

Predestination: Its History and Five Protestant Views

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Practical Questions

1. Can you say to a non-Christian person, ‘God loves you, *in particular*, you’?
2. Can you say, ‘God loves you and will *always* love you’?
3. Can you say, ‘God wants to heal and undo *all* human evil’?

Predestination: Some New Testament Sources

John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. ²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also *predestined* to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Ephesians 1:5 He *predestined* us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will... ¹¹ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been *predestined* according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will... ¹³ in him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – *having also believed*, you were sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise...

Predestination: The Earliest Debate

Pelagius (c.360 – 420/440 AD): believed humans were not morally wounded by original sin, that we can choose Christ freely without divine assistance, and that we can subsequently do good without divine assistance. Semipelagianism is the view that the human will can sometimes take the first step towards God and towards salvation, with God’s grace entering in later to assist.

Augustine (354 – 430 AD): Luther and Calvin believed that Augustine did not believe in human free will, but in *monergeia*, or one-will; God’s will was the sole explanation for people being saved. The Roman Catholic Church believes that Augustine’s views can be reconciled with human free will. Generally, Augustine believed that original sin involved physical corruption, moral woundedness (resulting in inability?), and moral guilt, and that all passed to all descendants; therefore only God by grace could redeem human beings.

John Cassian (360 – 435 AD): believed that original sin involved physical corruption and moral woundedness (possibly inability as well), but not moral guilt. Cassian believed that God’s initiative in grace comes first, and enables a person to make a genuinely free choice to receive or reject Christ. Hence, his view is called *synergeia*, or cooperation and partnership of two wills (divine and human), at all times, and it is held by the Eastern Orthodox.

Example Scripture: John 6:37 – 44

“*All that* the Father gives me will come to me” (6:37) (neuter tense, indicating human nature or humanity in general)

“And *whoever* comes to me I will never drive away” (personal, indicating human persons) (6:37)

“This is the will of Him who sent Me, that *of all* that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise *it* up on the last day” (6:39) (neuter tense, indicating human nature or humanity in general)

“For this is the will of My Father, that *everyone* who beholds the Son and *believes in Him* will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise *him* up on the last day” (6:40) (personal, indicating human persons)

“No one can come to me unless the Father draw him” (6:44) (personal, indicating human persons)

There is an interplay back and forth between the neuter and the personal. This is because all human nature, and thus all persons, gets raised up on the last day by Christ. Christ is the source of life for everyone, even the wicked. If he wasn't, then they would not be raised up. All come to Christ, but not all come to Christ in the same way. All belong to Christ by virtue of him taking up their human nature and so all will come to him in the resurrection. But some will come to him with acceptance, and others will not, which is why “come to me” (6:37) is not synonymous with belief (6:40).

The Eastern Orthodox perspective is as follows:

“‘God created man like an animal who has received the order to become God,’ says a deep saying of St. Basil, reported by St. Gregory of Nazianzus. To execute this order, one must be able to refuse it. God becomes *powerless* before human freedom; He cannot violate it since it flows from His own omnipotence. Certainly man was created by the will of God alone; but he cannot be deified by it alone. A single will for creation, but two for deification. A single will to raise up the image, but two to make the image into a likeness. The love of God for man is so great that it cannot constrain; for there is no love without respect. Divine will *always* will submit itself to gropings, to detours, even to revolts of human will to bring it to a free consent: such is divine providence...”¹

The Church Broadly

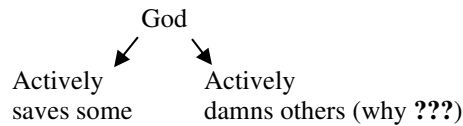
- *The early church theologians* provide us with strong statements about human free will and embrace synergeia and not monergeia. See my ongoing notes, ‘God’s Grace and Human Free Will in the Patristics’ on my website, <http://newhumanityinstitute.org/pdfs/article-free-will-in-patristics.pdf>.
- *The Eastern Orthodox* align themselves with John Cassian in holding to synergeia and not monergeia (although surely many Catholics would also assent to John Cassian’s views too).
- *The Roman Catholic Church* interprets Augustine’s monergist position on human free will vs. God’s decree as a mystery that is fundamentally compatible, though inscrutably. Catholics do this by declining to reflect on the cause of predestination.
- *Protestants* are different. Augustine’s monergism was interpreted by Luther and Calvin in terms of an active double decree. Thus, Protestant reflections on predestination have been the most recent, and being recent in theology is not a virtue, sadly.

