

## Man's Fate: Predestined or Free?

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May 1976



*Photo date and location unknown*

Even from the days of Jacob and Esau, it seems that God has loved and favored some men more than others. The Bible says, "Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad... (Rebecca) was told, 'The elder will serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'" (Romans 9:11-13) But it is easy for us all to recognize that for some people, happiness comes almost effortlessly. Everything cooperates to favor them. For others life is an uphill struggle with happiness at last crowning years of battle against unbelievable odds. And for not a few, whatever they do and however hard they labor, existence virtually begins and ends in disappointment and heartbreak. Why? We ask.

Does God really love some more than others? How can this be true if God is the universal loving Father of all mankind as He is portrayed in such passages in the Bible as John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son." How then do we explain the seeming inequality? How do men earn God's blessings? By their faith, perhaps? By their deeds? Does man have any influence over the matter at all? Maybe God just decided in advance whom He would favor and whom He would allow to suffer to demonstrate His power over man's destiny? Didn't He say to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." (Romans 9:15) How free are men, anyway, to affect the course of their lives? We say we have free will, but sometimes it seems that the outcome is predetermined.

These are questions that man has been asking throughout history. And as far back as we can go, we find blind groping for answers and specious conclusions. Neither Plato nor Aristotle, for example, was able to furnish a satisfactory reply to the question of the relationship between the human will and divine omnipotence, or Fate. Aristotle has always been regarded as the classical advocate of free will, but he also made contradictory statements which can be interpreted in other ways. The ancient Hebrew prophets generally held that man is a free agent, but there are also passages which cannot be reconciled with the rest.

The coming of Jesus Christ did not end the disputes. Some of his followers taught that God's grace alone could achieve salvation from original sin. Others emphasized human merit. The question naturally arose: Why should it have been necessary for Christ to die for our salvation, if it were within the power of every man, by his own will and by his own good works, to atone for his sins and achieve his own salvation?

Augustine regarded as an authority second in importance only to the Holy Scriptures themselves, taught that only Adam had possessed the choice to sin or not to sin, and since his fall man's bondage to sin could only be broken by divine intervention, which is why God sent His son into the world to die for man's redemption. Man's corrupt state could not be improved no matter how many good works he performed except through the grace of God. But even in the fifth century this was challenged by those who believed

that man came into this world free from sin and that an individual's own actions decided his fate.

The controversy reached its height after the Religious Reformation in the 16th century. The leaders of the Reformation denied emphatically that human merit and free will were of any value. They preached that those who believed in the possibility of the freedom of the will and salvation through good works were sinners who assumed they were superior to God Himself. The human race was irrevocably doomed to destruction because of original sin and the sinner could only expect salvation through divine grace.

Martin Luther, while maintaining that the human will was nothing, still held that salvation could be accomplished through faith. But Calvin shut even this door to salvation, denying not only good works but even faith as such. While Luther said all true believers can be saved, Calvin regarded even believers as damned if God so wills, "since all is in His power and subject to His will." The entire universe is subject to the laws of predestination, and God had predetermined that one part of the human race would receive eternal life, and the remainder would be subject to everlasting damnation. Such a theory totally denied man's ability to contribute to his own salvation and any possibility of influencing his destiny.

Calvin criticized the teachings of the Catholic Church that regarded the power of man as being merely impaired and not as totally destroyed. "We, on the other hand," Calvin stated, "maintain that our nature is so corrupt that it is quite incapable of good.... We convince man of his wretchedness and of his powerlessness, and thus bring him into a state of true humility, so that he is deprived of all confidence in his own powers and puts his trust in God alone."

And so the arguments went, each side presenting its own collection of quotations from the Bible or the writings of the fathers of the Church to back up their position. For the truth of the matter is, the Scriptures contain many passages which state that we are all lost sinners and that man has no hope save in the pardoning mercy of God, and many passages which emphasize man's freedom to choose between good actions and evil actions. Jeremiah, for example, had definitely proclaimed: "Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death." The New Testament also contains many contradictory passages. While Romans 9:16 emphasized God's mercy, not man's will or exertion, Romans 2:6 states: "For he will render to every man according to his works."

And so it continues today. Not only do the major religions and philosophies of the world disagree, but even within Christianity the different schools of thought still exist side by side, each convinced of the absolute truth of their beliefs. Fortunately, we have gone beyond the idea that merely supporting your beliefs with a formidable array of quotations makes them true. We now know that an experiment or a new theory may prove the error or incompleteness even of ideas that have been held to be true for centuries.

And at last we have a theory which reconciles predestination and human will, which explains all the contradictory Bible passages, which reflects God's power of forgiveness and the divine order of the universe, while at the same time giving proper place to man's efforts. This idea is the Divine Principle.

Let us take, for example, the well-known biblical passage from Romans 8:29-30, which says: For those whom He foreknew He also predestined... and those whom He predestined He also called; and those whom He called He also justified; and those whom He justified He also glorified.

