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by David Bennett

God created man in his own image... Genesis 1:27 NIV

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. Genesis 1:31 NIV

I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse: therefore choose life Deuteronomy 30:19

But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD. Joshua 24:15 NIV

God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes. Ecclesiastes 7:29 NIV

Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waiver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him, but if Baal is god, follow him. 1 King 18:21

This is what the LORD says...For they have forsaken me ...They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal--something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind. Jeremiah 19:1-5 (also see Jeremiah 7:30-31)

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD – Jeremiah 29:13-14

Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? Ezekiel 18:23

Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. Jonah 2:8 (NIV) or also They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy Jonah 2:8 (KJV)

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing". Matthew 23:37 & Luke 13:34

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17 NIV

But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Luke 13:3b NIV

God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. Acts 17:27

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Romans 3:22-34 NIV

...if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9 NIV

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. Titus 2:11

...humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. --James 1:21

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me. Revelation 3:20

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Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. James 4:8 NSAB

The story is told of a group of theologians who were discussing predestination and free will. Things became so heated that the group broke up into two opposing factions. But one man, not knowing which to join, stood for a moment trying to decide. At last he joined the predestination group.

“Who sent you here?” they asked.

“No one sent me,” he replied. “I considered the facts and decided on my own.”

“Free Will!” they exclaimed. “You can't join us! You belong with the other group!”

So he followed their orders and went to the other clique.

There someone asked, “When did you decide to join us?”

The young man replied, “Well, I didn't really decide--I was sent here.”

“Sent here!” they shouted. “You can't join us unless you have decided by your own free will.”¹

The issue of free will versus predestination has been a contentious debate for a long time and is likely to remain so. Most of the arguments on the issue I've read, heard or participated in generally devolve either into an exercise as to which side can rattle off the most Bible scriptures to bolster their arguments or become too convoluted to follow. What I hope to do here is to clearly present the case for free will in a simple manner. I also use many scriptures, each time to use in relation to a particular concept. While I do address some specific Calvinist arguments for predestination I am not going to address all of them. Neither am I going to use every point ever used in favor of free will.

WHAT IS PREDESTINATION?

Predestination is doctrine which teaches that God predetermined who would go to heaven and who would spend eternity in hell. Furthermore, it teaches that each person has absolutely no choice in accepting or rejecting salvation through Christ. Every move you make and everything that happens to you, good or bad, was predetermined by God. If you reject Christ you never had a chance to believe.

Those who espouse predestination claim that if we have the free will to accept God's salvation then we have earned our way into heaven. Therefore we're not saved by grace but by our own merit-- we caused our own salvation, not God.

Belief in predestination is often generally referred to as *Calvinism* or *Reformed Theology*.

- *God preordained, for his own glory and the display of His attributes of mercy and justice, a part of the human race, without any merit of their own, to eternal salvation, and another part, in just punishment of their sin, to eternal damnation. John Calvin (1509-1564)*
- *We proved above that something not subject to free choice is nevertheless voluntarily done. John Calvin²*
- *I believe that nothing happens apart from divine determination and decree. We shall never be able to escape from the doctrine of divine predestination - the doctrine that God has foreordained certain people unto eternal life. Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)*

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WHAT IS FREE WILL?

Free will teaches that when presented with the facts of God's plan for salvation that everyone has a choice to make, to either accept or reject God's gift of salvation. God desires that *everyone* accept His gift. What was predestined was God's *plan for salvation* through Jesus for those who accept it. Therefore if you accept that Jesus died for your sins and you have made Him Lord of your life then you are a part of the predetermined plan.

- *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.* Jesus Christ³
- *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* Apostle Peter⁴
- *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.* Apostle Paul⁵

Free will acknowledges that God is active in our lives and that He does intervene and cause certain things to happen as evidenced by the prophecies in the scriptures. Other things that happen to us are a result of choices we make. While yet other events happen because of sin that is in the world, we can't control the events. We can control how we react to them. Free will teaches that because God is sovereign and active in our lives He can use any event for our benefit, even those events He does not directly cause to occur.

WHAT IS ELECTION?

J. Vernon McGee said this about election:

The word *predestination* comes from the Greek *proorisos*, and it literally means "to define, to mark out, to set apart." ... predestination has to do with God's purpose with those He chooses... I cannot repeat often enough that ***election is God's choosing us in Christ.***⁶

John Wesley points out regarding those ordained to eternal life in Acts 13:

...and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. Acts 13:48 KJV

Luke does not say foreordained. He is not speaking of what was done from eternity, but of what was then done, through the preaching of the Gospel. He is describing that ordination, and that only, which was at the very time of hearing it. During this sermon those believed, says the apostle, to whom God then gave power to believe. It is as if he had said, "They believed, whose hearts the Lord opened;" as he expresses it in a clearly parallel place, speaking of the same kind of ordination, Acts 16:14, etc. It is observable, the original word is not once used in Scripture to express eternal predestination of any kind. The sum is, all those and those only, who were now ordained, now believed. Not that God rejected the rest: it was his will that they also should have been saved: but they thrust salvation from them. Nor were they who then believed constrained to believe. But grace was

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then first copiously offered them. And they did not thrust it away, so that a great multitude even of Gentiles were converted. In a word, the expression properly implies, a present operation of Divine grace working faith in the hearers.⁷

Another commentary⁸ has this to say:

Election is the pre-designed destiny of every one who believes in Christ. *Predestination* means that the believer has a part in this "pre-designed" plan of God. *Election* is the word that sums up that plan. It describes the "status" of the believer who, not only possesses an eternal destiny, but now "in time" has a functional responsibility to represent the "light" viewpoint of God to the world of darkness in which he lives.

