

# Top Ten Questions

Is Salvation by Predestination or Free Will?

Ephesians 1:1-3; Romans 8:29-30

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There are several things to remember about the debate between predestination and free will.

- It is a long-standing debate

This question has been discussed & debated for about 400 years, and much scholarly material has been written—still with no definitive consensus on the subject.

- It is a divisive debate

Many churches have experience conflict, and many Christians have exhibited unchristian attitudes toward brothers and sisters in Christ when discussing this issue.

- It is an important debate

The topic centers on the nature and process of salvation, so Christians must acknowledge the importance of this debate, even though no easy answers are found.

## ***1. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?***

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### **Sample Bible Passages about Predestination:**

*He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself* (Eph 1:4-5)

*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son* (Rom 8:29)

*To the pilgrims of the Dispersion . . . elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit* (1 Peter 1:1-2)

*For many are called, but few are chosen.* (Matt 22:14)

### **Sample Bible Passages about Free Will**

*If anyone cleanses himself from [sin], he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.* (2 Tim 2:21)

*If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved* (Romans 10:9)

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* (John 3:16)

*For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."* (Rom 10:13)

## ***2. WHAT IS “CALVINISM”?***

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Calvinism is a theological system named for a great theologian, John Calvin, who lived in 16<sup>th</sup> century and was part of what is called the Protestant Reformation. He taught about and believed in the sovereignty of God. About 100 years after his death, his students organized his teachings systematically into what is today called “Calvinism.” The preferred term is “Doctrines of Grace.”

The five major views of Calvinism are organized and explained with the TULIP acrostic:

T = Total Depravity

U = Unconditional Election

L = Limited Atonement (Particular Atonement)

I = Irresistible Grace

P = Perseverance of the Saints

Do Baptists believe in Calvinism, or the Doctrines of Grace? Almost all Baptist accept at least two or three of the tenets of Calvinism, some accept all of them. How many of the “points of Calvinism” that a Baptist accepts is a matter of individual convictions and liberty in the Lord.

## ***3. QUESTIONS ABOUT PREDESTINATION***

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### **A. Does Predestination limit salvation?**

Predestination does not limit salvation—God does. Most Baptists understand that salvation is limited in one way or another, acknowledging the fact that not every person goes to heaven, which is Universalism. The proper biblical understanding of God’s work at the cross of Christ is to see it as making a universal provision with limited application. In other words, the power of forgiveness and regeneration made available at the cross is only experienced by those who believe.

### **B. Does Predestination nullify missions?**

Instead of nullifying mission, predestination actually encourages mission work since God’s message of salvation will be accepted by those whom He foreknows. The best example is in the life of the Apostle Paul. Even though each New Testament reference to predestination comes from the Apostle Paul, there was no greater missionary or evangelist than he.

### **C. Isn’t Predestination unfair?**

Nothing about salvation deals with fairness. As lost and unrighteous creatures, we must rejoice in the fact that God does not base our salvation on fairness. Instead of basing salvation on our works, God bases it on His grace. If God were fair, none of us would inherit eternal life.

### **D. Does Predestination remove human will?**

One of the example of having been made in the image of God is to have free will, or moral agency. In the mystery of saving grace, God does violate or disregard human will but rather calls us to use

that choice to confess and believe. The Apostle Paul briefly touched upon this great mystery when he wrote, *[He] is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe* (1 Tim 4:10). How predestination and free will mysteriously and miraculously work in tandem was described by Timothy George, Dean of the Beeson Divinity School:

*God created human beings with free moral agency, and He does not violate this even in the supernatural work of regeneration. Christ does not rudely bludgeon His way into the human heart . . . No, He beckons and woos, He pleads and pursues, He waits and wins.* (Amazing Grace, p. 74)

#### **4. GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

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- In Salvation, start with God not man.  
Ultimately, it is His work not ours. We did not choose God for salvation—God chose us!
- Avoid the extremes  
Either extreme in this debate is biblically unattainable, theological unreasonable, and practically undesirable.
- Pursue the God of the Bible more than doctrines in the Bible  
Our passion should be for God Himself, not for a doctrine about God.
- Affirm the truth of both  
We affirm seemingly competing ideas in other matters, so we should do the same in this matter. Examples:
  - we accept that God is One, yet He is in Three Persons
  - we accept that Jesus is fully God, yet He is also fully manThus, we should also accept the tension from affirming both the truth of predestination and human free will

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who accepted the Doctrines of Grace, also accepted the truth of man's choice. He wrote the following:

*[Predestination & human will] are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory to each other, but they are not. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one part of the Bible that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and if I find, in another Scripture, that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is only my folly that leads me to imagine that these two truths can ever contradict each other. I do not believe they can ever be welded into one upon any earthly anvil, but they certainly shall be one in eternity. They are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the human mind which pursues them farthest will never discover that they converge, but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God . . .*

*You ask me to reconcile the two. I answer, they do not want any reconciliation; I never tried to reconcile them to myself, because I could never see a discrepancy. Both are true; no two truths can be inconsistent with each other; and what you have to do is to believe them both.*