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PREDESTINATION AND FREEWILL:

A STUDY OF ROMANS 8:29-30

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ABSTRACT

In the introduction part of this essay which the ~~writer~~ took as the first chapter, ~~he~~^{he} treated the background to the study of Predestination and Freewill. ~~he~~^{he} saw that it had been a subject of debate for centuries. The thoughts of Augustine, Calvin and Palagias were briefly examined.

The ~~writer~~^{writer} proceeded to give the purpose of the essay which was an attempt to answer the question.. "if God has predestined us to eternal salvation, why should we not live as we pleased?" Stated therein, were the methods employed in writing the essay and the limitation thereof. ~~he~~^{he} ended the introduction by giving the definitions of core terms.

In chapter Two, Predestination and Freewill were treated more fully, by examining Calvin's doctrine of Predestination. Election, Foreordination, Freewill and Moral Responsibility were also discussed. Chapter Three of the essay took us to the study of Determinism and indeterminism. Determinism is seen to be saying that everything that happens has a cause. That everything that happens is determined to happen before it happens. The ~~writer~~^{writer} went on to examine the fallacies connected with determinism. Indeterminism on the other hand is seen to be totally opposed to determinism.

It states that there are no antecedents or simultaneous causes of man's actions. This doctrine however, is said to be unacceptable to a Christian. In Chapter Four, ^{the writer} treated the doctrine of Destiny in African Traditional Religion. The Yoruba belief in 'Ori' head, and 'ayanmo' predestined share, were examined. The Yoruba believe that a person receives his destiny from Olodumare (God). Although, one's destiny could be changed by some agents. Chapter Five treated the sovereignty of God. Thus, throwing more light on the doctrine of Election.

Chapter Six is the conclusion of this essay. It was in the chapter that Romans 8, verses 29 to 30 were studied. The whole issue of predestination, foreordination, and election were examined from Biblical perspectives. It was seen that Biblical predestination does not eliminate man's freewill. The call of God was seen as the historical application of His eternal predestination, and this came through the preaching of the gospel.

CONCLUSION

The Reformers and Early Church Fathers correctly interpreted predestination and free agency of man. They stated that the two biblical truths do not conflict. The blending of the absolute sovereignty of God and the free agency of man is illustrated in every earthly kingdom. The king has the right to impose laws, and his subjects have the duty to observe them. God's right to impose law arises from His sovereignty. Man's duty to observe His law grows from his responsibility as created being to his Creator.

In concluding this essay by looking at the whole issue from biblical perspective, we can discuss predestination and freewill from three premises.

1. Biblical predestination is not fatalism. The Islamic concept of predestination is fatalistic. In genuine fatalism, fate is a natural force. The fatalist excludes mind and purpose, and confuses God with natural law. The Christian, however, is assured that actions proceed from the loving heavenly Father.

Fatalism is a heathen doctrine, but predestination is a Christian doctrine. It is called 'destination'

because it comprehends a determined order of the means to the end. It is called 'predestination' because God appointed that order in and with Himself before the actual existence of those things He so ordered. God's providence completes in time what He predestined in eternity.

The Christian is not in the hands of a cold, immutable determinism, but in the hands of the warm, loving, heavenly Father. Predestination signifies that God created all things, and His providence extends to all His works. God Himself is free, and He has provided that man shall be free within the limits of his nature. Although man does not have a freewill, he is a free agent. The truth of predestination destroys a person's pride and casts him at the feet of the sovereign God.

2. Biblical predestination does not eliminate man's free agency. God ordained human history and free agency in the midst of it. Self-determinism belongs only to man. God has the right to make laws, and man is obliged to obey them. Man is responsible for his volition - his disposition or inclination, is self-moved.

Man's free actions are not excluded from God's foreordination. Moreover, God's foreordination should not be regarded as over-riding man's free agency.

For Foreknowledge and foreordination stand or fall together. Since God knows even the most infinitesimal things (Matthew 10:29-30), it is contradictory to say He foreknows the certainty of an event which in its very nature is uncertain. Divine certainty does not conflict with free agency, since God's decree does not produce an event. The same decree that determines the certainty of an event also determines the freedom of the agent of the event.

3. Biblical predestination does not reduce the will of man to a mere machine. The alternatives to predestination are determinism and indeterminism. Atheistic determinism refuses to acknowledge God as the first cause. Non-atheistic determinism traces causality to God. Although the term determinism does come within the vocabulary of Christian conversation, the Christian doctrine of predestination and free agency presents something other than determinism and indeterminism. The Word of God reveals the almighty activity of God and human responsibility at the same time.¹

Criticisms against predestination are based on five premises:

1. Predestination is said to foster arrogance, since God's elect may boast of their favoured status. But on the contrary, predestination excludes boasting.