Election is the present possession of every person who has trusted in Christ as savior. Colossians 3:12, "as the elect of God" (Romans 1:6-7)

One is *elected* based on God's *grace*. There is no personal merit or works involved at all. *Grace* provides our destiny. All man needs to do is accept it by personal trust in Jesus as the Messiah-Savior. Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Corinthians 8:9.

The basis for election is the election of Christ.

- He is the elect of God: Isaiah 42:1; 1 Peter 2:4, 6.
His election was established from eternity past. Acts 4:28; 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8.
- The believer is made a partner with Christ and actually shares His destiny, which is His election. 1 Corinthians 1:9; Romans 8:17
- This is accomplished through union with Christ. i.e. being identified into the "one" body of Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13) and is represented by the term "in Him" Ephesians 1:4. 1 Peter 5:10, "called you to His eternal glory IN CHRIST."

The "standard of THE ELECTION" refers to God's plan for saving those who trust in the Messiah. That is why it is called "an election of GRACE," (Romans 11:5).

The difference between "called" and "elect"

- **Called:** The word group, klätos (kaleö, kläsis) describes our election with emphasis on the believer's function and responsibility here on earth. It also is used to indicate the "invitation" aspect of God's plan of salvation. "many are called (as in *all*) but few are chosen," Matthew 22:14
- **Elect:** The word group, eklektos (eklegomai) describes our election with emphasis on the believer's position in union with Christ, the STATUS of election. Sometimes this word is translated as "chosen." We are "chosen" by God to be part of His plan because we accept His invitation through faith.
- Both words are used together at: Revelation 17:14; 2 Pet. 1:10; Mat. 22:14

How does God choose and still allow free will?

But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go;

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but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink." Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

Judges 7:4-6

J. Vernon McGee called this, "one of the finest lessons concerning divine election and man's free will." McGee went further on to say, "This is the way they work together. God said to Gideon, "I am going to choose the men that I want to go with you, but the way I will do it is to let them make the choice. Bring them down to the water, and the ones who lap water like a dog, just going through and throwing it into their mouths, are the ones I have chosen. You can put aside those men who get down on all fours and take their time drinking. I don't want them." ⁹

IS THERE A MIDDLE GROUND?



Imagine you are on a high beam and are holding in each hand one of two ends of a rope on a pulley to keep you upright. One end of the rope is *predestination* and the other end of the rope is *free will*. If you lean on one end or the other end too much, you're going to fall over.

This illustration suggests that there needs to be a certain amount of openness in the debate. However, I've been told emphatically by a friend I'll call Fred, who is a bi-vocational *Reformed Theology* pastor, that there is no middle ground.

Loraine Boettner, author of *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* claims "*there is no consistent middle ground between Calvinism and Atheism.*"

DOES IT MATTER?

There are two reasons as I see it that it matters:

a) It may be demotivating for us to reach the lost if we believe everything is predetermined. If salvation is already decided there is no real point in being proactive in the faith or urgency in preaching the Gospel. If your neighbor is unsaved Reformed Theology tells you that they will come to know Jesus or spend eternity in hell whether you tell them about God's plan for salvation or not.

b) Calvinists believe that if you don't believe in predestination it is because the Holy Spirit has chosen not to reveal the truth of predestination to you. The Holy Spirit reveals the truth of predestination to real believers so you must not be a real believer if you believe in free will.

Why do Calvinists even bother to debate the issue? After all, if they are correct then those believing in Calvinism and those believing in free will were predestined to have those beliefs. Yet there seem to be more books and more web sites arguing the case for predestination than there are in favor of free will. Many Calvinist sites verge on the militant, dismissing any argument for free will out of hand. All Calvinist websites I've come across call freewill dangerous to true faith. If, as Loraine Boettner says, "*there are no valid arguments for free will*" then why devote so much time to arguing the case for predestination?

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EARLY JEWISH THOUGHT

Jewish philosophy stresses that free will is a product of the intrinsic human soul and is closely linked with the concept of reward and punishment, based on the Torah itself:

I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse: therefore choose life
Deuteronomy 30:19

It is further understood that in order for Man to have true free choice, he must not only have inner free will, but also an environment in which a choice between obedience and disobedience exists. God thus created the world such that both good and evil can operate freely.¹⁰

EARLY CHRISTIAN FATHERS

Calvinists claim that their position is proven by early church leaders and usually point to Augustine who lived from 354 to 430 AD. That does go a long way back. What do even earlier church leaders say about free will? Let's look at a few. Some of these men were discipled directly by one or two of the original twelve apostles or by men they taught and mentored.

Ignatius of Antioch- Died between 98 and 110 AD. Ignatius was likely a disciple of both Apostles Peter and John and was martyred (Ignatius was condemned to fight wild beasts in the Coliseum) in Rome. Seven of his letters have survived to this day; he is generally considered to be one of the Apostolic Fathers (the earliest authoritative group of the Church Fathers):

- *If any one is truly religious, he is a man of God; but if he is irreligious, he is a man of the devil, made such, not by nature, but by his own choice.*¹¹

Polycarp- c. 69 AD-c. 155 AD. Martyred by being burned at the stake in his 87th year. Polycarp had been a disciple of John (there is debate as whether this John was the son of Zebedee, or John the Presbyter (Lake 1912)).¹² I list Polycarp here not for any particular quote but because he was a teacher of Irenaeus, whom I do quote:

