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The Disciple-Making Minister

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

By David Servant

Chapter Twenty-Eight God's Eternal Plan

Why did God create us? Has He had some goal in mind from the beginning? Didn't He know that everyone would rebel against Him? Didn't He foresee the consequences of our rebellion, all the suffering and sadness that humanity has since faced? Then why did He create anyone in the first place?

The Bible answers these questions for us. It tells that even before God created Adam and Eve, He knew that they and everyone after them would sin. Amazingly, He had already formed a plan to redeem fallen humanity through Jesus. Of God's pre-creation plan Paul wrote,

God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but *according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ from all eternity* (2 Tim. 1:8b-9, emphasis added).

God's grace was granted us in Christ *from* all eternity, not just *to* all eternity. That indicates that Jesus' sacrificial death is something God had planned from ages past. Similarly, Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians:

This was in accordance with the *eternal purpose* which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:11, emphasis added).

Jesus' death on the cross was not an afterthought, a quickly-devised plan to fix what God had not foreseen.

Not only did God have an eternal purpose in granting us His grace from all eternity, but He also foreknew from eternity past who would choose to receive His grace, and He even wrote their names in a book:

And all who dwell on the earth will worship him [the beast of Revelation], every one *whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life* of the Lamb who has been slain [Jesus] (Rev. 13:8, emphasis added).

The fall of Adam didn't catch God by surprise. Neither did your fall or my fall. God knew we would sin, and He also knew who would repent and believe in the Lord Jesus.

The Next Question

If God foreknew that some would believe in Jesus and others would reject Him, why did He create people whom He knew would reject Him? Why not simply create people whom He knew would repent and believe in Jesus?

The answer to that question is a little more difficult to understand, but not impossible.

First, we must understand that God created us with free wills. That is, all of us have the privilege of deciding for ourselves whether or not we will serve God. Our decisions to obey or disobey, repent or not repent, are not predetermined by God. They are our choice.

This being so, every one of us must be tested. God, of course, foreknew what we would do, but *we had to do something at some point in time in order for Him to foreknow it.*

By way of example, God knows the outcome of every football game before it is played, but there must be football games that are played with outcomes if God is going to foreknow the outcomes. God doesn't (and can't) foreknow the outcomes of football games that are never played because there are no outcomes to foreknow.

Similarly, God can only foreknow the decisions of free moral agents if those free moral agents are given an opportunity to make decisions and do make them. They must be tested. And that is why God didn't (and couldn't) create only people whom He foreknew would repent and believe in Jesus.

Another Question

It could also be asked, "If all God wants are people who are obedient, why then did He create us with free wills? Why didn't He create a race of eternally obedient robots?"

The answer is because God is a Father. He wants to have a father-child relationship with us, and there can be no father-child relationship with robots. God's desire is to have an eternal family of children who have chosen, by their own free will, to love Him. According to Scripture, that was His predestined plan:

In love He predestined us to *adoption as sons* through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will (Eph. 1:4b-5, emphasis added).

If you want to have some idea how much pleasure God would have derived from robots, just place a puppet on your hand and have that puppet tell you that he loves you. Most likely, you won't get a warm feeling in your heart! That puppet is only saying what you make him say. He doesn't really love you.

What makes love so special is that it is based on the choice of someone with a free will. Puppets and robots know nothing about love because they can't decide anything for themselves.

Because God wanted a family of children who would *choose* to love and serve Him from their own hearts, He *had* to create free moral agents. That decision involved His taking the risk that some free moral agents would choose *not* to love and serve Him. And those free moral agents, after a lifetime of resisting God who reveals Himself and draws all people through His creation, their conscience and the call of the gospel, would have to face their rightful punishment, having proved themselves worthy of God's wrath.

No person in hell can rightfully point a finger of accusation against God because He provided a way whereby every person can escape the penalty of his sins. God desires for every person to be saved (see 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), but each person must decide for himself.