To explain these brief sentences, let us go back to look at God's original plan for creation, His original will. It is the essence of both Judaism and Christianity that God is a being of absolute, unlimited goodness and love, our Heavenly Father. As a God of goodness, He could never have intended for evil to come about from His creation of Adam and Eve. Indeed, Genesis 6:6 states that God was sorry that He had made man, when He saw his fallen ways. To prevent man from falling, God had given Adam and Eve a commandment to fulfill. He created them, in other words, with the possibility that they might fall if they disobeyed that commandment, but a possibility is not a predestined fact. It was man's responsibility to fulfill that commandment and remain on God's side instead of choosing to listen to Satan. God's will is still to establish a world of goodness and love, and He has been working to restore man to his original state of goodness ever since the fall. God's will is eternal and unchangeable in this respect, and He will set up another person in the place of anyone who fails to fulfill his portion of responsibility. When Adam fell, God wanted to work through Cain and Abel, but this plan was defeated when Cain killed Abel. Then, God intended to accomplish His will through Noah's family. When they, too, failed to accomplish God's will, He had to set up Abraham to fulfill His will.

In other words, God uses men as His instruments to accomplish His will. If those men fail to do their part, then God will choose other men, until the work is done. God set things up this way at the beginning because He didn't want just robots as His children. He wanted sons and daughters who would love Him freely and by their own choice. And He wanted sons and daughters who would share His nature, who could be co-creators with Him. By first fulfilling their portion of responsibility -- obeying God's commandment not to eat of the fruit -- Adam and Eve would have participated in their own creation as perfect beings. God wanted to make man lord over all creation and for this reason, too, He had to make man superior to all other creatures by giving him a responsibility, a condition to fulfill, which no other

part of the creation could.

But even though the conditions asked of us by God have been so small in comparison to all that He has done for us, still man has always failed, time and time again, even to accomplish that much. That is why the whole process of restoration has taken so long, and still remains unfulfilled today, a challenge to us all.

When God calls a person, He knows the qualifications He needs. Those whom He predestined to do His will, He foreknew their qualities. But before that person is justified and glorified, he must accomplish the job that God gave him to do. If he doesn't, the mission is passed along to someone else. The mission must be fulfilled, but the individual who does so may change. For example, when God chose Moses, He predestined him to be the great leader capable of bringing the Hebrew people to the blessed land of Canaan, but first Moses had to fulfill his own portion of responsibility. When Moses went against God's will by striking the rock twice, he failed to carry out his responsibility and so he died without entering Canaan. Judas was predestined to be Jesus' disciple, but only if he had remained loyal could he be justified and glorified. As it was, Matthias took his place.

From this viewpoint, then, let us look at some of the other Bible verses which seem to say that God predetermines everything. What about Romans 9: 15-16: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy. As we said, God chooses the person who is most suitable for the job at hand, foreknowing all that person's qualities. God can then also choose whether He will show mercy or compassion for that individual. It doesn't depend on that person's desires or efforts. These biblical verses are meant to emphasize the power and grace of God, but they are not intended to mean that man has no choice over his destiny. Whether he fulfills God's will is up to him.

Further on in Romans we read, Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use? (Rom. 9:21) We know that God set up man's own portion of responsibility as the condition to exalt him to be the lord of creation and to love him most. However, man fell because he violated God's condition. This verse is meant to teach fallen man that he has no right to complain against the way God treats him.

Even though the Bible says that God hated Esau and loved Jacob, that too only depended on their fulfilling their portion of responsibility. When Esau forgave his brother and reunited with him, he too received God's love. And Jacob would not have been entitled to receive God's love if he had not been able to win his brother's love and forgiveness, which was his portion of responsibility.

Calvin's stand on predestination resulted from his not understanding that man has his own portion of responsibility to fulfill before God's will can be completely realized. God and man must work together to achieve the 100 percent fulfillment of God's will.

What about the seeming inequalities in people's lives -- the good people who always seem to suffer, the ones who have it easy, those who struggle for everything they get? If these people are not predestined to their lot in life by God, how do we explain these facts? According to the Divine Principle, each person is part of a long line of ancestors stretching far back into the past. If the sun shines on everything a man does, it may be that he is reaping the rewards for the labor of his ancestors. Similarly, if another man's life is filled with frustration and defeat, he could be paying for the misdeeds of his ancestors. But by paying off this debt we may release those ancestors from their heavy burden, earning their eternal gratitude.

Are some of us doomed to hell regardless of our actions? How could a loving Father be content to see some of His children basking in the warmth of heaven and the rest doomed irredeemably to hell? When man does not reach perfection in his physical lifetime, he must continue to grow towards that state in spirit world, but sooner or later all men past and present will be restored to God's bosom. To believe otherwise is to deny that God is a God of goodness and love, and to deny that His original purpose of creation can ever be fulfilled. This would make God a God of failure. Either God made a mistake in creating man in the first place or man can permanently frustrate the divine will. Both of these positions run counter to basic Christian teachings.

If we could really understand and feel the depths of God's love for His children, the endless tears He has shed in watching them suffer and struggle, knowing that He can only do so much and man must finally wake up and do the rest!

Over a year ago, two young girls, sisters, disappeared from their parents' home in suburban Washington and have never been seen or heard from since, though an exhaustive search was carried out by police and volunteers. Perhaps those parents can to some extent appreciate the anxious desperation and yet hope with which God greets us each day. Will this be the day I find one of My lost children? With this kind of heart, God will not let heaven and hell exist side by side for eternity. He is ardently awaiting the day when His predestined will for an ideal world can be actualized among all men.