- *But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom...*¹³

Irenaeus- (ca. 130-202) - Irenaeus, who was also a martyr, was taught by Polycarp and his writings were formative in the early development of Christian theology. About 180 AD Irenaeus wrote *Against Heresies Book IV*, against ideas that would later become aspects of Calvinist and Reformed Theology in its denial of the free will as you can see in the following summaries:

- *Men are Possessed of Free Will, and Endowed with the Faculty of Making a Choice. It is Not True, Therefore, that Some are by Nature Good, and Others Bad.*¹⁴
- *Man is Endowed with the Faculty of Distinguishing Good and Evil; So That, Without Compulsion, He Has the Power, by His Own Will and Choice, to Perform God's Commandments, by Doing Which He Avoids the Evils Prepared for the Rebellious.*¹⁵

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Justin Martyr- c. 100/114AD – c. 162/168 AD. He was another early Christian apologist (defender) of the faith and was martyred by beheading. His works represent the earliest surviving Christian apologies of notable size.

- *Man acts by his own free will and not by fate.*¹⁶
- *We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, chastisements, and rewards are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions. Otherwise, if all things happen by fate, then nothing is in our own power. For if it be predestined that one man be good and another man evil, then the first is not deserving of praise or the other to be blamed. Unless humans have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions-whatever they may be.... For neither would a man be worthy of reward or praise if he did not of himself choose the good, but was merely created for that end. Likewise, if a man were evil, he would not deserve punishment, since he was not evil of himself, being unable to do anything else than what he was made for.*¹⁷
- *But that you may not have a pretext for saying that Christ must have been crucified, and that those who transgressed must have been among your nation, and that the matter could not have been otherwise, I said briefly by anticipation, that God, wishing men and angels to follow His will, resolved to create them free to do righteousness; possessing reason, that they may know by whom they are created, and through whom they, not existing formerly, do now exist; and with a law that they should be judged by Him, if they do anything contrary to right reason: and of ourselves we, men and angels, shall be convicted of having acted sinfully, unless we repent beforehand. But if the word of God foretells that some angels and men shall be certainly punished, it did so because it foreknew that they would be unchangeably [wicked], but not because God had created them so.*¹⁸

Clement of Alexandria (190 AD)

- *A man by himself working and toiling at freedom from sinful desires achieves nothing. But if he plainly shows himself to be very eager and earnest about this, he attains it by the addition of the power of God. God works together with willing souls. But if the person abandons his eagerness, the spirit from God is also restrained. To save the unwilling is the act of one using compulsion; but to save the willing, that of one showing grace.*¹⁹
- *Neither praise nor condemnation, neither rewards nor punishments, are right if the soul does not have the power of choice and avoidance, if evil is involuntary.*²⁰

Archelaus (250-300 AD)

- *All the creatures that God made, He made very good. And He gave to every individual the sense of free will, by which standard He also instituted the law of judgment.... And certainly whoever will, may keep the commandments. Whoever despises them and turns aside to what is contrary to them, shall yet without doubt have to face this law of judgment.... There can be no doubt that every individual, in using his own proper power of will, may shape his course in whatever direction he pleases.*²¹

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Methodius (260-315 AD)

- *Those [pagans] who decide that man does not have free will, but say that he is governed by the unavoidable necessities of fate, are guilty of impiety toward God Himself, making Him out to be the cause and author of human evils.²²*

Augustine (354-430 AD)

- *God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.*
- *If there be not free will grace in God, how can He save the world? And if there be not free will in man, how can the world by God be judged?²³*

Interestingly, Calvinists use Augustine to justify predestination. Perhaps Augustine didn't lean on the predestination rope as hard as the Reformed Theology crowd would like us to believe. Augustine seems to be saying in the following quote that God doesn't play favorites:

Damnation is rendered to the wicked as a matter of debt, justice and desert, whereas the grace given to those who are delivered is free and unmerited, so that the condemned sinner cannot allege that he is unworthy of his punishment, nor the saint vaunt or boast as if he were worthy of his reward. Thus, in the whole course of this procedure, there is no respect of persons.²⁴

Perhaps John Calvin didn't lean as hard on that predestination rope either. It is said that John Calvin hadn't given the issue of predestination much thought until someone specifically asked him what he thought about it.

THE PROBLEM WITH PREDESTINATION

According to Reformed Theology when someone, lets call her Molly, accepted Christ it wasn't really because of her and made of her own free will, but because God created her specifically to accept Christ, without a choice.

Now suppose her grown son dies without accepting Christ. Reformed Theology tells us that God created her son specifically to spend eternity separated from God, in hell.

Therefore all the years of prayer, anguish and hope that Molly's son would accept Christ was a waste of time. Her son was doomed in the womb and was created to be eternal kindling wood, a never-ending Duralog.

It's one thing to have a loved one that rejects God because of his own choice, but another to think that *person* never had a chance because God never *allowed* them a chance.

To follow predestination to its logical conclusion we should not feel any sense of grief or sadness when an unsaved friend or relative dies and goes to spend eternity in hell. Rather we should rejoice because the person is going to hell, just as God intended.

IN THE BEGINNING... IT WAS VERY GOOD

We see in the first chapter of Genesis that God created *everything* and *everything* He created was *good*.

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God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. Genesis 1:31 NIV

What did God create that was not good? Nothing!

We're also told that "*God created man in His image*". The Bible tells us God created man, male and female, and *God blessed them* (Genesis 1:28). Nowhere in the Genesis account does it tell us that God created some specifically for damnation.