Biblical Predestination

But what about those scriptures in the New Testament that speak of God predestining us, choosing us before the foundation of the world?

Some unfortunately think that God has specifically chosen certain people to be saved and chosen the rest to be damned, basing His decision on nothing those individuals have done. That is, God supposedly chose who would be saved or damned. This idea obviously eliminates the concept of free will and it is certainly not taught in Scripture. Let's consider what the Bible does teach about predestination.

Indeed, Scripture teaches that God has chosen us, but this fact must be qualified. God has chosen from the foundation of the world to redeem the people whom He foreknew would repent and believe the gospel under the influence of His drawing, but *by their own choice*. Read what the apostle Paul says about the people God chooses:

God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed Thy prophets, they have torn down Thine altars, and I alone am left and they are seeking my life." But what is the divine response to him? "I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." *In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice* (Rom. 11:2-5, emphasis added).

Notice that God said to Elijah that He had "kept for Himself seven thousand men," but those seven thousand men had *first* made a choice not to "bow the knee to Baal." Paul said that *in the same way*, there was also a remnant of believing Jews *according to God's choice*. So we can say that yes, God has chosen us, but God has chosen those who have first made the right choice themselves. God has chosen to save all who believe in Jesus, and that was His plan even before creation.

God's Foreknowledge

Along these same lines, Scripture also teaches that God also *foreknew* all those who would choose to make the right choice. Peter, for example, wrote:

To those who reside as aliens...*who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father* (1 Pet. 1:1-2a, emphasis added).

We are chosen according to God's foreknowledge. Paul also wrote of foreknown believers:

For whom He foreknew [us], He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He [Jesus] might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified (Rom. 8:29-30).

God foreknew those of us who would choose to believe in Jesus, and He predestined that we would become conformed to the image of His Son, becoming regenerated children of God in His big family. In keeping with that eternal plan, He called us through the gospel, justified us (made us righteous) and will ultimately glorify us in His future kingdom.

Paul wrote in another letter:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved* (Eph. 1:3-6, emphasis added).

The same truth is presented here—God predestined us (whom He foreknew would repent and believe) before the foundation of the world to become His holy sons through Jesus Christ.

As already mentioned, some twist the meaning of such scriptures by ignoring everything else the Bible teaches, claiming that we really had no choice in our salvation—the choice was supposedly all God's. This they call the doctrine of "unconditional election." But who ever heard of such a thing as an "unconditional election," that is, an election that is not made on the basis of certain conditions being met? In free countries, we elect political candidates based on conditions they meet in our minds. We elect spouses based on conditions they meet, characteristics about them that make them desirable. Yet some theologians want us to believe that God's supposed choice of who is saved and who is not saved is an "unconditional election," not based on any conditions people have met! Thus the salvation of individuals is by *pure chance*, the whims of a cruel, unrighteous, hypocritical and unintelligent monster named God! The very phrase, "unconditional election" contradicts itself, as the very word *election* implies conditionality. If it is an "unconditional election," it is no election at all; it is pure chance.

The Big Picture

Now we see the big picture. God knew all of us would sin, but He made a plan to redeem us before any of us were born. That plan would reveal His amazing love and justice, as it would require that His sinless Son die for our sins as our substitute. And God not only predestined that we who repented and believed would be forgiven, but that we would become like His Son Jesus, as Paul said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

We who are born-again children of God will one day be given incorruptible bodies, and we will live in a perfect society, serving, loving and fellowshiping with our wonderful heavenly Father! We will live on a new earth and in the New Jerusalem. All of this will have been made possible through the sacrificial death of Jesus! Praise God for His predestined plan!

