



PREDESTINATION

Course 8, Solving Doctrinal Differences, Lesson 7

The Problem: The doctrine of predestination did not become a central concern in Christian theology until the time of Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354–430). In response to Pelagius, a British monk who taught that human will could contribute to salvation without divine grace, Augustine insisted that any transformation in fallen humanity is entirely the work of God's grace. Before the fall, Adam could choose good because he had grace. After the fall, human will became enslaved to sin. According to Augustine, no one can choose God's will unless grace first intervenes. But this grace is not given universally—it is reserved for the elect, those whom God chooses by His sovereign will. This grace is irresistible: those predestined to salvation will receive it and be saved. Those not chosen remain in their lost condition and face just condemnation. See Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought*, Vol. 2, pp. 44–47.

The Reformers and Predestination

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

Luther built upon Augustine's ideas, especially in his 1525 treatise *The Bondage of the Will*, written in response to Erasmus. Luther argued that everything—good or evil—happens by God's unchangeable will. Human free will, he claimed, is an illusion. People do not choose God; God chooses them. This led to the doctrine of **double predestination**:

- The elect are chosen for salvation.
- The rest are predestined to damnation.

Luther wrote: "Everything we do, everything that happens... happens necessarily and immutably if you have regard to the will of God." (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 33, p. 38) Though Luther insisted that God is not the author of evil, his system left little room for human responsibility. He even suggested that Adam's fall was willed by God: "He is God, and for His will, there is no cause or reason... it is itself the rule of all things." (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 33, pp. 180–181) Luther concluded: "There cannot be any free choice in man or angel or any creature." (Vol. 33, p. 293)

Erasmus (c. 1466–1536)

In contrast, Erasmus argued that humans have the capacity to choose what is right and to cooperate with grace. While affirming the necessity of grace, he maintained that human will plays a role in salvation—a view Luther found unacceptable.

John Calvin (1509–1564) and the Rise of Double Predestination

Calvin placed double predestination at the heart of his theology. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he taught that:

- God eternally decreed who would be saved and who would be damned.
- These decrees are unchangeable and not based on human merit or foreseen choices.
- Even Adam's fall was part of God's sovereign plan.

Calvin wrote: "God not only foresaw the fall... but also meted it out in accordance with His own decision." (*Institutes*, III.XXIII.7) When critics questioned the justice of condemning people based on divine decree, Calvin and Luther responded that God's will is mysterious and beyond human understanding. They rejected the idea that God's decrees were based on foreknowledge of human choices. Instead, they taught that God *caused* those choices.

Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) and the Defense of Free Will

Arminius challenged the Reformers' view. He taught that:

- God *foresees* who will accept Christ and who will reject Him.
- Salvation is offered to all, but only those who freely choose Christ are predestined to eternal life.

- God does not will evil, nor does He will anyone's damnation.
- Grace is available to all, but it is not irresistible.

Arminius emphasized that God's foreknowledge does not negate human freedom. His view affirms both divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

The Synod of Dort and Westminster Confession

In 1618–19, the Synod of Dort rejected Arminianism and affirmed Calvinistic predestination. Arminians were persecuted. Later, the Westminster Assembly (1647) adopted Calvinistic predestination in its Confession of Faith, though it did not affirm that Adam's fall was decreed by God. Since then, Calvinism has shaped many Protestant traditions, though **Arminianism** remains influential—especially among Methodists, Wesleyans, and many evangelical groups.

Where Do Seventh-day Adventists Stand?

Seventh-day Adventists affirm key Arminian principles, such as the freedom of human will, the universal offer of salvation, and the rejection of unconditional election and irresistible grace. However, they do not formally identify with Arminianism as a theological system. Instead, they seek to understand predestination through the broader narrative of Scripture—especially the cosmic conflict between good and evil—and emphasize that God's foreknowledge does not override human freedom. The Adventist position emphasizes:

- The universal offer of salvation
- The freedom of human choice
- The necessity of grace
- God's desire that none should perish (2 Peter 3:9)

Rather than focusing on philosophical speculation, Adventists turn to the biblical narrative to understand how divine sovereignty and human freedom work together in the plan of redemption.

Objectives: In this lesson we will—

- I. Recognize God's prevenient will as the foundation of salvation—His grace reaches out to all people before any human response, restoring the capacity to choose.
- II. Explore the biblical truth that God's foreknowledge does not equate to divine causation—He foresees all, but does not will all that occurs.
- III. Understand predestination in light of God's foreknowledge—highlighting that divine election honors human freedom and choice.
- IV. Affirm the universal scope of Christ's atonement—Jesus died for all humanity, not exclusively for a predetermined elect.
- V. Recognize that the gift of choice is extended to all people—each person is invited to respond freely to God's grace.
- VI. Engage thoughtfully with Romans 9—examining its context and meaning within the broader narrative of Scripture.

