of any limits, or especially the devious idea that God causes sin, **either directly or indirectly**. "**Pro**" defines something done in advance. "**Horidzo**" defines the "Horizon," the point at which the landscape ends and the sky begins. Even the two passages where the King James translators translated this word by a different English word have to do with Jesus' sufferings for our sins and not with every event in human history. And in those two passages, the idea of limitation prevails. Wicked men would gladly have done far more to Jesus than they did, but God limited what they did; He didn't cause them to do what they did. Jesus' words, "I have power..." takes the whole issue of His sufferings and death away from Pilate, the Sanhedrin, and the Roman soldiers.

The next time someone tells you that he/she objects to the idea of predestination ask the question. "Do you object to being raised from the dead at the Second Coming without your sins and glorified so that you can wholly praise God for eternity?" That, my friends is the grand and final outcome of God's election. The two contexts where the King James translators used this word harmonize in naming the final outcome of God's election and predestination. First, all whom He knew, loved, in advance shall be finally and without a single exception "...conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Second, he shall "...gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." Praise God for such loving mercy.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor