

The Arminian View of Election and Predestination

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One of the most hotly debated topics in the theological scholarly realm is predestination and election. Often times, the Arminian teachings on the doctrines of grace are misconstrued or not properly defined. The truth is, Arminians have the most biblically sound view of God's election, foreknowledge, and predestination in regards to salvation.

Everyone contains presuppositions when examining the Bible. The key for correct interpretation is to let the text speak for itself and use biblical presuppositions when interpreting difficult passages.

With this in consideration, there are obvious factors which would hinder one from exegeting the Bible properly. For example, if you rejected the truth of Scripture or did not believe Jesus is the Messiah you could not accurately examine the texts. In addition, if you read the Bible with the presuppositions that God has reprobated people before the foundation of the world¹, or that God saves everyone, you would not properly read the pertinent passages.

There are three clear distinctions one must conclude when reading the Bible. First, God is love. 1 John 4:8 states, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."² God is not a capricious, evil Being, but is rather loving, merciful, and holy. Second, God desires all people to be saved. 2 Peter 3:9 makes this quite clear, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." Third, salvation is contingent on repentance and belief in Jesus Christ. John 3:36 says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever

¹ Henshaw, Ben. "Sin, Reprobation and Foreknowledge: The Calvinists Attempt to Have Their Cake And Eat it Too." Accessed March 2, 2017, <http://evangelicalarminians.org/sin-reprobation-and-foreknowledge-the-calvinists-attempt-to-have-their-cake-and-eat-it-too/>.

² 1 John 4:8 (NIV)

rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them."

It is clear from the Old to New Testament that God does not desire anyone to be damned to hell but rather longs for all people to turn to Him. This is clearly taught in Ezekiel 33:11, "Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?'" God did not want to bring death and destruction on the Israelites and pleaded with them to repent. Obviously, He would not desire His creatures to repent if He had already damned them to hell.

In light of the fact that God does not decree some to be eternally damned before the creation of the world, the New Testament provides us clear examples of how God chooses people for salvation. In Romans 8:29-30 we read, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." Since the Bible firmly establishes one is saved through belief in Jesus (John 3:16), it is clear Romans 8:29-30 is saying that God foreknew who would believe on His Son, and those He predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus.

Since God knew who would respond to the Gospel, they were predestined according to His foreknowledge. In other words, "**Predestination is therefore based on God's foreknowledge**, not his will. That is, God corporately predestines all those who respond in faith to salvation, and by foreknowledge he knows who will respond. Yet the response of each person is truly theirs, because God's foreknowledge does not cause their response."³

³ Pedlar, James E.. "Predestination and God's Sovereignty." Accessed on March 3, 2017, <http://www.seedbed.com/predestination-and-gods-sovereignty/>.

On the subject of election, both Augustine (Ancient Church), and Calvin (Reformation period) held that God's election is based off of His eternal decree to save some. The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible summarizes this nicely, "They taught that God had chosen before the creation of the world to save a number of specific individuals from sin and judgment and to give them eternal life. Those whom he chose did nothing to deserve it; their merits are no better than the rest of humankind who will be judged for their sins. But in his mercy God decided to save some; therefore, he chose them and sent Jesus to be their Savior."⁴

However, it appears the early church did not believe God irresistibly coerced people into His family and unconditionally chose some to be saved like Calvinism teaches. In fact, many church fathers held to the free will of man. Justin Martyr said, "For He foreknows that some are to be saved by repentance, some even that are perhaps not yet born. In the beginning He made the human race with the power of thought and of choosing the truth and doing right, so that all men are without excuse before God; for they have been born rational and contemplative."⁵ The biblical and historical evidence supports the fact that through God's prevenient grace, He frees the will of man to receive or reject His Son (Jn. 3:18, Eph. 2:8).

There are three popular theological models on predestination and election: Double-predestination, Universalism, and Foreknowledge. In double-predestination (which is a Calvinist model), God decreed who would spend eternity in heaven and who would suffer in hell without

⁴ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988; published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 2017), 683.

⁵ Martyr, Justin. "The First Apology." Accessed on March 3, 2017, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0126.htm>.

their say. Also, according to universalism, everyone will receive salvation and no one will be punished in hell.⁶

Double predestination fails to account for the fact that God desires all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) and commands His creation to repent (Acts 17:30). Obviously, it would be illogical for God to desire everyone to be saved and command all people to repent if He had already divinely shafted them based on His eternal decree.

Furthermore, Universalism is ignorant of the plethora of passages which state those who do not repent and trust in Jesus will be punished in the afterlife (Jn. 3:18,36, Lk. 16:19-31).

It seems the most biblically accurate model of God's election and predestination is as follows. God foreknew all who would respond to the Gospel, and based on His foreknowledge, God elected those individuals to be His saved people. Thus, God predestined everyone who He knew would believe in Jesus Christ to be:

(a) called (Rom. 8:30); (b) justified (Ro 3:24, 8:30); (c) glorified (Ro 8:30); (d) conformed to the likeness of his Son (Ro 8:29); (e) holy and blameless (Eph 1:4); (f) adopted as God's children (1:5); (g) redeemed (1:7); (h) recipients of an inheritance (1:14); (i) for the praise of his glory (Eph 1:2; 1 Pe 2:9); (j) recipients of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13; Gal 3:14); and (k) created to do good works (Eph 2:10).⁷

It is important to adhere to the Arminian model of God's predestination and election because it shows us the character of God which Christians should seek to imitate. Since God loves everyone and sent His Son to save anyone who believes in Him (Jn. 3:16), Christians

⁶ Brantley, Garry K. "Some Prominent Theories of Predestination Considered." Accessed on March 3, 2017, <https://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=281>.

⁷ "A Concise Summary of the Corporate View of Election and Predestination." Accessed on March 3, 2017, <http://evangelicalarminians.org/a-concise-summary-of-the-corporate-view-of-election-and-predestination/>.

should reflect that love in their lives as they show His love to all people. The author is delighted to say that he can go up to anyone and truthfully tell them that God loves them through Jesus. Furthermore, non-Christians can rest assured that Christianity is not God forcing Himself to be reconciled with them, but rather an authentic relationship with the Creator.

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