Sin, Rebellion and Evil

God did not create the world to destroy part of it. That is something we brought on ourselves.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:17 NIV

Sin: Everything God created was good so how did sin enter the world? Apostles Paul and John tell us that sin entered the world through Adam and that God did not create sin.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned. Romans 5:12 NIV

...But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him... the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God... 1 John 3:5-9 NASB

God did not cause Adam to disobey Him; otherwise man wouldn't have been created in God's image. The Bible tells us that God hates sin and that sin can't enter heaven. Solomon wrote

This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes. Ecclesiastes 7:29 NIV

Reformed Theology says "God created us therefore whatever He does is just, whether we like it or not." Yes, that is true, however, I don't accept that the definition of *just* nor do I believe that God is that capricious or arbitrary. God sets the standard for us and His attributes are knowable.

A just parent cannot force his child to eat a cupcake and then slap the tar out of him for eating it. It's a different case when the parent says, "Don't eat the cup cake", then if the child thinks about it and says to himself, "Dad really didn't mean he'd punish me if I did eat it" or "I don't care what Dad says, I make my own decisions and I am eating the cupcake anyway" then the resulting punishment is just.

Having free will means bad things are going to happen as a result of living in a fallen world. When a loved one gets sick, or dies in a traffic accident, or loses their job, or just gets a cold many tend to say it's God's will. It is certainly a convenient and uncomplicated explanation. If one means it's God's will because He didn't prevent it is different than saying God caused it to

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happen. Looking back at the pulley analogy we can lean on that one possibility too much because many calamities are a consequence of living in a sinful fallen world of our own making. Otherwise one would have to conclude that God causes every rape, every murder, and every starving child. Nevertheless we can rely on God because He can use any incident for His glory. In the same way, regardless of what befalls us, God expects us to react a certain way:

... Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...
Philippians 1:27 NIV

Rebellion: Did God create Lucifer/Satan, specifically to rebel and take a third of the angels with him? Because God is sovereign, He could have prevented the possibility of the rebellion from ever happening. That He didn't prevent it doesn't mean He caused it to happen.

Evil: Did God create evil?

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Genesis 2:16-17 NIV

And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Genesis 3:22 NIV

You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; Psalm 5:4 NIV

The LORD loves righteousness and justice Psalms 33:5 NIV

Josh McDowell had the following to say about creation, evil, and God's love for us:

The Scriptures make it plain that God did not create the world in the state in which it is now, but evil came as a result of the selfishness of man. The Bible says that God is a God of love and He desired to create a person and eventually a race that would love Him. But genuine love cannot exist unless freely given -- through free choice God allows us to accept His love or to reject it.

This choice made the possibility of evil a reality. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they did not choose something God created, but, by their choice, they brought evil into the world. God is neither evil nor did He create evil. Man brought evil upon himself by selfishly choosing his own way apart from God's way. ²⁵

GOD LOVES US

God created us out of love for a purpose. The purpose is God wants a relationship with us. A relationship cannot be one-sided where the interaction of one side is all controlled by the other side. Imagine creating a sock-puppet with button-eyes and carrying on both sides of a conversation with it. How satisfying is it for you as a creator to make up both sides of the dialog?

If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your forefathers.
Deuteronomy 7:12 NIV

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... the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. John 16:27 NIV

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4:8 NIV

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4:10 NIV

God created man for fellowship, not to keep us in a fishbowl as a pet, in a cell as a prisoner, or preprogrammed to be obedient robots. If God did there would be no relationship.

God, from the beginning, had a plan to redeem mankind and built into that plan were choices and consequences for man. God desires fellowship with all mankind, not just certain people. Yet God knows that not all people are going to reciprocate because of the freedoms He gave us.

WE ANGER GOD

We know that God cares for us because He created us. We also know He loves us because the Bible says God gave His Son for our salvation. There is another emotion that shows that man was created with free will. That emotion is *anger*. The Old Testament says that God was angry with many people, even His own chosen people, the Israelites. Some He punished, some He relented at the pleading of people like Moses and others. If God preordained everything then why would He be angry if people and nations did exactly what they were programmed to do? God is sovereign and almighty therefore no one could oppose Him or disobey Him unless they were given free will.

In Genesis 1, God said *everything* He created was good. In chapter 6 God flooded the earth.

Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever... The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.
Genesis 6:3;6 NIV

Sometime later after Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt they rebelled several times, even breaking the first and second commandments by creating and worshipping a golden calf:

"I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them..." Exodus 32:9-10 NIV

...For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways." Psalms 95:10 NIV

...When God heard them, he was very angry; he rejected Israel completely. Psalms 78:59

...they provoked the LORD to anger by their wicked deeds... Psalms 106:29 NIV

That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.' Hebrews 3:10 NIV

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And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief. Hebrews 3:17-19 NIV

Several writers in Psalms wrote about God's anger:

How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever? Psalms 79:5 NIV

Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? Psalms 85:5 NIV

Throughout 2 Kings we're told the Lord was angry with the northern nation of Israel and removed them entirely leaving only the southern nation Judah. Later Judah too would fall away.

...Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away... Isaiah 12:1 NIV

Later His anger against Israel subsided:

The LORD said to me, "Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah. Go, proclaim this message toward the north: "'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD, 'I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful,' declares the LORD, 'I will not be angry forever. Jeremiah 3:11-12 NIV

The prophets wrote about God's anger, punishment, and reconciliation:

The LORD is angry with all nations... Isaiah 34:2 NIV

When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath. Jeremiah 10:10 NIV

"The LORD was very angry with your forefathers Zechariah 1:2 NIV

Then the angel of the LORD said, "LORD Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?" Zechariah 1:12 NIV

They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry. Zechariah 7:12 NIV

We have seen that *we cause* God to be angry with us. God did not create us to tick Him off. Let's follow Reformed Theology logic: we are not as great as God and we cannot *make* Him do anything. Therefore, if God becomes angry with us it is because He created us to anger Him.