This Present Life

Once we understand God's eternal plan, we can more fully comprehend what this present life is all about. Primarily, this life serves as a test for every person. Each person's choice determines if he or she will be enjoy the blessed privilege of being one of God's own children who will live with Him for eternity. Those who humble themselves by yielding to God's drawing, then repenting and believing, will be exalted (see Luke 18:14). *This life is primarily a test for that future life.*

This also helps us understand some of the mysteries that surround this present life. For example, many have wondered, "Why are Satan and his demons permitted to tempt people?" or, "When Satan was cast out of heaven, why was he permitted to have access to the earth?"

We can see now that even Satan serves a divine purpose in God's plan. Primarily, Satan serves as the alternate choice for humanity. If the only choice were to serve Jesus, then everyone would serve Jesus whether he wanted to or not.

It would be similar to an election in which everyone was required to vote, but there was only one candidate. That candidate would be unanimously elected, but he could never have the confidence that he is loved or even liked by any of his electors! They had no choice but to vote for him! God would be in a similar situation if there were no one competing with Him for the hearts of people.

Consider it from this angle: What if God had placed Adam and Eve in a garden where nothing was forbidden? Then Adam and Eve would have been robots by reason of their environment. They couldn't have said, "We've chosen to obey God," because they would have had no opportunity to disobey Him.

More importantly, God would not have been able to say, "I know Adam and Eve love Me," because Adam and Eve would have had no opportunity to obey and prove their love for God. *God must give free moral agents the opportunity to disobey in order for Him to determine if they want to obey Him.* God doesn't tempt anyone (see Jas. 1:13), but He tests everyone (see Ps. 11:5; Prov. 17:3). One way that He tests them is to allow them to be tempted by Satan, who thus serves a divine purpose in His eternal plan.

A Perfect Example

We read in Deuteronomy 13:1-3:

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, "Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them," you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for *the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul (emphasis added).*

It seems reasonable to conclude that it wasn't God who gave that false prophet the supernatural ability to work a sign or wonder—it must have been Satan. Yet God permitted it and used Satan's temptation as His own test to find out what was in the hearts of His people.

This same principle is also illustrated in Judges 2:21-3:8 when God permitted Israel to be tempted by the surrounding nations in order to determine whether or not they would obey Him. Jesus, too, was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for the purpose of being tempted by the devil (see Matt. 4:1) and thus tested by God. He had to be proven sinless, and the only way to be proven sinless is to be tested by temptation.

Satan Does Not Deserve All the Blame

Satan has already deceived a great number of people in the world by blinding their minds to the truth of the gospel, but we must realize that Satan can't blind just anyone. He can only deceive those who allow themselves be deceived, people who reject the truth.

Paul declared that unbelievers are "darkened in their understanding" (Eph. 4:18) and ignorant, but he also revealed the root reason for their darkened understanding and ignorance:

That you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, *because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness (Eph. 4:17b-19, emphasis added).*

The unsaved are not just unfortunate people who have been sadly tricked by Satan. Rather, they are rebellious sinners who are willfully ignorant and who want to remain deceived because their hearts are so hard.

No person has to remain deceived, as your own life proves! Once you softened your heart toward God, Satan couldn't keep you deceived.

Ultimately, Satan will be bound during the thousand-year reign of Christ, and he will then have no influence on anyone:

And he [an angel] laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time (Rev. 20:2-3).

Note that before Satan's incarceration he "deceived the nations," but when he is bound he will no longer deceive them. Once released, however, he will deceive the nations again:

And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to *deceive the nations* which are in the four corners of the earth...to gather them together for the war....And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them (Rev. 20:7-9, emphasis added).

Why will God release Satan for this short period of time? The reason is so that all those who hate Christ in their hearts but have been feigning obedience to Him during His rule will be manifested. Then they can be rightfully judged. That will be the final test.

For the same reason, Satan is permitted to operate on the earth now—that those who hate Christ in their hearts might be manifested and ultimately judged. Once God no longer has any use for Satan to fulfill His divine purposes, the deceiver will be cast into the lake of fire to be tormented there forever (see Rev. 20:10).