Predestination: Five Camps Among Protestants

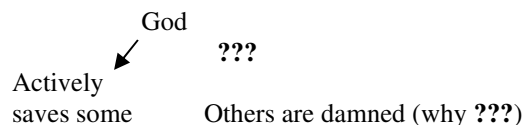
1. Double Predestination:
 - a. Supra-lapsarian or pre-lapsarian, where God makes a choice before, or without reference to, the fall; this means that God wills and assures the Fall. First articulated by Lucidus, the regional Council of Arle condemned it 473 AD; the second council of Orange in 579 AD; then Gottsalk taught this and a council condemned it. But in the 1500’s, the Catholic Banezians in Spain, being influenced by the *Muslim* theology of double predestination, were the first Christians to embrace this idea. Shortly thereafter, John Calvin (perhaps?) and Theodore Beza (certainly) picked it up. Westminster did, too, and had a powerful influence. The Puritans and Jonathan Edwards also agreed with this.
 - b. This is a view of the absolute sovereignty of God’s *will*: God proves His freedom by both blessing and damning. Then both the Fall and Jesus’ saving work are a means to a larger end of a divided

¹ Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Scarsdale, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978, paperback 2001), p.73

creation expressing a division in God's character. Most in this camp will say that Christ died only for the elect. Some will say that Christ's death is sufficient for all, but efficient for some (shifting the question over to the work of the Holy Spirit). Love is not essential to God; will is essential to God. This is the glory of God: the sovereignty of God's arbitrary will.

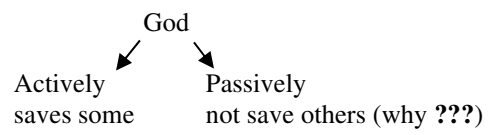


2. Calvin's own view: Scholars debate whether Calvin held Calvinist doctrine like Beza. Richard Muller is the primary Reformation scholar who was arguing for continuity and then blamed Calvin for being wrong and not fully Calvinist.
 - a. Double predestination; supra-lapsarian or pre-lapsarian. Calvin couldn't get around what Augustine and others had made of Jacob/Esau and the Pharaoh.
 - b. Essence of God is the sovereignty of His love. For Calvin, God was essentially a Redeemer. Why? Because God was known in Christ and only in Christ. There is no other revelation of God; there is no other God. There is nothing in God that would lead God to condemn people to hell. 'Who are we to limit the grace of God to a specific number?'
 - c. Why God would condemn some? It's incomprehensible. And furthermore, anyone who dared to speculate about that was liable to hell themselves. So Pighius said that we know exactly why people are condemned to hell – it's God's character. But Calvin responded by saying, 'That's ungodly speculation.' He didn't like the idea of the back side of God that you could not see. God is savior. He went on and on defending the love of God and sovereignty of God's love. Where does Calvin put the doctrine of reprobation? As a sub-sub-subpoint of the doctrine of salvation. Beza made that more rational and up-front, thinking that shows us the true nature of God. Beza tried to fix Calvin. But did he fix Calvin or lose the most essential point at which Calvin was right?
 - d. Calvin said in a good number of places in the Institutes that he believed in *unlimited atonement*.
 - e. Calvin was also concerned about the righteousness of God. When he condemns and reprobates, he is righteous in doing so, and there is mercy for some, but it's inexplicable. But God's character is love for all and grace and mercy.

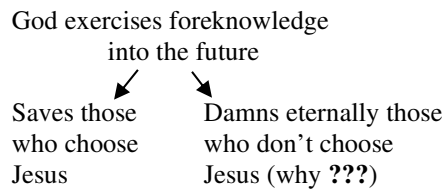


3. Single Predestination or Soft Calvinism (Dutch Reformed Calvinism, e.g. Herman Bovink, G.C.C. Berkouwer, Louis Berkhof?; the Scots' Confession and the Heidelberg Confession and Belgic Confession; J.I. Packer; Augustine's final view was probably this sort – he seemed to soften; during the Reformation time, Bullinger also held this)
 - a. Asymmetrical willing. God has a primary will and a secondary will. His primary will is active and makes something come about. His secondary will is passive. God is universally (passively) concerned for law and righteousness. But his primary will is grace for some. Thus, he actively wills the election of some. So all receive justice, and some receive grace in addition. Why are some condemned? It's not because God wills it, but because God does not act. So no one is actively rejected. But what accounts for God's passivity? But if we ask, then they answer that it's because of their unrighteousness. So God is inexplicably but unequally predisposed to bless, not condemn. Apparently they condemned themselves.

