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Christ's Incredible Cross

By David Servant

ONE **The Cross Preordained**

In eternity past, God “dreamed a dream,” if I might say it in human terms. He desired to have a family. He wanted children upon whom He could shower His great love. They, in turn, would reciprocate by loving Him and each other. Together, they would live in a perfect world, in a perfect society, enjoying one another forever. It would be a never-ending love story.

So, God devised a plan to fulfill His desire.

First, He planned to create the heavens and the earth. Even then He knew that, further in the future, He would create a *new* earth, but the first earth would be a good place for His plan to develop.

Next, He planned to create a man and a woman in His own image. They would parent the human race, His own potential children.

Because God wanted children who could love Him, He planned that all members of the human race would be given free wills, possessing the capacity to obey or disobey Him. Without the will to choose, they would be robots, and a robot programmed to “love and obey” really can’t love and obey. *Love* and *obedience* are meaningless concepts apart from choice. Possessing free wills, the human race would also have an equal capacity to hate and disobey God.

God also planned that all members of the human race would be placed in an environment where they would be given the opportunity to exercise their right to choose. If He placed them in a world where nothing would be forbidden, a world where they would be ignorant of His will, then, again, love and obedience would be meaningless concepts. This being so, all free moral agents would have to be tested, for a period of time, to see whether they would choose to obey or disobey.

The first test came in the Garden of Eden. God planned that the first humans would be tested by forbidding them to eat from one specific tree.

He would test the other humans in a similar manner, also giving them opportunities to obey or disobey. God planned to write a moral code of ethics on their hearts, and their consciences would tell them what was right and wrong. Then they would have to choose.

God would not only speak to humans by means of their consciences, He would also communicate through His creation, a nonstop display of His amazing power and wisdom. Through sunsets and snowflakes, babies and bananas, God would constantly call the world to seek and not ignore Him.

God Plans to Reveal His Love

The amazing thing, however, is that as God was forming His plan, He knew that every member of the human race would choose to disobey the law He had written on their hearts. As Isaiah would later declare by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Is. 53:6a).

Yet, in the great wisdom of God, this sad outcome would not bring His plan crashing down in pieces. Rather, it would provide an opportunity for Him to reveal His great love for the people whom He would create in His image. The apostle Paul wrote,

For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! (Rom. 11:32-33)

Once they transgressed, humanity would be faced with the consequences of their rebellion—namely, the prospect of facing God’s holy wrath. Yet after their transgression, God would also have an opportunity to prove His love for them. He could offer them mercy—a mercy that would be obtained without compromising His righteousness—a mercy that stemmed from His own suffering. He Himself would satisfy the demands of His own holiness, bearing the punishment they deserved.

Even before God created the heavens and the earth, He planned to become a man, live without sin under every temptation for thirty-three years, and then take upon Himself the guilt of the entire human race, suffering in their place as a substitute. In so doing, without compromising His holiness, God would open the door for them to be forgiven and transformed into holy beings. By His selfless sacrifice, the Creator would provide an entrance into His future perfect world where they would live as His children, obeying Him and enjoying His love forever. He would only require of them that they repent and believe in the Lord Jesus, His beloved Son.

All of this God planned before the foundation of the world.

God’s Ancient Book

But, amazingly, there is still more that occurred before the earth was created. Being all-knowing, God knew even before the creation *which* free moral agents would choose to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus. Accordingly, the Bible tells us He wrote down their names “from the foundation of the world” in a book called “the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain” (Rev. 13:8). Moreover, He prepared a kingdom for them, anticipating the time when all the testing in the realm of time would be complete. Then God would have a family who, with pure hearts, would reciprocate His love, a people who could enjoy Him for eternity in a perfect world and society. Then His desire would be fulfilled.

Here is a staggering fact: God planned for Jesus to die on the cross for our sins before He created any of us. Only through that self-giving sacrifice could He fulfill His eternal purpose. Such information evokes in us new inspiration and appreciation for God’s amazing love. Jesus’ death on the cross claims unparalleled preeminence above any and every other episode of human history. Words are simply not adequate to describe it.

The Truth About Predestination

Let’s consider some specific scriptures that reveal to us that our redemption was preordained, or predestined. First, however, we need to reflect on the whole concept of biblical predestination.

As a young Christian, I was confused when the word *predestination* popped up in the New Testament. At that time, I was attending a Bible study taught by a young man who was pursuing his degree in theology at a Calvinistic seminary. You may know that the historic reformer, John Calvin, taught that God has predestined some people to be saved and some people to be damned. He also taught that Jesus only died for those who were predestined to be saved. And that is what this particular seminary student was teaching me.