Preparing For the Future World

If you've repented and believed the gospel, you've passed the initial and most important test of this life. Don't think, however, that you will not continue to be tested in order that God might determine your continued devotion and faithfulness to Him. Only those who "continue in the faith" will be presented before God as "holy and blameless" (Col. 1:22-23).

Beyond this, it is clear from Scripture that all of us will one day stand at God's judgment seat, at which time we will be individually rewarded according to our obedience on earth. So we are still being tested in order to determine our worthiness of future special rewards in God's kingdom. Paul wrote,

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? *For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.* For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then *each one of us shall give account of himself to God* (Rom. 14:10-12, emphasis added).

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and *disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God* (1 Cor. 4:5, emphasis added).

What Will be the Rewards?

What, exactly, will be the rewards given to those who prove their love and devotion to Jesus?

Scripture speaks of at least two different rewards—praise from God, and more opportunity to serve Him. Both are revealed in Jesus' parable of the nobleman:

He said therefore, "A certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business with this until I come back.' But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' And it came about that when he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him in order that he might know what business they had done. And the first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.' And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.' And another came, saying, 'Master, behold your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow.' He said to him, 'By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down, and reaping what I did not sow? Then why did you not put the money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?' And he said to the bystanders, 'Take the mina away from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' And they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas already.' 'I tell you, that to everyone who has shall more be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here, and slay them in my presence'" (Luke 19:12-27).

Obviously, Jesus is represented by the nobleman who was absent but who eventually returned. When Jesus returns, we will have to give account for what we did with the gifts, abilities, ministries, and opportunities He gave us, represented by the one mina given to each servant in the parable. If we've been faithful, we'll be rewarded with praise from Him and be given authority to help Him rule and reign over the earth (see 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27; 5:10; 20:6), represented by the cities each faithful servant was authorized to oversee in the parable.

The Fairness of Our Future Judgment

Another parable Jesus told illustrates the perfect fairness of our future judgment:

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; and to those he said, "You too go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you." And so they went. Again

he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing; and he said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day long?" They said to him, "Because no one hired us." He said to them, "You too go into the vineyard." And when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, "Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first." And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. And when those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; and they also received each one a denarius. And when they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, saying, "These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day." But he answered and said to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?" Thus the last shall be first, and the first last (Matt. 20:1-16).

Jesus was not teaching in this parable that all of God's servants will receive the same reward in the end, as that would not only be unfair, but would also contradict many other scriptures (see, for example, Luke 19:12-27; 1 Cor. 3:8).

Rather, Jesus was teaching that each of God's servants will be rewarded, not only on the basis on what they did for Him, but on the basis of how much opportunity He gave them. The one-hour workers in the Christ's parable would have worked all day had the landowner given them the opportunity. So those who made the most of their one-hour opportunity were rewarded equally with those who were given the opportunity to work all day.

So, too, God gives different opportunities to each of His servants. To some He gives great opportunities to serve and bless thousands of people using the amazing gifts He has given them. To others He gives lesser opportunities and gifts, yet they can receive the same reward in the end if they are equally as faithful with what God has given them.¹

The Conclusion

There is nothing more important than obeying God, and one day everyone will know that. Wise people know it now and act accordingly!

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil (Eccl. 12:13-14).

The disciple-making minister obeys God with all his heart and is doing everything he can to motivate his disciples to do likewise!

For further study concerning this important topic of our future judgment, see Matt. 6:1-6, 16-18; 10:41-42; 12:36-37; 19:28-29; 25:14-30; Luke 12:2-3; 14:12-14; 16:10-13; 1 Cor. 3:5-15; 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:26-27; 5:10; 20:6.

¹ This parable also does not teach that those who repent at a young age and faithfully labor for many years will be rewarded the same as those who repent during the last year of their life and faithfully serve God only one year. That would be unfair, and would not be based on the opportunity that God gave each one, as God gave each one opportunity to repent all through their lives. Thus those who labor longer will receive more reward than those who labor for less time.