GOD'S GIFT, FAITH, EXCUSES, REPENTANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY

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Gift: The Bible calls salvation a gift. A gift without acceptance is not a gift. If you force a gift on the receiver it is no longer a gift. In business law to have a legally binding contract or a legal transaction you have to have an *offer* and an *acceptance*. Another element to have a legally binding transaction you must also have *consideration*, that is, something of value or a price has to be given. In the case of our salvation Jesus paid the price.

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! --Romans 5:15 NIV

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. --Romans 6:23 NIV

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- Ephesians 2:8 NIV

There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words-- John 12:48

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. --James 1:21 NIV

During a question and answer episode on J. Vernon McGee radio program a person asked “if Jesus died for everyone why is it that just those who believe in Jesus are saved?” His answer also pertains to the issue of whether we have free will to accept God’s gift: “*He died for all, but you have to accept the pardon that He paid in order for it to become yours. I’m told that in Pennsylvania there was a prisoner who was granted a pardon by the governor, and he refused to accept it. They took it to court, and the judgment was that a pardon could be granted but it wasn’t valid until it was accepted by the individual. Now, there’s a pardon for every sinner on top side of this earth, but you have to call for it by faith before it becomes yours.*”

Faith: In Romans 4 we’re told that it was **by faith** that Abraham was credited with being righteous. It is faith by which all are saved.

Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” --Luke 7:50 NIV

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. --Acts 20:21 NIV

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. --Romans 3:22-25 NIV

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11:6

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Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. --Galatians 3:13-14 NIV

Faith requires an action on our part, otherwise it is not faith. If *faith* was a pre-programmed action then it wouldn't be faith.

Excuse: My Calvinist friend Fred used as an argument for Reformed Theology that the Bible says we are all *without excuse*. True and that helps to make my case:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. Romans 1:18-20 NASB

“*Without excuse*” implies choice and consequence. If God created certain men to be condemned to hell then they had no choice and they do have an excuse. The excuse is: *God created me that way and I had no choice to either accept or reject God.*

Fred also told me, “*I read the bible to teach human responsibility, not free will.*”

Without free will there is no responsibility. If you accept predestination then you rule out responsibility.

Throughout the Bible God made conditions for individuals and groups, which they had free will to obey or reject.

“The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways.” Deuteronomy 28:9 NIV

It is clear that people have two choices. Today we have the same two basic choices:

“But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” Joshua 24:15 NIV

“Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waiver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him, but if Baal is god, follow him.” 1 King 18:21

Repentance: Repentance involves a conscious change on our part. It must be sincere, therefore it must also be made freely by our own choice.

Therefore, thus says the LORD, “If you return, then I will restore you— Jeremiah 15:19 NASB

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Thus says the Lord GOD, "Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations. Ezekiel 14:6 NASB

Say to them, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways!" Ezekiel 33:11 NIV

But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Luke 13:3 NIV

...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9 NIV

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9

TEMPTATION VS TESTING

"When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." James 1:13-14 NIV

If one cannot fail a test because God fixed the outcome, then it is no longer a test, but a pointless exercise. A test has a purpose and failure is always an option, otherwise it is not a test.

The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked... Psalms 5:11 NASB

Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind... Psalms 26:2 NIV

And we are told the Israelites were in the desert for 40 years not only as punishment but they were also being tested.

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. Deuteronomy 8:2 NIV

According to Calvinism God already predestined the outcome, so why test them? God was testing them, allowing them to keep His commands or not, something that could not be done without free will.

A FEW ARGUMENTS USED BY CALVINISTS

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of predestination arguments.

Free will denies God's Sovereignty

Reformed Theology claims that those who believe in free will deny, or at the very least, limit God's sovereignty. As to denying God's sovereignty Reformed Theology has it backwards. God's sovereignty is limited by those who say that God can only exercise His will by

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predetermining who will end up in heaven or in hell by predetermining every action. God is so powerful that He can ensure His plans are fulfilled *and* allow man free will.

Looking back at the discussion on Genesis we know that:

- a. Everything God created was good therefore God did not create sin.
- b. Sin entered into the world when man sinned of his own volition.

Even though God is sovereign He did not prevent man from sinning or the effects of sin. Having the capability to sin doesn't make us greater than the Creator which is what Calvinism implies if we have free will. That He *could have* prevented sin but didn't doesn't weaken God's position with respect to sovereignty and neither does allowing us free will. God allowed His perfect creation to become corrupted, but rather than holler "Cut!" and make us do the scene over God allowed His creation to continue.

Why did God allow sin in His creation? The answer is that to prevent sin and its effects would be to prevent free will. Therefore the fact that sin and its consequences exists is proof that we have been given free will. Otherwise God would either have created a perfect world and kept it perfect or he would have prevented the effects of sin from marring His creation once we messed it up.

Free will does not negate God's sovereign will, nor does it deny that God has a plan for mankind. That God allows us free will is demonstrated by His paying *the* price for us all. All we have to do is accept Him.

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. Romans 8:3

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2:2

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. James 1:21

God chose us, we didn't chose Him

You did not choose Me, but I chose you. John 15:16 NIV

Jesus is talking specifically to His disciples. In Jesus' day men who wanted to study and learn from a rabbi *usually* chose which rabbi they wanted to follow and emulate. Jesus is reminding them that He chose them.

