

Absolute Predestination

BY Gilbert Beebe

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Mr. Beebe: - In a former letter I requested your views on the absolute predestination of all things. I asked for information, and for nothing else; but I will excuse you for not answering me, for I know that I am not worthy of notice, but I am a poor unworthy worm of the dust.

Your unworthy friend.

R.S.

Reply. - We assure our friend R.S. that our apparent neglect of this request was not owing to any want of respect for him, nor to any unwillingness to give him such views as we have on the important subject of his inquiry. Those who truly feel sensible that they are poor unworthy worms of the dust, and yet have a desire to be informed in regard to the universal government of the supreme God, of his prescience and irrevocable decrees, are the very persons above all others, whom we desire to serve to the full extent of the ability God may be pleased to give us.

Predestination, as a highly esteemed writer in the Signs once remarked, does not require to be qualified by prefixing to it the word absolute, as the predestination of God must of necessity be absolute in every particular. Jehovah is an absolute God, and all that he purposes or performs must be absolute. There can be no fiction nor anything merely nominal with him. Predestination is destination beforehand, and as nothing can be beforehand, or subsequent with him, the term as it is used in the scriptures is used in reference to our finite state, as creatures of time; or rather as creatures of God, but for the present, in the time state of existence. God inhabits eternity, and all things are present with him. The

progression of time and development of events can add nothing to his stock of knowledge. We his creatures may and we certainly do, live and learn. He has himself called our attention to the fact that he has declared the end from the beginning, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure. This declaration of the end from the beginning proves his prescience, so conclusively, that but few are so hardened in infidelity as to openly and in so many words, deny his foreknowledge of all events; for if he were deficient in knowledge he could not with unerring certainty declare the end from the beginning and from ancient times, the things which are yet to transpire. But there are those who while they admit what is called the foreknowledge of God, deny that his knowledge is based upon his own purpose and determinate counsel. They urge the following objections to predestination. It is fatalism, it destroys man's free-agency, and his accountability, and makes God the author of sin; and some there are who go still farther and say if the doctrine of predestination be true, God in predestinating the events of time, etc., has transcended his right and is unjust. Our friend R.S., we think, will agree with us, that it very easily becomes poor sinful dying mortals thus irreverently, not to say blasphemously, to question the eternal right of God to do what seemeth to him good, in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth, or to set up their standards of justice and denounce their creator if he does not abide by their decisions. Let all such first meet the searching interrogative of the inspired apostle, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, to form one vessel to honor" etc.? The holy prophet of Jehovah, by inspiration, has informed us that God is the potter, and we are the clay. Hence we must acknowledge his eternal right to dispose of all things, all events, and of all worlds according to his own pleasure. Let this be admitted and all murmuring against his predestination will cease. It is not our purpose to meet the objections urged by men to the doctrine of divine revelation, and by logical argument to put them to silence; nor do we design to attempt to make the doctrine palatable to the natural mind of man which is enmity against God, for all such attempts are without the least prospects of success. The enmity of the carnal mind is fully demonstrated in the

objections which they bring, but we design rather to search out and call the attention of our inquiring friend to what God has revealed in the scriptures on the subject, and this we will do, if God permit, whether men will hear, or whether they forbear.

The term predestination, as we have intimated, has reference to the order and succession of events in time, by which the eternal designs of God are brought to pass. And, so far as pass, predestination simply signifies that God had purposed, God's providence is concerned in bringing his designs to decreed, ordained, or destined the accomplishment of those things before they were, in order of time brought to pass. Hence to us, it is predestination, with God it is destination, because his infinity connects and comprehends the end with the beginning, for he is himself the First and the Last, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending.

Having, as clearly as we are able, defined predestination, we pass to enquire whether it be a Bible doctrine. If it be a Bible doctrine, we must admit it, or reject the Bible as a record of infallible and eternal truth, and take the open ground of infidelity. And who can trace the sacred pages of the holy book and say that it contains no testimony in support of the doctrine? In the absence of predestination how was it that the prophets of Jehovah foretold the events of ages, thousands of years before those events were actually fulfilled? Who, or what directed the prophetic vision of holy men of old, to look down the vista of intervening centuries, and in the name of the Lord Jehovah predict the things that should come to pass down to the end of time, and even the resurrection of the slumbering dead, and the judgment of the last day. If these things were not before determined of God, how were they known, and if they were unknown to God and man how were they foretold? And if they were foreknown of God, and he inspired holy men to foretell them, that knowledge and decision of God was what the Bible calls predestination. But we have no need of ifs in this investigation. The scriptures do most clearly and emphatically declare that "Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"; that God spake to the

