

Understanding Predestination

Some believe in the concept of predestination: That God has chosen ahead of time who will be saved and who will not be saved, and that since God has made the choice we do not have the power to change that. This is a brief look at the arguments for and against this belief.

Scriptures that appear to support predestination

Matthew 11:27	no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (See also Luke 10:22)
Matthew 22:14	For many are called, but few are chosen.
Romans 8:29-30	For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.
Romans 9:11-29	...though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls – she was told, “The older will serve the younger.... “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.
Ephesians 1:4-5	even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons
Ephesians 1:11	In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined
1 Thessalonians 1:4	For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you
Revelation 17:14	for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.

Why predestination is not a Biblical teaching

As with any topic, we must understand all the Bible’s teachings on the topic, not just the ones we like or want to grasp. All of God’s word is truth, and there are no contradictions in scripture.

Psalm 119:160 The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.

☞ God has always given us a choice to follow him or reject him.

Genesis 3:11	Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?
Joshua 24:15	And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”
Matthew 10:38	And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

☞ Predestination ignores God’s teachings regarding Jesus coming to save the entire world.

Luke 2:10	And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.
Luke 19:10	For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

Luke 24:46-47	Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.
Acts 17:30	The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.
1 Timothy 2:3-4	This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
2 Peter 3:9	The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.
1 John 2:2	He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

☞ **The Bible speaks of those who once followed God, but chose to abandon their faith.**

1 Timothy 6:10	For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.
James 5:20	Whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.
2 Peter 2:20-21	For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.
2 Timothy 4:10	For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

☞ **It is the church which has been predestined – the vehicle – not individual passengers.**

A closer and more careful reading of Ephesians 1:3-14 shows that we are predestined according to God's will and purpose. All those who are redeemed through Christ and who follow God's will are included in that purpose and plan of grace which God put in place before time began. It is not individuals who are predestined, it is those who follow God's will and purpose – the church. Salvation is for all those who obey the gospel.

Ephesians 1:3-14	³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he <i>chose us in him before the foundation of the world</i> , that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, <i>according to the purpose of his will</i> , ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, <i>according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ</i> ¹⁰ <i>as a plan for the fullness of time</i> , to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined <i>according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will</i> , ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ <i>In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit</i> , ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.
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The church is comprised of those who follow God's will. In Ephesians 3, Paul expands on his earlier teaching in chapter one. God's eternal plan of salvation is implemented through the church.

Ephesians 3:7-11

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and **to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God** who created all things, ¹⁰so that **through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known** to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹**This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord**

☞ Salvation is for those who continue in following God.

Paul's teaching to the Gentiles in Roman's 11:17-24 shows that God's plan was to be shared first with the Jews, and then later revealed to the Gentiles. The Gentiles would be saved as grafted in branches, only as long as they continued in God's will and belief in him. Again, God's salvation is for those who choose him.

Romans 11:17-24

¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. ¹⁹ Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ That is true. **They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith.** So do not become proud, but fear. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. ²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, **but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness.** Otherwise you too will be cut off. ²³ And even they, **if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.** ²⁴ For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

Colossians 1:22-23

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ **if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard,** which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

While we see that God set aside Christians for specific works, such as Paul and his focus on the Gentiles, it is clear from scripture that God does not predestine specific individuals for salvation. God wants everyone to be saved. It is also clear from Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7 that not everyone will choose to live a life for God, even though that is his desire.

Matthew 7:13-14

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

Jesus goes on to teach in verse 21 of that same chapter that the determination as to who will enter the kingdom of heaven is based on those who choose to do God's will.

Matthew 7:21

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."