Another way to look at this verse which is equally valid is God chose man over all His creation from the beginning, to have fellowship with Him. So yes, "God did choose us, we did not choose Him."

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world

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...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... Ephesians 1:4-6 NASB

At first glance it *appears* that Paul is saying that those who are believers were predestinated for salvation. However, Paul is talking about *the plan* that God has for us, *through Jesus Christ*. As stated previously, God created (and therefore chose us) to have a relationship with Him.

The Bible does not teach free will

Fred told me the Bible does not teach free will as the term *free will* is not specifically mentioned. Fred's claim that *free will* is not *specifically* mentioned is incorrect. For one thing that depends on which translation you're using. Consider the following:

Four different translations of the Bible, NIV, NKJV, KJV, and NASB on the following variations of *predestination* reveals how often derivatives of the term *predestination* are used:

Predestine	NIV=0	NKJV=0	KJV=0	NASB=0
Predestinate	NIV=0	NKJV=0	KJV=2 *	NASB=0
Predestination	NIV=0	NKJV=0	KJV=0	NASB=0
Predestined	NIV=4*	NKJV=4*	KJV=0	NASB=6*

* = None of the references were in the Old Testament or in the Gospels.

The point here is not that *predestination* or the concept is or is not in the Bible, but that it is not a widely used term. That the term is not widely used proves nothing one way or the other. So to say that the term *free will* is not used or is used infrequently is a moot point.

Case in point -the *Trinity* is not *specifically* mentioned in the Bible yet we are able to infer it when considering the Bible as a whole. From Genesis to Revelation the concept but not the actual term is there. The same with free will, just because the term may not be there it doesn't mean the concept isn't.

However, free will *is* specifically mentioned. Read Paul's letter to Philemon, it is a wonderful illustration of how God wants us to do things for Him, of our own volition, out of our love for Him. Not because we have no choice in the matter, even though He *could* make or force us to.

In this letter Paul is writing to his friend, and brother in Christ, Philemon, to let him know that Paul is returning something that belongs to him, his slave Onesimus who has now accepted Jesus for his salvation. Paul tells Philemon how useful Onesimus has been to him and how he wants Philemon to treat Onesimus not as a slave but as a brother in Christ. Paul appeals to Philemon that if he has any regard for Paul that he should accept Onesimus the same way he would accept Paul:

Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do that which is proper, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you...but without your consent I did not want to do anything, that your goodness should not be as it were by compulsion, but of your own free will. Philemon 1:8, 9, 14 NASB

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It was out of *love* that Paul didn't force Philemon to free Onesimus. By virtue of Paul's position in the Church he could have easily kept Onesimus with him or he could have commanded and forced Philemon to free Onesimus and not punish him for running off.

Paul also reminds Philemon he was also indebted to Paul for leading him to salvation through Christ. Paul could have easily forced Philemon to do the right thing, but how much better for everyone involved, Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus, that Philemon do so of his own free will. It is always better to do things voluntarily, out of love, than by forced compulsion.

We were predestined according to His good pleasure

*...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself,
according to the good pleasure of His will-- Ephesians 1:5 NKJV*

In his commentary John Wesley had this to say about Ephesians 1:5²⁶

- ***Having predestinated us to the adoption of sons*** = Having foreordained that all who afterwards believed should enjoy the dignity of being sons of God, and joint heirs with Christ.
- ***According to the good pleasure of his will*** = According to his free, fixed, unalterable purpose to confer this blessing on all those who should believe in Christ, and those only.

God hardened Pharaoh's heart

No doubt God knew what was in Pharaoh's heart. Here are a few different translations of the same passage:

- *And he hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said. And the LORD said unto Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuseth to let the people go. Exodus 7:14 (King James Version)*
- *And Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said. So the LORD said to Moses: "Pharaoh's heart is hard; he refuses to let the people go. Exodus 7:13-14 (New King James Version)*
- *Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go. Exodus 7:13-14 (New American Standard)*
- *Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go. Exodus 7:13-14 (New International Version)*

Regardless of the translation what God did was bring to the surface *what was already in Pharaoh's heart*.

Even accepting the King James translation that God hardened Pharaoh's heart it does not explain what that really means.

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*Did God harden Pharaoh's heart? Yes, but in this way: If Pharaoh were a tenderhearted, sweet fellow who desired to turn to God and was happy to have Moses deliver the children of Israel because Pharaoh wanted to do something for them, then it was mean of God to harden the heart of this wonderful Pharaoh. If that is the way you read it, friends, you are not reading it right. **The hardening is a figurative word, which can mean twisting, as with a rope. It means God twisted the heart of Pharaoh. He was going to squeeze out what was in it.** God forced him to do the thing he really wanted to do. God's part in this was to bring to the surface that which was already there.*²⁷

No one seeks after God

Fred wrote to me in an e-mail, "The scripture says *MULTIPLE* times that 'No one seeks after God.'"

Fred failed to provide a single reference for his claim so I looked it up. Actually the phrase 'No one seeks after God,' is used *once*, not *multiple* times and is found in Romans 3:11 and Paul is partially quoting from Psalms 14:1-3, 53:1-3, & Ecclesiastes 7:20. If you read these in context these passages Paul references say we're *all* sinners. No argument from me on that!

The Bible does tell us, *multiple times*, that people are to seek Him: Exodus 18:15; Deuteronomy 4:29; 1 Kings 22:5; 1 Chronicles 28:9; 2 Chronicles 7:14; 2 Chronicles 15:2; 2 Chronicles 20:4; Psalm 9:10; Psalms 69:6; 69:32; Isaiah 55:6; Jeremiah 29:13 to specifically list a few.