Naturally, I became quite concerned about which category of people I was in. So I asked my teacher, “How can I know if I’m predestined to be saved?”

He couldn’t give me an assuring answer (and neither can any other consistent Calvinist, since the Bible doesn’t reveal the names of those whom God supposedly predestined to be saved). He only suggested that I examine my life to see if I was living as a Christian should. His advice filled me with even more anxiety, because I was well aware of my own shortcomings and sins.

So I began to study for myself what the Bible had to say about predestination.

Calvinism’s Fatal Flaws

I first discovered that Jesus died for the sins of *everyone*, not just a chosen few. He even died for the sins of people who will spend eternity in hell. For example, the apostle John wrote, “He Himself [Jesus] is the propitiation [appeaser of wrath] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the *whole world*” (1 John 2:2, emphasis added). Along with scores of other biblical texts, this one verse clearly refutes the Calvinism’s “limited atonement,” the idea that Jesus died only for the people whom God supposedly predestined to be saved.¹ God’s Word tells us that God wants everyone to be saved (see 1 Tim. 2:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:9), and so Jesus had to die for everyone’s sins.

Second, it occurred to me that if God had predestined some people to be saved and others to be damned, then no person could be saved by faith, as the Bible teaches we are.

The only way to have faith for salvation is to know that it is God’s will for you to be saved. “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). That is why we are commanded to proclaim the gospel to everyone, so that people will believe the good news and be saved. But if people don’t know if God wants them to be saved, then there is no way they can have faith to be saved.

Third, I realized that the idea of God predestining some people to be saved and some to be damned completely contradicts the concept of humanity’s free moral agency—a truth found from Genesis to Revelation. Joshua couldn’t have made it more clear when he proclaimed to Israel, “Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15).

Fourth, I discovered that nowhere does the Bible teach that God has predestined certain individuals to be damned or certain individuals to be saved. Certainly we can find scriptures declaring that believers are predestined—but those scriptures say nothing about believers being predestined to be saved.

The truth is that God has predestined a wonderful plan that centers around Christ, and that plan has ramifications for everyone. God predestined that all who believe in the Lord

¹ Calvinists attempt to explain this verse that so clearly refutes their doctrine by claiming that it actually means that Jesus not only died for those who were (supposedly) predestined to be saved in John’s part of the world, but He also died for the sins of those who were (supposedly) predestined to be saved in every part of the world! Are we really to believe that John wrote to correct his readership because they mistakenly believed that Jesus only died for those whom God (supposedly) predestined to be saved in his part of the world, and didn’t believe that Jesus died for those whom God (supposedly) predestined to be saved in other parts of the world? Do Calvinists really think John’s readership was that stupid? Do Calvinists think we are that stupid?

Jesus Christ would be saved, and all who would not believe would be damned. By His foreknowledge, God obviously knew who would and who would not choose to believe in Jesus.

God's Foreknowledge

Let's look at two scriptures that prove God's choosing of us was based upon His foreknowledge of our faith, not upon His arbitrary, sovereign decree. Peter wrote,

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who...are chosen *according to the foreknowledge* of God the Father" (1 Pet. 1:1-2a, emphasis added).

Peter emphasized that God's choosing of us was according to His foreknowledge. He chose us based on His foreknowledge of our faith, the condition of salvation. His was a *conditional* election, not an *unconditional* election, as Calvinists want us to think. Similarly, Paul wrote to the Romans:

For whom He [God] *foreknew* [us], He also *predestined* to become conformed to the image of His Son...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, emphasis added).

Again, note the God predestined us based on His foreknowledge. He foreknew we would believe in Jesus. Knowing that, He predestined that we would be conformed to the image of Jesus. To that degree we have indeed been predestined. Notice, however, that Paul said nothing about God arbitrarily predestining us to be saved.

The first chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians also reveals that God predestined certain blessings for the free moral agents whom He foreknew would choose to believe the gospel. In that first chapter, Paul unveiled God's eternal plan that centers around Christ. He began,

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 (Eph. 1:3-5, emphasis added).

God predestined "us," that is, all of us whom He knew would believe in Jesus, to be holy and blameless. Paul didn't say God chose us to be saved—he said God chose us "in Christ" with the intention that we would become holy and blameless.

God also predestined that those who would believe in Jesus would be adopted as sons through Him, as the above scripture states. It is Jesus' death and our being members of His body that makes it possible for us to become God's sons.