¹W. E. Best, Free Grace Versus Free Will (Houston: W. E. Best Book Missionary Trust, n.d.), pp. 49, 52.

For it fills God's people with astonishment that He should ever have had mercy on undeserving sinners like them.

2. Predestination is said to foster uncertainty. But this is not so. If they are unbelievers, they are entirely unconcerned about their salvation. If they are believers, however, even when passing through a period of doubt, they know that in the end their security lies only in the eternal predestinating will of God.

3. Predestination is said to foster apathy. For if salvation is entirely God's work and not ours, people argue, then all human responsibility before God has been undermined. Again, this is not so. On the contrary, the Scripture emphasizes God's sovereignty, but it never diminishes man's responsibility. It is an antimony rather than a paradox.

4. Predestination is said to foster complacency. For if God has predestined us to eternal salvation, why should we not live as we please, without moral restraint, and in defiance of divine law? Paul himself answered this criticism in chapter six of the letter to the Romans which when summarized can be stated thus: Those whom God has chosen and called He has united to Christ in His death and resurrection. Having died to sin, they now live a new life to God.

5. Predestination is said to foster narrow-mindedness as the elect people of God become absorbed only in themselves. However, the opposite is the case. The reason God called one man, Abraham and his family, was not for their blessing only, but that through them all the families of the earth might be blessed.

So, the doctrine of divine predestination promotes humility, not arrogance; assurance, not apprehension; responsibility, not apathy; holiness, not complacency; and mission, not privilege.²

The point Paul singles out for emphasis in verse 29 of chapter 8 in his letter to the Romans is pastoral. It concerns the two practical purposes of God's predestination. The first is that, we should be conformed to the likeness of His Son. In the simplest possible terms, God's eternal purpose for His people is that we should become like Jesus. The second purpose of God's predestination is that, as a result of our conformity to the image of Christ, He might be the first born among many brothers, enjoying both community of the family and the pre-eminence of the first born (Colossians 1:18).

In verse 30a, Paul says those He predestined He also called. The call of God is the historical application of His eternal predestination. His call comes to people through the gospel, and it is when the gospel is preached

²John B. W. Scott, The Message of Romans (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 252.

to them with power, and they respond to it with the obedience of faith, that we know God has chosen them. So evangelism (the preaching of the gospel), far from being rendered superfluous by God's predestination is indispensable, because it is the very means God has ordained by which His call comes to His people and awakens their faith. Clearly, then, what Paul means by God's call here is not the general gospel invitation, but the divine summons which raises the spiritually dead to life. Those whom God thus calls (v. 30) are the same as those 'who have been called according to his purpose' (v. 28).

"Those he called, he also justified" (Romans 8:30b). God's effective call enables those who hear it to believe, and those who believe are justified by faith. It is in Christ, by virtue of our union with Him, that we have been justified (Galatians 2:17).

"those he justified, he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30c). Paul has already several times used the noun 'glory'. It is essentially the glory of God, the manifestation of His splendour. Our destiny is to be given new bodies in a new world, both of which will be transfigured with the glory of God.

Thus we see that in the verses under study, God is pictured by the apostle as moving irresistibly from stage to stage; from an eternal foreknowledge and predestination,

through a historical call and justification, to a final glorification of His people in a future eternity.³

In concluding this essay, it may not be complete without saying something about election in the pastoral ministry. To this effect, one is guided by the thoughts of that famous French Protestant theologian and pastor, Pierre Maury. In his book, Predestination and Other Papers, Maury admonishes:

We must not preach predestination, that would be the worst betrayal of the Gospel; we must preach Jesus Christ, in whom, from everlasting to everlasting, 'dwelleth the fullness of God'. We must preach salvation and not damnation, the forgiveness of sin rather than the sin, and call our flocks unceasingly to the renewal which daily manifests our new birth which is a birth 'of God' (John 1:13).⁴

Maury went on to assert that, one of the greatest joys that the mystery of election in Christ gives to a pastor is that of believing for others. Believing in election in our ministry is really to pray for others as for ourselves. If everything depends on the divine will, how could we recognize it except by appealing to it, for others as well as for ourselves.⁵

²Stott, p. 253.

³Pierre Maury, Predestination and Other Papers (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1960), p. 64.

⁵Maury.

Election belongs to the realm of faith. Only faith can receive the witness, as also the assurance of election.

At the close of his paper on predestination Maury admonishes pastors with these words:

One last word to my beloved colleagues in the ministry. The charge which is entrusted to us is part of our election. Sometimes it is a crushing burden and we wonder if we are capable of bearing it, or even if we have been called to it. At such times let us recall, for our peace, and to make us more faithful in our service, that it is by God's grace that we are ministers of Jesus Christ We shall never be pastors except through His mercy.