

The Church of the Servant King Soteriology Series

SO_6_Predestination & Election – Part 1_Introduction

Introduction

Without a doubt, the subject of the sovereignty of God and the free will of man has probably been one of the most divisive and controversial soteriological concepts since at least the Reformation. The three basic tenets of the Reformation were 1) justification by faith; 2) the universal priesthood of the believer; and 3) the inerrancy of Scripture. These three tenets eventually separated the “protestants” from the Roman Catholic Church. Over time, the protestant groups that emerged would fall into two major categories when considered in view of the subject of predestination. One category is known as Reformed and the other category I would term the Free Grace category. There is probably a wide divergence of views within each category in regard to other doctrines; however, generally speaking, the Reformed category includes those who adhere to a Calvinist position on this subject, whereas the Free Grace category includes those who are either moderate Calvinists or who have adopted an intermediate position between the Calvinist and the Arminian.¹

Generally speaking, the Reformed category adheres to a system of biblical interpretation that is more consistent with Covenant theology; whereas the Free Grace position adheres to a position that is more consistent with a dispensational approach. What makes all of this very confusing is that on any particular point, you might find a theologian or pastor in either category who applies his system of interpretation inconsistently. The result is that some of a dispensational, Free Grace orientation might inadvertently (or overtly) promote elements of the Reformed position and vice versa. I think you can readily see the temporary success of Satan’s strategy of confusing and disillusioning the Church Age believer (and unbelievers) in the greater context of the Angelic Conflict.

In the course of this series, we will examine each of the positions of these two major categories of thought in fairly great depth. It is my desire and hope that at the end of the series, we will have clarity of understanding and a greater appreciation of what was accomplished on our behalf in the mind of God even prior to His first creative act. In addition, we should be able to defend a view of the subject of election and predestination that reconciles with our understanding of the Angelic Conflict and that follows a consistent method of interpreting related Scriptures. Such an understanding is necessary for the believer to possess a perspective that transcends the present here and now and bears the fruit characterized by self-control (poise), love, joy (inner happiness and contentment), gentleness, kindness, and patience (Gal 5:22). Such a perspective should be the desired result of all Bible study for it glorifies the Lord we adore and worship by presenting to the world a gentle, balanced (spiritual not religious) and powerful testimony of God’s grace.

¹ Jacobus Arminius was a Dutch Reformed pastor and theologian who considerably modified the theological position in which he had been trained, i.e. that of Calvin and Calvin’s successor, Theodore Beza. In 1587, Arminius was asked to defend Beza’s doctrine of predestination in view of a pamphlet that was circulating against it. However, after studying the matter further, he developed views more akin to the positions he initially desired to refute. We will eventually study in greater depth the views of each major figure in Church history that has contributed to this subject; however, for now, Arminius related election to God’s omniscience foreseeing who would choose to believe; whereas the Reformed position relates election to God’s sovereign choice. While the view of election and predestination that I will present tends to align more with Arminius’ view on this particular point, we’ll eventually see where the view that I present adopts what I believe to be the best points from both positions and attempts to discard those points that don’t synthesize with other doctrines.

A Difficult Topic?

In reality, the concept of predestination and election is not that difficult when properly reconciled and synthesized with such doctrines as the Angelic Conflict and God's essence attributes. However, if one does not possess a firm grasp of these two essential doctrines, then the ramifications in regard to the subject of election and predestination can only be a confused or contradictory position.² Every serious student of Scripture and every believer who desires to know and do the will of God in his/her life will one day be forced to address the apparent contradictions in Scripture between the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. Such a struggle is a part of the spiritual growth process and is inevitable in the advancing believer's walk.

Any believer who has ever had to trust God in a difficult or adverse situation and who knows that God is sovereign has struggled to balance that understanding with the all too apparent reality that man possesses a will or volition that is often in conflict with God's desires. For instance, have you ever prayed for an unsaved friend or family member? Have you ever prayed for the wayward believer? Have you ever been out of a job and prayed that God would open the door somewhere and give you the wisdom to see the open door? Have you ever prayed that God would grant you favor in the eyes of an employer or prospective employer? Have you ever been single and desirous of finding a Christian mate who was spiritual and of like mind and you realized that your life is slipping by while the choices are becoming fewer in a spiritually blind society? Have you ever prayed for a safe flight or travel? Or do you just leave all of these issues to "chance?"