Now let's consider the predestination of Christ's sacrificial death.

God's Eternal Purpose

Some have wrongly supposed that God's plan was almost thwarted when evil men conspired and killed Christ, but that God turned the tables by raising Jesus from the dead. The truth is, however that, before the creation of the world, God planned that Jesus would be crucified at the hands of wicked men. Numerous scriptures verify this fact. Let's look at a few.

The apostle Paul wrote to his beloved co-worker, Timothy,

Join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of 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 Jesus from all eternity*, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 1:8b-10a, emphasis added).

From God's perspective, His grace has been granted to us in Christ from all eternity because that's when He purposed that Jesus would die for our sins.

Similarly, Paul wrote of God's eternal purpose in the third chapter of his Ephesian letter:

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of *the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God*, who created all things....This was in accordance with the *eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Eph. 3:8-9, 11, emphasis added).

Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, declared that Christ's crucifixion was preordained by God:

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, *delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God*, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death (Acts 2:22-23, emphasis added).

We read in the fourth chapter of Acts that after Peter and John had been arrested and released by the Sanhedrin, they returned to "their own companions" (Acts 4:23) and joined in united prayer. It's interesting to note that these early disciples committed themselves to the care of the One who had so marvelously predestined the death of Christ:

"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, *to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur*" (Acts 4:27-28, emphasis added).

God predestined to use what wicked men meant for evil for the good of all people. Those who crucified Christ had no idea that they were being used to play a part in the grand, predestined plan of God.

A Kingdom Prepared

Other scriptures confirm the foreordination of Christ's death. While these verses are not as obvious, they nevertheless substantially verify God's predestined plan.

For example, in Christ's foretelling of the judgment of the nations in Matthew 25, the Son of Man is presented as saying to the righteous, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). If the kingdom was prepared for righteous people from the foundation of the world, then God must have devised a plan from the foundation of the world to make people righteous. That plan was through Jesus' death.

Notice that Jesus didn't say that the kingdom had only been planned from the world's foundation, but *prepared* from the world's foundation. When someone says, "Dinner is

prepared,” that means the food is ready to eat! So, according to Jesus, God’s kingdom has been ready from the foundation of the world.

To what extent was God’s kingdom prepared? The book of Revelation tells about a marvelous city called the New Jerusalem that one day will descend from heaven to earth (see Rev. 3:12; 21:10-27). Several scriptures indicate that the New Jerusalem actually already exists and was constructed a long time ago (see Gal. 4:26; Heb. 11:10-16, 12:22-23, 13:14). Perhaps it was prepared from the foundation of the world when God began to work His great plan of redemption.

Jesus stated near the time of His crucifixion that His Father’s house already had many “dwelling places,” so those dwelling places must have been prepared before then. Apparently, however, not *everything* was completely finished in those dwelling places:

“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to *prepare a place for you*. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3, emphasis added).

In the book of Revelation, we discover once more that God foreknew those who would choose to believe in Jesus. In fact, the apostle John wrote that their names were “written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain” (Rev. 13:8). If there has been such a book since the foundation of the world, then obviously God planned from the foundation of the world that there would be a Lamb who would be slain.

Hidden Wisdom

Another place in the New Testament where we find the concept of predestination mentioned is in the second chapter of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. There Paul spoke of a “hidden wisdom,” which “God predestined before the ages to our glory” (1 Cor. 2:7). That predestined wisdom centered around the death of Jesus Christ. Paul made that clear in the very next verse by stating that if the “rulers of this age” had understood that “hidden wisdom,” they “would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8).

It is thought by some that the “rulers of this age” of whom Paul wrote were not earthly rulers but demonic spiritual rulers who influenced wicked men to crucify Christ (see Eph. 6:12). If that is true, then you can understand why they would not have crucified “the Lord of glory” had they understood God’s “hidden wisdom.” In so doing, they unwittingly helped fulfill God’s predestined plan to redeem humanity.

In Summary...

Were you predestined to believe in Jesus? No, that was your own choice. You yielded to God’s gracious drawing through the creation, the gospel, and your conscience. But were you predestined? Yes, if you believe in Jesus. God knew you would make the right choice, and your name has been written in heaven from the foundation of the world. God predestined that you would be a member of His eternal family who will live with Him forever. And it has all been made possible because of the predestined, sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Christ’s death on the cross makes every blessing—past, present, and future—possible. *Praise God for His amazing love!*