I. GOD'S PREVENIENT WILL: A GRACE THAT GOES BEFORE

Before we ever knew to seek God, He was already seeking us. Scripture reveals a God who initiates, who calls, who awakens the heart long before we respond. This is *prevenient grace*—the grace that goes before. It is not earned, nor is it reserved for a select few. It is the quiet, persistent work of the Spirit that stirs longing, opens understanding, and restores the capacity to choose. God's prevenient will is His loving desire that *all* be saved. It is expressed in the cross, extended through the Spirit, and offered to every soul. This grace does not override human freedom—it honors it. And it reminds us that salvation begins not with our reaching up, but with God's reaching down.

The Word:

1. John 1:9 – *“The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.”*

2. Titus 2:11 – *“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.”*
3. Jeremiah 31:3 – *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.”*

Explanation: God’s will to save precedes human decision—He initiates the offer of salvation universally, not selectively. This is the foundation of *prevenient grace*, which restores the capacity to choose. Even in a fallen state, the Spirit works to awaken conscience and stir longing for God. This grace is sincere and impartial. Scripture affirms that God’s *antecedent will* is for all to be saved (cf. 1 Timothy 2:4), and He provides sufficient grace for every person to respond. Yet human freedom remains intact. God’s *consequent will*—what follows human choice—honors each individual’s decision to accept or reject His grace.

Relevance: God’s saving initiative is not reserved for a few—it reaches all. Prevenient grace reflects this divine generosity: the Spirit quietly awakens conscience, stirs longing, and restores the capacity to choose—even in the midst of brokenness. This grace is not earned—it is offered. Scripture confirms that God desires all to be saved (cf. 1 Timothy 2:4), and He equips every soul with the ability to respond. Human freedom is respected; God does not coerce, but honors each person’s response to His invitation.

Ellen White affirms that Christ’s grace is freely offered to all who will receive it, even though she does not use the term “prevenient.” Her writings consistently reflect the Spirit’s active pursuit of every heart—even before conscious faith begins.

Prevenient grace is not a reward for readiness—it is the reason readiness becomes possible. It reaches every soul before they even know they need it.

II. GOD DOES NOT WILL ALL THAT HE FORESEES

If God willed everything He foresaw, as some Reformers taught, He would bear ultimate responsibility for all the evil in the world. Yet Scripture affirms that while God foresees all that will occur (Isaiah 46:9–10), He does not cause sin, suffering, or misery. His foreknowledge is not synonymous with His will.

The Word:

4. Even though God foresees the destruction of the wicked, what has His will always been toward them—and toward humanity as a whole? 2 Peter 3:9-14, 17; 1 Timothy 2:4
5. To how many is the grace of God extended? Titus 2:1.
6. To how many is the love of God available? Whom does He desire to save? John 3:16-17
7. Because God does not will that anyone should be lost, what message did He give through Ezekiel? Ezekiel 18:31-32; 33:11-16
8. Even though God does not will the destruction of the wicked, what does He foresee will happen to them? 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 21:27

Explanation: God foresees the final judgment of the wicked at Christ’s return, yet His desire remains unchanged: *“not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). Peter’s pastoral urgency is clear—he pleads with believers to remain faithful and warns against falling away (v. 17). Though only God knows who will endure and who will turn aside, His longing is that none be lost.

Paul echoes this truth: God’s design is that *“all men”* be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). Though not all will choose Christ, God does everything an infinitely loving Father can do to make salvation possible. *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men”* (Titus 2:11). Grace is not reserved for a predestined few—it is extended to all.

John affirms this with sweeping clarity: “*God so loved the world...*” (John 3:16–17). The plan of salvation was never exclusive. God’s love and grace reach every soul. He has no favorites in redemption—all are His children, and He longs to save them.

Ezekiel reinforces this message with urgency and tenderness. God pleads with His people to turn from sin—not because their fate is sealed, but because His heart breaks over their destruction: “*I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies*” (Ezekiel 18:31–32). The prophet makes it clear: the righteous can fall, and the wicked can repent. God’s will is not fixed in fatalism—it is responsive to human choice. Even those He foresees as lost are pursued with earnest love, and some will respond and be saved.

