

“Even As He Chose Us ...”

“... *in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love*” (Eph. 1:4). The Ephesian letter is a frequent reference in Calvinistic material for they are persuaded their “brand” of Calvinism is sustained there. Paul will tell the Ephesians that they had been “foreordained” unto adoption of sons (1:5); made a heritage by being “foreordained” (1:11); God had worked all things according to His good pleasure according to the counsel of His will and according to His eternal purpose (1:11; 3:11). All of these terms are used by Calvinists but none of them were used by the apostle in the same sense that Calvinists use them.

There IS a Bible doctrine of foreordination and foreknowledge. Peter said on Pentecost that Christ had been “*delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*” (Acts 2:23). He also wrote that we are elect “*according to the foreknowledge of God*” and he urged that we make our “*calling and election sure*” (1 Pet. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:10). Paul, in other letters beside his Ephesian, spoke to Thessalonians regarding their “*election*” (1 Thess. 1:2). He wrote the Romans that “*whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren; and whom he foreordained, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified*” (Rom. 8:29-30). All of which is to say that God has foreordained certain ones to be His elect, but none of which is to say that God’s election of man is as John Calvin envisioned it!

Since Peter used the word “*foreknew*” and “*foreordained*” together in the same passage, we conclude that the terms are not precisely the same. It is possible that God foreknew something without foreordained it; impossible that God foreordain something without foreknowing it! In God’s omniscience, it was possible for Him to know what man would do in any given instance without approving or willing what that man do. On the other hand, when God foreordained certain things to occur, they occurred because He willed they should. God knew Israel would reject and crucify His Son. That did not necessarily mean He willed they should do it, but when Peter said Christ was “*delivered up by the determinate counsel*” of God, there is only one conclusion one may properly reach: God intended His Son to die at Calvary.

God chose us in His Son before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3). God’s plan for man’s redemption had been calculated and designed from the time of the world’s formation and God willed to bring about that plan through all the ages which actually preceded the coming of His Son into the world. Yet,

while God chose man in Christ, He did not interfere with man's free will. His determination about the place of man's election (in Christ) is unalterable and unchangeable. On the other hand, all men are left with the right to choose as to whether they will be in Christ or not! The contrast between Calvin's doctrine of election and the New Testament doctrines of election is very great. Calvin's doctrine makes God a respecter persons and robs man of his own volition: he is chosen (or rejected) irrespective of his will; regenerated (or left in an unregenerate state) irrespective to his will; and "kept" (or not "kept") irrespective of his will. The New Testament's doctrine of election pictures God as no respecter of persons, allowing each man his personal choice as to whether he will be chosen, regenerated and kept! Thus, when Paul says that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, we are not to understand that he means that each man's personal destiny was determined before the world began; rather we are to understand that God, foreknowing that man would sin, planned man's redemption before He made man, which purpose demanded that each man's redemption and election come because he came to be in Christ, yet leaving to every man his decision whether he willed or willed not to be in His Son!

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