The answer to every one of the prayers above that is the subject of the question reflects a tension between the sovereign ability of God to respond and man's volition at some point in the process. If you take your prayer life seriously (as any advancing believer would), then no doubt at some point you've pondered the tension that you know must exist between the sovereignty of God and the volition He has given to His creature – man. The position one adopts with regard to these questions and thousands of others like them reflects the practical outworking from one's position regarding the soteriological concept of predestination and election.

The tension that has existed in the minds of believers for centuries between the sovereignty of God and the fact that man has volition is rooted in Scripture. There are perhaps thousands of imperatives that presuppose that one is able to choose and is responsible for his choices. On the other hand, there are hundreds of texts that show God to be sovereign and that He does predestine.

Examples of Scripture That Would Seem to Imply Determinism

Many passages seem to imply a certain determinism or seem to provide evidence of God's sovereign will somehow bypassing the free will of man. As we will see in this series of lessons, such an interpretation is based upon a reading of the text without consideration being given to the larger whole of Scriptural revelation and the context that it provides, i.e. the angelic conflict, God's essence and His purpose in creating man. The following list provides a few examples.

- Genesis 12:1 – Now the Lord had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will

² While I am sure that there will be questions and issues related to this topic with which I will continue to ponder and address until the day I die, I am confident that all issues related to this subject can be resolved and/or better understood when the doctrines of the Angelic Conflict and God's essence are carefully considered. I have witnessed only confusion and contradiction where these two doctrines are lacking or where they have not been properly synthesized.

- bless those who bless you and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
- Exodus 9:12 – “But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them just as the Lord had spoken to Moses.” (Sixth plague - A reference God’s prediction in Exodus 7:4)
 - Exodus 10:20 – “But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go.” (Eighth plague)
 - Exodus 10:27 – “But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let them go.” (Ninth plague)
 - Exodus 11:10 – “and the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Tenth plague)
 - Job 42:2 – “I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.”
 - Psalm 115:3 – “But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.”
 - Psalm 135:6 – “Whatever the Lord pleases he does”
 - Psalm 139:1-6, 13-16 – David affirms God’s direct involvement in His life.
 - Proverbs 16:9, 33 – “A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps...the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.”
 - Proverbs 20:24 – “A man’s steps are of the Lord; how then can a man understand his own way?”
 - Proverbs 21:1 – “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.”
 - Isaiah 46:10 – “Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’”
 - Isaiah 55:11 – “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”
 - Isaiah 63:17 – “O Lord, why have You made us stray from Your ways, and hardened our heart from Your fear?”
 - Daniel 4:17 – “In order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowliest of men.”
 - Daniel 4:35 – “He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’”
 - John 6:37 – “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”
 - John 6:44 – “No man can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him”
 - Acts 2:23 – “Him being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God”
 - Acts 4:27-28 – “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.”
 - Acts 17:24-26 – “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth ... since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.”
 - Romans 13:1b – “For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”
 - Ephesians 1:11b – “Being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will”
 - Philippians 2:13 – “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

Examples of Scripture That Indicates Man Has Volition

Of course, there are numerous passages that indicate that man has volition and sometimes uses it to the opposite purpose of God’s express desires. The following list is not

exhaustive, but provides only an example of passages that illustrate man's free will in choosing for God or against God and His plan for man.

- Genesis 3:11 – “Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?”
- Genesis 4:6-7 – “So the Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.’”
- Exodus 7:13 – “And Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said” (First miracle and a reference to Exodus 7:4 – God predicts Pharaoh’s hardening)
- Exodus 7:22-23 – “and Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said. And Pharaoh turned and went into his house. Neither was his heart moved by this.” (First plague)
- Exodus 8:15 – “But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not heed them, as the Lord had said.” (Second plague)
- Exodus 8:19 – “But Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had said.” (Third plague)
- Exodus 8:32 – “But Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also” (Fourth plague)
- Exodus 9:7 – “But the heart of Pharaoh became hard, and he did not let the people go.” (Fifth plague)
- Exodus 9:34-35 – “And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants. So the heart of Pharaoh was hard; neither would he let the children of Israel go, as the Lord had spoken by Moses.” (Seventh plague)
- John 3:15 – “That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”
- John 3:18 – “He who believes in Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”
- John 4:13-14 – “Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst.’”
- Acts 3:19 – “Repent therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”
- Acts 13:45 – “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.”
- 1 Cor 3:1-4 – “And I, brethren could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?”