To claim that everything God foresees is His will is to misrepresent His character. Did God will Adam’s fall? The corruption before the flood? The destruction of Sodom? The rejection and crucifixion of Christ? The long history of violence, disease, and death? Such a view distorts the gospel and drives seekers away from a God they cannot imagine choosing such evil.

Relevance: God’s omnipotence is not used to override human freedom—it is used to uphold it. He could have willed all things by necessity, as Stoic philosophy suggests. Instead, because of His infinite love, He gave humanity the ability to choose. Thus, what God foresees is often not His will, but the will of those who reject Him. His foreknowledge is not fatalism—it is compassion that watches, warns, and woos. And His will remains: that all might be saved.

III. PREDESTINATION IS BASED ON DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE

Scripture teaches that God’s predestination is not arbitrary. He first foresaw how individuals would respond to His grace, and then He predestined for salvation those He knew would choose Christ. He did not impose decrees that some must be saved and others lost. His foreknowledge informed His purpose, but never overrode human freedom.

The Word:

9. Upon what basis did Paul and Peter say God predestined or elected His people? Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 1:2
10. What did God foreknow about the elect that led Him to choose them? Romans 11:2,4,5,7,20,23,25,28. Why was it God’s will to predestine some people to be His children? Ephesians 1:4,5,11,12,13,19; 2:8
11. Can those who are predestined to salvation still fall away? Why? 2 Peter 1:9-15; 2 Timothy 2:10,12,18; Colossians 3:12,25; (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27; Hebrews 6:4-6)
12. Who only remains the chosen of God? 1 Peter 2:1-9; James 2:5
13. When was Christ chosen to be the sacrifice for the world’s sin? 1 Peter 1:19-20; 1 Corinthians 2:2,7,85 Revelation 13:8
14. Did God foresee or predetermine that Christ would not sin? 1 Peter 2:21-23; Hebrews 4:15

Explanation:

Romans 8:29 Paul affirms that those predestined to salvation are those whom God *foreknew*. The Greek verbs *proginosko* (“to know beforehand”) and *proorizo* (“to decide beforehand”) clarify the sequence: foreknowledge precedes predestination. Before the world began, God foresaw who would respond to Christ, and He determined to save them, transform them, and conform them to His Son’s image. These are the “elect” (v. 33)—chosen not by decree, but by divine foresight.

1 Peter 1:2 Peter echoes Paul: the elect are those identified by the *foreknowledge of God the Father*, set apart by the Spirit for obedience and sanctification.

Romans 11 Paul explains that God did not reject His people whom He foreknew. The faithful remnant—like the 7,000 in Elijah’s day—were chosen because they remained true. Though most of Israel stumbled in unbelief, those who believed were accepted. God’s election was based on foreseen faith, not national identity or arbitrary selection.

Ephesians 1–2 God chose His people “before the foundation of the world” (v. 4), but not apart from foreknowledge. Verse 12 clarifies His purpose: *“that we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ.”* The believers were sealed with the Spirit *after* they believed (v. 13). God did not predestine their belief—He foresaw it, and in response, predestined them to an eternal inheritance. Salvation is by grace through faith (2:8), and faith is the means by which grace is received—not earned or imposed.

2 Peter 1:9–15 Peter warns that believers who neglect spiritual growth can become blind, forgetting their cleansing from sin. He urges them to make their calling and election *sure*—because falling away is possible. Election is not irrevocable; it must be confirmed through faithful perseverance.

2 Timothy 2:10–18 Paul’s ministry aimed to strengthen the elect, knowing that some might deny Christ and be denied (v. 12). Tragically, some had already abandoned the faith (v. 18). Election does not guarantee final salvation without continued faithfulness.

Colossians 3:12–25 The elect are called to live in holiness. Those who persist in wrongdoing will face judgment—there is no partiality. Election must be matched by obedience.

1 Peter 2:1–9 The “chosen generation” consists of those who believe in Christ (v. 7). Those who reject Him, even after once belonging, are rejected in turn (cf. Hebrews 6:4–6; 1 Corinthians 9:27).

Christ’s Foreordination Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world to be our Savior (1 Peter 1:19–20). But His mission was not a scripted inevitability. Hebrews 4:15 affirms that He was tempted in every way, yet chose not to sin. His victory was meaningful because it was freely chosen. God foresaw Christ’s faithfulness and predestined Him to be the Redeemer—not by coercion, but by foreseen obedience.

Relevance: God’s predestination is rooted in His foreknowledge—not in arbitrary decree. He saw who would respond to grace, and He lovingly prepared an inheritance for them. Yet even those predestined must remain in Christ. Salvation is not automatic—it is sustained by daily dependence on grace. God does not override human freedom. He honors it. And in His infinite wisdom, He foresaw every heart’s final decision. On that basis—not favoritism—He predestined the redeemed.