fathers by the prophets, and also that the spirit of Christ, which was in the prophets, did testify beforehand of his sufferings and of the glory that should follow. This was and is predestination. God spake by the prophets, saying, "It shall come to pass." Do not these words imply a decree when uttered by him who speaks the word, and it stands fast, who commands, and it is done? How harmoniously do both testaments agree in this fundamental doctrine. Throughout the first, or Old Testament, God, by his prophets, declared the things that should come to pass. Apostles and inspired evangelists in the New Testament respond, saying, "And it came to pass." But perhaps some may demand; What came to pass? We reply, all that God by the prophets said should come to pass. First, in reference to the advent of the blessed Saviour, for he himself declared that all that was written of him in the law, and in the prophets and in the psalms must be fulfilled, and when dying on the cross of Calvary he exclaimed, "It is finished!" and in awful confirmation the retiring sun, prevailing darkness, the quaking earth, rending rocks, opening graves, rising dead, and rending vail gave ample demonstration. Daniel, in harmony with all the other prophets of the Lord, had predicted that at a specific time the God of heaven should set up a kingdom that should never be destroyed, that the Messiah should come, should be cut off, should make an end of sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness. The whole New Testament is a record of the faithful fulfillment of these predictions. Long had the prophet slumbered with his fathers, before the accomplishment of his seventy weeks, but the word of our God could not die, it liveth and abideth forever.

The predestination of our God also embraces all the heirs of immortality. "For whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified them he also glorified." This predestinated people is blessed with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, according as he (God) hath chosen them in him before the foundation of the world, that they should be

holy and without blame before him in love. Having predestinated them unto the adoption of children, according to the good pleasure of his will. In whom we have received an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after (or according to) the counsel of his own will."

There are those who admit the doctrine of predestination, so far as it applies to the coming of the Savior, the work which he was to perform, the sufferings which he was to endure, and the glory which was to follow; and also in relation to the good works which God before ordained that his people should walk in; but reject the idea that his purpose and foreknowledge extends to the wicked acts of men and devils. But for ourself, it is our firm conviction that if a single event could possibly transpire from the creation of the world to the end of time, from the rise and fall of empires, to the falling of a sparrow, or a hair of our head to the ground, that such unforeseen and consequently un-provided for events would unavoidably endanger and render uncertain the execution of what is admitted to be ordained and decreed of God. How could it be otherwise? Can we consistently believe that it was predestinated that Christ should suffer on Calvary to redeem sinners, and yet that he did not foreknow that there would be any sinners to save? Did he decree that his dear Son should be delivered into the hands of wicked men; and yet not contemplate in that decree, either the existence of wicked men, or what they should do in condemning and crucifying him? But aside from all human reasoning, or vain speculation on the subject, God has informed us, by his inspired apostles, that Jesus was delivered by his determinate counsel, and foreknowledge, and put to death by wicked hands. And again, the inspired apostles break forth in praise to God, in devout acknowledgement both of the decree and of its accomplishment, that, "And when they had heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; who by the mouth of the servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against

the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth, against thy holy child Jesus whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontious Pilate, with the gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." (Acts 4:24-28). Here let it be observed the holy apostles of the Lamb did not start back with horror, and exclaim, fatalism! this makes God the author of sin! or this destroys the accountability of man! They saw nothing in all this reflecting unfavorably on the character or purity of the supreme God; but they saw such harmony in the purpose, decrees, and actual accomplishment of the designs of God, as led them simultaneously and with one accord to lift up their voice in devout adoration and praise to the Most High God, whose providential government was so clearly manifested in controlling all events. The things which they now saw brought to pass were distinctly spoken of by David in his day, and pointed out by the slaughtered lamb which Abel, by faith, offered to God some four thousand years before any of the actors in the crucifixion of Christ, were born. God had not only decreed what they should do, but he had also decreed what they should not do. "The enemy should not exact upon him, nor the son of wickedness afflict him." "A bone of him should not be broken." "He should not be holden of the pains of death." His soul should not be left in hell, nor should his flesh see corruption. Neither death nor hell could go beyond the purpose and decree of God. None but Judas could betray him, without involving a contradiction of the purpose and decree which was recorded in the scriptures; the pieces of silver for which he was betrayed were numbered and recorded in the decree of God, as published by the prophet hundreds of years before Judas was born. The parting of his raiment, and casting lots for his garments, was all a matter of ancient record, together with all the minute circumstances which occurred; all of which we are informed were done that the scripture should be fulfilled. The murder of the infants by Herod, brought to pass the decree published by the prophets six hundred years before. "Thus saith the Lord, A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children because they were not.