- b. Most Reformed people are probably here. They believe this the best you can do. This is not really Westminster, but it's close.
- c. Election is sufficient for all.



4. Classical Arminianism: See Roger Olson's book *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*; Olson disagrees with Philip Hughes about Semi-Pelagianism. Semi-Pelagianism says we still have free wills, though fallen natures. We can choose God's grace without His grace.
 - a. Post-lapsarianism or sub-lapsarian: God foresees that people will reject grace after the fall. God extends His prevenient grace; and sees that some will resist Him to the end. Salvation is on the basis of God's foreknowledge of what happens after the fall. This still leaves them with their free will. People who choose God are those who would be predisposed, and God gives them grace for freedom to respond. How they use that freedom is up to them. God sees how they would use that free will to accept or reject. Those who accept God elects. Those who don't, God rejects.
 - b. Unlimited atonement. Christ died for all, wanting all to be saved. Sufficient for all but applied/efficient for some. Notice their concern for the character of God.
 - c. The reason for election is human choice in cooperation with God. God's sovereign righteous will is done, but God really does will two things secondarily. He wills some to election and some to rejection. God is never frustrated. It preserves God's sovereign free will and also the freedom of human will.



5. Revised Reformed (and Eastern Orthodox) view: called this for historical reasons, though one camp will call it the other. Theologians: J.R.R. Tolkien?, C.S. Lewis, Karl Barth, T.F. Torrance, J.B. Torrance, Donald Bloesch; see Grace Communion International (www.gci.org, click on 'media' and then 'You're Included' or just go to www.youreincluded.org) for excellent sermons, interviews, and lectures.
 - a. Character of God is wholly love. Grace and judgment are united in Christ: God is wrathful against sin itself because He's gracious.
 - b. God's will can only express God's love.
 - i. God's use of power and will are always shaped by His character, which is love (because His Trinitarian nature of love between Father, Son, Spirit means that He is love above all else)
 - ii. Even hell is an expression of God's love (God loves you and will always love you)
 - iii. Nothing stops God from loving; God is sovereign in His love; God's love is sovereign
 - c. Election is understood in Christ. There is only one elect. Jesus is the elect one (Mt.3:16 – 17; 12:15 – 21; 17:5; Lk.9:35). 'Elect' means 'anointed, chosen, appointed.' From all eternity, God elected to be humanity's life-giver and life-source. So rather than God having a problem of wanting to elect some people and then using Jesus as a means, election is God's first impulse in love towards all.
 - d. God chose the first Adam and Eve as the first of all humanity. They are the heads of all humanity. God elects Noah and his family. Then God elects Abraham, then Isaac. Then God elects Israel. Then as Israel split into two, God elects Judah. Then eventually all reject God and only one is left: Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one true Israelite, the Messiah, the Chosen One, the Elect One. Does God elect some in order to reject others? Not biblically. God elects some to be a blessing to others. The pattern is that God elects the one to include others, to be a blessing to others. This is why Jesus is the life, the gate. Election does not imply rejection. Election is an office. At any point in time, is everyone considered the elect? No: some are still yet to be included.
 - i. In Romans 9, Esau was the one to whom the promise was passed on. But he threw it away and gave it to his brother Jacob. Esau and Jacob do not just represent individuals, but whole groups. Esau represents those even in Israel who accept their election. But does that mean it's permanent? No. It's so that God can have mercy on all. It means that Esau is going to be grafted back in. His rejection was only temporary. This is the

meaning of Romans 9 – 11 as a whole (see my ppt ‘Romans 9 – 11: Predestination and Free Will, Hardening of Hearts, and Outreach to the Jewish Community’, <http://newhumanityinstitute.org/pdfs/reconstruction-10-romans-9-11.pdf>)

- ii. What about Scripture giving ‘explanations’ for people not coming to faith? Paul says the god of this world has blinded them (2 Cor.4). Or when Israel chose a righteousness of their own (Rom.9). These are partial descriptions, not but ultimate reasons. Descriptive or prescriptive questions are not resolved by grammar because the phrase ‘so that’ (or ‘that’ or ‘in order that’) could go either way. You need a larger interpretive frame. That ambiguity exists in both Greek and English.
- e. God, in His love, predestines everyone to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom.8.29). For some, however, because of their own choice to defend the corruption in their nature, they receive God’s love as torment. God’s wrath is directed against the corruption in our nature (Rom.1:18), but it is driven by God’s love, which wants us to be in restored relationship with Him.