- *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* Matthew 6:33 NIV
- *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.* Matthew 7:7-8 NIV
- *God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.* Acts 17:27 NIV
- *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.* Hebrews 11:6

GOD LISTENS & JESUS INTERCEDES

We know God listens to prayers. Hezekiah and Moses are two examples where God said, "I am going to do X" and then yielded to the pleading of His people. There are other examples.

The Bible tells us Jesus is our intercessor. People who are predestined to be saved do not require an intercessor. In Reformed Theology what is the purpose of prayer or intercession? Is it just pretend listening and interceding?

...God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men. 1 Timothy 2:3-6 NIV

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Hebrews 7:25 NIV

WHY DID JESUS NEED TO DIE?

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Jesus did not die a painless, quick, clean, and honorable death. In taking on the sins of the world Jesus in fact suffered a very painful, lengthy, bloody and ignoble death.

If God was going to predestine some to be saved and not others, why set up a scenario where Jesus had to die a horrible death on the cross for the sins of the whole world? Why not just create perfect obedient people in the first place without the capability or opportunity to sin?

The reason is simple. Jesus died because God created us with free will. Jesus did not die for sins God created and predestined us to have, He died for the sins we willingly commit.

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- John 1:10-12 NIV

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life John 3:16 NIV

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. Titus 2:11.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28:19 NIV

When I mentioned the *Great Commission* to Fred he told me the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel was not to save anyone, but merely to be obedient for the sake of the command. He said we do not actually accomplish anything as everyone has already been assigned an eternal place in either heaven or hell. That is not what the Bible says:

I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. Acts 26:18 NIV

Reformed Theology mixed with the Great Commission is like having a doctor operate on a dead person. It may be obedient, but it's also a complete waste of time. Paul tells us differently:

Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. 1 Corinthians 9:16-17 NIV

Calvinists will tell you if you are compelled to do something then it isn't voluntarily. However Paul is saying he preaches the gospel voluntarily even though he is compelled. Being compelled doesn't mean by force and without a choice. Sometimes we are compelled by conviction or love.

THE REFORMED DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION

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To explain his position on predestination Fred suggested I read *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* by Loraine Boettner, so I did. Reviewers hail this book as “*The Bible on Predestination*.” In the book Loraine Boettner decrees that there are **no** valid arguments to refute predestination/Calvinism, therefore rejecting all arguments out of hand. This tells me that Boettner is putting the writings of Calvin and his own on the same level as the Bible, as infallible and irrefutable. I’m not willing to do that.

Many of the general statements Boettner makes on the sovereignty of God I have no dispute with except that I see *predestination*, and not *free will*, as limiting God’s sovereignty.

Several times Boettner states that unbelief in predestination is unbelief in the Bible, referring to 1 Corinthians 2:14 to prove those who believe in free will are not convinced for a reason:

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

The implication is those who reject predestination and don’t believe in Calvinism **can’t believe** because the Holy Spirit has not revealed the truth to them. Boettner states on page 111 “*To the non-elect, the Bible is a sealed book; and only the true Christian is it “given” to see and understand these things.*” The logical conclusion, therefore, is unbelief in predestination doctrine is rejection of the scriptures, and therefore rejection of God, and Jesus.

1 Corinthians 2:14 has nothing to do with predestination but has everything to do with believing on Jesus and accepting Him. We receive the Holy Spirit when we believe and repent.

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." Acts 2:38-39

Calvinists love to pounce on the phrase *for all whom the Lord our God will call* claiming predestination proof. The call is for everyone, for black and white, for rich and poor, for people in North America and South America:

- *He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. John 1:7*
- *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16*
- *He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9.*
- *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. Titus 2:11*
- *For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. Romans 11:32*

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- [God] *who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.* 1 Timothy 2:4
- [Jesus] *...gave himself as a ransom for all men* 1 Timothy 2:6
- *...we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.* 1 Timothy 4:10

The only way predestination works, as described in Boettner's book, is when Calvinists like Boettner are allowed to determine the meaning of words like *believe, justice, faith, accept, gift, repent* and *all*.

To Boettner *all* never means *all* when applied to free will, in which case it always refer to *all of a subset*, meaning predestined, even when it is clear from the context that *all* does mean *all*.

Boettner's rationalization of Predestination is found in his statements on page 337, "*Some have declared-- and rightly we believe-- that there is no consistent middle ground between Calvinism and Atheism.*" He elaborates further, "*...As strict Calvinists we believe this to be the **only** system of Christian truth which is taught in the Bible and the only one that can be logically and respectably defended before the world.*" [Note: **only** was in bold by Boettner]

According to Boettner if you believe in free will you are not one of the elect and therefore not a believer. The logical conclusion is that those who believe in free will are destined to hell.

Many in Reformed Theology attempt to destroy those who believe in free will by misrepresenting them, sometimes in other areas. For example. Lorraine Boettner tries to discredit John Wesley by claiming Wesley "was a believer in witchcraft."

On page 426 Boettner had this to say of John Wesley, "*It should be said at this point that Wesley was a believer in witchcraft. Failure to believe in witches was looked upon by him as a concession to infidels and rationalists... In his Journal we read this report of a girl who was subject to fits: 'When old Doctor Alexander was asked what her disorder was, he answered, 'It is what formerly they would have called being bewitched.' And why should they not call it so now? Because the infidels have hooted it out of the world; and the complaisant Christians, in large number, have joined them in their cry.'*"

Other Calvinists have jumped on the "John Wesley believed in witchcraft" bandwagon. Many Calvinist websites state, "*In his Journal, Wesley bemoaned the decline of superstition, the advance of human thought and the more peaceable reign of Christ on the earth, in the following words: 'It is true likewise, that the English in general, and, indeed, most of the men of learning in Europe, have given up all accounts of witches and apparitions as mere wives' fables. I am sorry for it... The giving up of witchcraft is in effect giving up the Bible!'*"

OK, so John Wesley believed in witchcraft. *Believing* and *condoning* are not the same. I'm pretty certain both John Calvin and Martin Luther believed in witchcraft as well. Like Wesley, they believed it existed and was dangerous.