(Jer. 31. See also, Matt. 2:18.) The case also of Joseph and his brethren is a very clear and striking illustration of the overruling government of God, as embracing all events. And who shall dare to charge God with unrighteousness, because he retains in his own hand a supreme control of all beings and of all events; because he worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. Who has a right to infer that God is the fountain of sin or unholiness; when we are informed that men with wicked hands, do whatsoever his hand and counsel before determined should be done? Paul when declaring what God had said of Pharaoh, that for this purpose he had raised him up to make his power known in him, etc., anticipated the blasphemous out breakings of the human mind in opposition to the predestination of God. "Thou wilt surely say unto me, Why doth he yet find fault," or hold man as a responsible being, "for who has resisted his will?" But the apostle did not forbear to declare this doctrine because men resisted and blasphemed it; but says the apostle, "Nay, but who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?" etc. When the enmity of the human heart is subdued by the quickening power and grace of God in regeneration, then the heaven-born child is reconciled to God, and loves to contemplate the power and glory of Jehovah. Then is he prepared, with the inspired psalmist, to rejoice that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth; that all power in heaven and in earth is vested in the blessed Savior. But if left to doubt his all-prevading power and providence for a moment, now sinks his spirit at the fearful thought that some wheel in the vast, and apparently complicated machinery of nature might be suffered to revolve unbound by the wisdom and foreknowledge of God. If one of the wheels could work without the power and providence of God, its effects might be to ungear the whole system of divine government, and worlds on worlds be dashed in irretrievable ruin. When the enlightened mind of God's dear children contemplates the glory of this subject, they fall down before God in admiration, and with the four beasts, and four and twenty elders, cry Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord, God, Almighty. They are filled with the most profound reverence for, and confidence in the God of their salvation.

One reason we have thought why some of the children of God have seemed to be unreconciled to this doctrine is that they have failed to discriminate between the overruling power and providence of God and the effusions of his Spirit. "Let no man say when he is tempted, that he is tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted, neither tempteth he any man." When men are tempted to sin they are tempted of their own lusts, and by the devil. But how hopeless and desperate would be the condition of all who are tempted, if God had not the power and providence to control the temptation, and overrule its effect according to his eternal purpose and pleasure for the good of his tried and tempted children, and for the glory of his own great name. Our every temptation, though they flow not from God, are directed, and restricted and made serviceable to his saints, by him, is absolutely certain. Hence Peter assured the saints that God would control this matter. He will not suffer you to be tempted beyond that which ye are able; but will also with the temptation make a way for your escape. That glorious High Priest which becometh us, was himself tempted in all points as his children are, and knows how to succour them that are tempted. Soon after he was baptized, he was led up by the Spirit, unto the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. He was not led there by the devil; but by the Holy Spirit of the Lord God which was upon him. Neither was he tempted of the Spirit of God which led him into the wilderness; but he was tempted of the devil. The devil could neither afflict poor old Job, nor even drown the herd of swine, until he received permission of the Lord, and it is hard for us to think that any of the saints, however shy they may seem to be of the doctrine of predestination, really would wish or be willing that God should have less, or that sin or Satan should have more power. It is a blessed reflection to us that

**"Death and hell can do no more
Than what our Father please."**

Volumes have been written upon this subject, and volumes may still be written, it is too rich and boundless ever to be exhausted, but after all that we can say, it is the Spirit of the Lord alone who can present it in its beauty to the sons of men. He, the Spirit of the Truth, whom the world cannot receive, can slay the enmity of our carnal mind, and give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, shining in the face of Jesus Christ. May that spirit in all its quickening power and grace be with our friend R.S. and all others who earnestly desire a knowledge of the true God and eternal life.