IV. CHRIST DIED FOR ALL MANKIND, NOT JUST FOR THE ELECT

Some predestinarian teachings claim that Christ died only for those whom God had decreed to save—that He bore their guilt, but not the guilt of those He had decreed to condemn. This view stands in stark contrast to the testimony of Scripture.

The Word

15. For whose sins did Christ die? 1 John 2:2; John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 19.

16. Because of Christ’s death, for how many is the gift of justification available? Romans 5:18.

17. Did Christ come to save the elect only, or the whole world? 1 John 4:14; John 6:51; 12:47.

Explanation: The Apostle John speaks with unmistakable clarity: *“He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world”* (1 John 2:2). This echoes the declaration of John the Baptist: *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). Though God cannot remove the guilt of those who reject Christ, His loving purpose in sending Jesus was that *all* might be saved.

Paul affirms this same truth: *“If one died for all, then were all dead... and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them”* (2 Corinthians 5:14–15). Christ’s death was

universal in scope—intended to awaken faith and offer redemption to every soul. *“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself”* (v. 19). Though He foresaw that not all would accept Him, He still provided the same opportunity to all—atoning for their sins and enabling them to choose Christ as their Substitute (cf. vv. 20–21).

Paul further declares that Christ’s sacrifice made justification available to all humanity: *“By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life”* (Romans 5:18). This is why rejecting Christ is the gravest of sins—He bore the eternal loss of every soul on Calvary. At the final judgment (Revelation 20:11–15), no one will be able to claim that Christ did not die for them or that they were predestined to be lost without choice.

Christ offers Himself as the Savior of the whole world (1 John 4:14; John 6:51; 12:47)—not as a selective redeemer, but as the Lamb who was slain for all. His love is not limited by decree, and His grace is not reserved for a privileged few. The Cross stands as a universal invitation.

Relevance: Praise the Lord—every class, race, and nation has a Savior. Whoever you are, wherever you’ve been, Christ offers you eternal life. Every provision has already been made. The only thing He awaits is your response. Grace is not rationed. It is poured out. And it is yours—freely, fully, forever.

V. THE ABILITY TO CHOOSE OR REJECT CHRIST IS GIVEN TO ALL MANKIND

Some predestinarian teachings claim that human beings lack the freedom to choose Christ—that salvation is reserved only for those arbitrarily selected by divine decree. But Scripture consistently affirms that God’s grace invites all, and that every person is endowed with the capacity to respond.

The Word:

18. What Old Testament statements affirm the power of human choice? Deuteronomy 30:19; Joshua 24:15; Proverbs 1:28-30; Isaiah 65:12
19. What is available to all who have faith in Jesus Christ? Romans 3:19-22
20. How did Paul receive the power to act on his good intentions? Romans 7:18,24,2.
21. How many did Jesus say He would draw to Himself? John 12:32; compare 6:44-45
22. What invitation does Christ extend to all? Matthew 11:28-30
23. How many have the ability to believe and be saved? John 1:7,9,12; Isaiah 45:22
24. How many does Christ desire to believe in Him? Revelation 22:17; John 17:21,23

Explanation: Throughout the Old Testament, God’s call to choose Him is unmistakable. *“I have set before you life and death... therefore choose life”* (Deuteronomy 30:19). Joshua’s challenge—*“Choose you this day whom ye will serve”* (Joshua 24:15)—would be meaningless if the people lacked the ability to respond. And they did respond, entering into covenant with God and receiving divine power to obey. Grace initiated the invitation, but their choice activated the relationship.

Proverbs warns that rejecting God’s counsel leads to spiritual ruin. *“They did not choose the fear of the Lord”* (Proverbs 1:29), and thus forfeited His protection. Such warnings only make sense if the power to choose is real. Isaiah further dismantles the idea of selective calling: *“When I called, ye did not answer... but did choose that wherein I delighted not”* (Isaiah 65:12). God’s grace was extended, but it was resisted. His call was not irresistible—it was rejected by those who chose evil.

Paul affirms that *“the righteousness of God... is unto all and upon all them that believe”* (Romans 3:22). Since *“all have sinned”* (v. 23), the offer of salvation is universal. The gift is available to all—but it must be received by faith.

Before Christ transformed his life, Paul struggled to act on his good intentions. He could choose what was right, but lacked the power to perform it (Romans 7:18). Only when he surrendered to Christ did he receive victory through the Spirit (Romans 7:24–25; 8:9–14).