As I said, John Wesley was neither condoning nor encouraging witchcraft. However, Wesley *did* believe that witchcraft was in the world and to deny it would deny the existence of evil and of Satan. I have seen surveys by Barna that show a significant number of Christians today, including many preachers, do not believe in a literal Satan or hell. That is what

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concerned Wesley.

In *Wesley's Commentary* on the Bible **every** reference to *witchcraft*, while emphasizing that it is real and exists, condemned its practice. The Calvinists link of John Wesley to witchcraft is nothing more than an effort to discredit John Wesley for his belief in free will.

Lorraine Boettner failed to mention Calvin and Luther's position on witchcraft:

Calvin and the other reformers (as well as Catholics) also believed in witchcraft.

In 1522 Martin Luther, charged the "witches" with a litany of supernatural behaviors, including transformation into different animals...

In 1545 twenty-three people were burned to death in Geneva under charges of practicing witchcraft and attempting to spread the plague.

John Calvin mentions witches in the "Institutes of the Christian Religion." Calvin was frank about his use of the witch craze to enforce the power of his own theocratic order, stating in the Institutes that he had brought up the entire issue "in order that we may be aroused and exhorted," (i.e., rallied behind Calvin's religious movement).

Apparently despite Boettner's attempt to discredit John Wesley on the issue of witchcraft Wesley was in pretty good company!

I mention this to demonstrate the flawed logic that is used through out Lorraine Boettner's 400-plus page book.

THE REFORMATION

The reformers were trying to show those who'd been grown up in the Roman Catholic church with the growing corruption and false teachings that they couldn't earn, pray, or pay their way into heaven. The reformers were trying to fight the corruption and emphasize the truth that one cannot do anything to earn salvation but accept God's gift by faith. Nothing else is required.

But, like the Roman Catholic church of that day, some things were over emphasized by some reformers, in other words the Calvinists over corrected, at least with respect to free will.

One point Lorraine Boettner conveniently ignores is that during the Protestant Reformation not all of the early reformers always agreed with each other, sometimes their differences were bitter.

Those who believe in free will don't reject everything from the reformers of Calvin's and Luther's day. John Wesley was influenced by reformers like Martin Luther:

*"For ten years he (Wesley) had fought temptation and tried to fulfill the law of the Gospel, but had not, he wrote, obtained freedom from sin, nor the witness of the Spirit, because he sought it, not by faith, but "by the works of the law." He had learned from the Moravians that true faith was inseparably connected with a sense of forgiveness, and that saving faith is given in a moment. John Wesley understood this while listening to the reading of **Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans**²⁸, containing an explanation of faith and the doctrine of justification by faith. "I felt," he wrote, "my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was*

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given me that he had taken away my sins.” A few weeks later he preached a remarkable sermon on the doctrine of present personal salvation by faith, which was followed by another, on God’s grace “free in all, and free for all.” He never stopped preaching this doctrine and that of the witness of the Spirit.”

Martin Luther’s testimony to justification through faith alone shows that perhaps he did not lean as hard on the predestination rope as Boettner and other later-day Calvinists. From the Internet I read of Luther:

During A.D. 1515 he lectured on Romans, and, in the next two years, on Galatians. Somewhere in this time the passage, ‘The just shall live by faith’ brought personal assurance to him that he was accepted by God-through faith alone. He wrote: ‘I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise’.

There are points from the original Reform movement that we can all agree on:

sola gratia- we are saved from sin and destruction by the grace of God alone -- never by human works, no matter how good they might seem to be.

sola fide- our major responsibility toward God is to live through total faith alone in God and his "providence" or good care.

sola scriptura- all authoritative guidance for the Christian life comes from scripture alone -- not from human authority.

CONCLUSION

There are some who don’t want to get involved in this debate partly because it is divisive and partly because they think the discussion is pointless because “you can prove anything by selecting the right Bible scripture.” True enough but that can be a cop out because that implies that the truth is not knowable. A common mistake many make in understanding what the Bible is telling us is *neglecting to interpret difficult passages in light of clear ones*. Another mistake is *basing a teaching on an obscure passage*.²⁹

When you look at the Bible as a whole and consider why God created man, why God is angered by us, why Jesus came to earth to be a sacrifice for our sins, and why God delays in destroying the world and creating a new one it is clear God is giving every person every chance possible to repent and accept Him. Otherwise we can ignore our lost neighbors, criminals, or those struggling with various addictions, because the result of predestination is that is the way they were created and were meant to be.

God is not standing off in the distance, having wound us up and pre-programmed us, watching us and the rest of His creation wind down. No, God is actively involved with us on our life’s journey and we are involved as well.

I have addressed just a few arguments for free will and the Reformed Theology crowd can give you as many reasons for predestination. Yet it all boils down to this:

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If you can believe that God does not love everyone, just specific people, and that Jesus only died for a predetermined few, then you won't have any problems justifying a belief in predestination. For me it doesn't get any more basic, or any clearer, than Jesus' words in John 3:16-17

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

David Bennett
December 2005

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