God is love
(because He is a Trinity)
↓
Loves all in truth, in Jesus.
Offers Jesus’ new humanity to heal everyone by the Spirit
Some receive it as torment –
for irrational reasons of their own (why ??? needs to be answered by each person)

Theological Method: Consistently Trinitarian or Not?

The central question in systematic theology is whether we discuss God’s *nature* prior to God’s *will*, or, for all intents and purposes, not at all. If God is a Trinity of three divine persons in an eternal relation of love, then His nature is love. This means two things. (1) Human free will in relation to God must be a reality, because God’s nature as love requires that humanity make a free choice to love God in response. And (2) all other ‘attributes’ or ‘characteristics’ must therefore be derived from God’s nature, which is love.

For example, God’s holiness is not an independent characteristic within God (as treated by e.g. A.W. Tozer in *The Attributes of God* or R.C. Sproul in *The Holiness of God*). It is derived from His nature of love. God is holy in the sense that He is the most loving being in the universe. It is even a secondary characteristic and not a primary one. That is, God was not holy (set apart) before He created the universe. Why? Because there was nothing ‘common’ with which to compare ‘holy’! So ‘holiness’ is not a primary characteristic within God. It is secondary, with respect to the creation. And holiness is derived from God being a loving, Triune communion of persons.

The same is true of God’s wrath. Wrath did not exist as an explicit action or characteristic within God prior to His creation of the universe. So it is not a primary characteristic, but secondary, like ‘holiness.’ The wrath of God takes its meaning from the love of God, as God expresses Himself towards the creation (in this case, humanity). God is wrathful towards the corruption in human nature and wants to destroy it (Rom.1:18; 2:28 – 29; 6:6; 8:3), but He is not towards our personhood *per se*. We must ultimately adopt a Christocentric understanding of God’s wrath – that God was pouring out His wrath against the corruption in Jesus’ own human nature through the moment by moment decisions of Jesus to never sin. Hence, Paul says, ‘God condemned sin in the flesh’ of Jesus (Rom.8:3) because the human will of Israel to do that was weakened by ‘the flesh.’ But simultaneously, and in a larger sense, God was embracing in love human nature in the person of Jesus, in order to offer Jesus’ healed human nature back to us by the Spirit. God’s wrath against the corruption of sin in each of us is derived from God’s love towards each of us as persons.

By contrast, if God’s wrath and God’s love exist within God as equal and opposite characteristics, as is most obviously true in double predestination, but arguably also in Reformed single predestination and in the Arminian system as well, then God becomes fundamentally arbitrary. He would be both good and evil. He would be both loving towards some and unloving towards others. But that is not consistent with the assertion that God is a Trinity.

Lessons: Choose Where You Want Clarity

- If God's will is dual, then what becomes unclear is his character. Love becomes optional for God (e.g. 'God didn't have to love you'), not a consistent governing principle over all God's actions.
- If God's character is singular and clear, then what becomes unclear is why or how anyone would reject. Sin is irrational. It doesn't make sense. Rejecting Jesus is incomprehensible. It is inexplicable and irrational how anyone could reject the love of God.
- Practical implications:
 - Evangelism: 'God loves you, in particular you, and will always love you.'
 - Social Justice: 'God wants to undo all human evil at the source, in each one of us.' 'God is completely opposed to evil.' 'God does not allow evil.'
 - The Problem of Evil and the Character of God: 'God is 100% good and is opposed to all human evil, 100%, and gives 100% of Himself to undo it.'
 - Hell: 'Hell is not a prison system from which people want to get out and be with God, as if God says no. Instead, Hell is an addiction treatment center for those who refuse to admit they have a problem. Hell is the love of God for those who continue to refuse Jesus because they have trained their human nature to become addicted to something else. Jesus continues to call out to people to receive his new humanity. But for those who believe they don't need Jesus for their own healing and transformation, Jesus appears to them as a stalker who refuses to leave them alone, a doctor trying cure a disease they believe they do not have, a time keeper insisting on urgency when they believe they still have thousands of years of independence, a counselor trying to cure them of alcoholism when all they want is a well deserved drink, etc.'