Jesus declared, *“I, if I be lifted up... will draw all men unto me”* (John 12:32). If all are drawn, all have the capacity to respond. Though *“no man can come to me except the Father... draw him”* (John 6:44), the Father draws all (v. 45), making the invitation universal. John the Baptist testified that *“all men through him might believe”* (John 1:7). Christ gives light to *“every man that cometh into the world”* (v. 9), and those who receive Him are given power to become children of God (v. 12). Isaiah echoes this: *“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth”* (Isaiah 45:22).

Christ’s will is not limited to a select few. He desires that *“whosoever will”* may come (Revelation 22:17), and He prayed *“that the world may believe”* (John 17:21). Such prayers affirm that the whole world has the ability to respond.

Relevance: Have you responded to Christ’s invitation? Have you exercised your God-given freedom to choose Him as Savior and Lord? When you do, you step into the grace that God foresaw—and you become one of His elect. The door is open. The invitation is real. And the choice is yours.

VI. THE MEANING OF ROMANS CHAPTER 9

Does God predetermine salvation apart from human choice? Or does Romans 9 affirm the role of faith in receiving mercy? Predestinarians often cite Romans 9 to support the idea that God arbitrarily decides who will receive mercy and who will be lost. But a careful reading of the chapter—alongside the broader witness of Scripture—reveals a different message: God’s mercy is extended to all, and His election is based on foreknowledge of faith, not on arbitrary decree.

The Word:

25. Who are the true children of Abraham, and what does Isaac symbolize? Romans 9:7-9; compare Galatians 3:28-29; 4:22-26
26. What second illustration shows salvation is by grace through faith, not works? Romans 9:10-16
27. What further examples does Paul use to explain divine mercy and human response? Romans 9:17-21
28. Why does God show mercy to some and allow others to face judgment? Romans 9:22-24, 30-33

Explanation:

Romans 9:7–9 — Isaac and Ishmael Paul’s reference to Isaac—*“In Isaac shall thy seed be called”*—is not about eternal salvation versus damnation. Rather, it highlights Isaac as the child of promise, born miraculously to Abraham and Sarah, symbolizing salvation by faith. Ishmael, born through human effort, represents those who seek righteousness by works. Paul uses this contrast to show that true children of Abraham are those who trust in God’s promises, not those who rely on lineage or law (cf. Galatians 4:22–31).

Romans 9:10–16 — Jacob and Esau Paul’s second illustration contrasts Jacob and Esau. God’s choice of Jacob was not based on merit but on foreknowledge of his faith. *“The elder shall serve the younger”* (Genesis 25:23) refers to Jacob receiving the spiritual birthright—not to Esau being predestined for damnation. Both brothers sinned, but Jacob repented and embraced grace. Esau rejected it. God’s “hatred” of Esau (Romans 9:13) reflects a Hebrew idiom meaning “to love less” or “to set aside” (cf. Luke 14:26; Malachi 1:3–4). The point: God’s election is rooted in grace, received by faith—not earned by works.

Romans 9:17–21 — Pharaoh and the Potter Pharaoh’s story is often misunderstood. Scripture says God hardened Pharaoh’s heart (Exodus 4:21), but it also says Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:32). God’s appeals were real and persistent, but Pharaoh chose rebellion. Divine hardening is not arbitrary—it reflects the natural consequence of rejecting grace. Like clay responding to the potter’s hand, each person shapes their destiny by how they respond to God’s call. The vessel of honor is the one who believes; the vessel of dishonor is the one who resists.

Romans 9:22–24, 30–33 — Wrath and Mercy Paul concludes by contrasting two groups: those who pursued righteousness by works (and stumbled), and those who received righteousness by faith. The elect are those who believe in Christ. The rejected are those who refuse Him. God’s mercy is not withheld from anyone—it is received by faith. *“Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed”* (Romans 9:33).

Relevance: Romans 9 must be read in harmony with the full counsel of Scripture. God’s predestination is not a denial of human choice—it is a confirmation of His foreknowledge. He calls all, gives light to all, and invites all to respond. Those who receive Christ become part of His elect, not by compulsion, but by grace through faith.

Have you responded to His call? Have you received the mercy He freely offers?

There is forgiveness, power over sin, and eternal life in Christ—for all who choose Him.

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. God long ago decreed that certain people would not be able to believe.
 - b. Everyone is given the power of choice.
 - c. God's predestination is based on His foreknowledge of man's choice.
 - d. Esau had no chance because God hated him from the start.
2. Discuss: What changes when we realize that no one is predestined to be damned—and that every person is invited into God’s mercy? How might that affect the way we speak about or relate to others?