

Salvation Terms Defined

PREDESTINATION- This word is properly used only with reference to God's plan or purpose of salvation. The Greek word rendered "predestinate" is found only in these six passages, Acts 4:28; Rom 8:29,30; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:5,11; and in all of them it has the same meaning. They teach that the eternal, sovereign, immutable, and unconditional decree or "determinate purpose" of God governs all events.

This doctrine of predestination or election is beset with many difficulties. It belongs to the "secret things" of God. But if we take the revealed word of God as our guide, we must accept this doctrine with all its mysteriousness, and settle all our questionings in the humble, devout acknowledgment, "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight."

For the teaching of Scripture on this subject let the following passages be examined in addition to those referred to above; Gen 21:12; Ex 9:16; 33:19; Deut 10:15; 32:8; Josh 11:20; 1 Sam 12:22; 2 Chron 6:6; Ps 33:12; 65:4; 78:68; 135:4; Isa 41:1-10; Jer 1:5; Mark 13:20; Luke 22:22; John 6:37; 15:16; 17:2,6,9; Acts 2:28; 3:18; 4:28; 13:48; 17:26; Rom 9:11,18,21; 11:5; Eph 3:11; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 1:2; 1 Peter 1:2. (See DECREES OF GOD; ELECTION.)

Hodge has well remarked that, "rightly understood, this doctrine (1) exalts the majesty and absolute sovereignty of God, while it illustrates the riches of his free grace and his just displeasure with sin. (2.) It enforces upon us the essential truth that salvation is entirely of grace. That no one can either complain if passed over, or boast himself if saved. (3.) It brings the inquirer to absolute self-despair and the cordial embrace of the free offer of Christ. (4.) In the case of the believer who has the witness in himself, this doctrine at once deepens his humility and elevates his confidence to the full assurance of hope" (Outlines).

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ELECTION - The gracious and free act of God by which He calls those who become part of His kingdom and special beneficiaries of His love and blessings. The Bible describes the concept of election in three distinct ways. Election sometimes refers to the election of Israel and the church as a people for special service and privileges. Election may also refer to the election of a specific individual to some office or to perform some special service. Still other passages of the Bible refer to the election of individuals to be children of God and heirs of eternal life.

Throughout the history of redemption, election has characterized God's saving activity. He chose and called Abraham from Ur to Canaan, making an everlasting covenant with him and his offspring (Gen 11:31-12:7; Neh 9:7; Isa 41:8). God also called Moses to lead His people out of bondage (Ex 2:24-3:10; Deut 6:21-23; Ps 105:1). He chose Israel from among the nations of the world to be His special covenant people (Deut 4:37; 7:6-7; Isa 44:1-2).

Election to salvation takes place "in Christ" (Eph 1:4; 2:10) as a part of God's purpose for the human race. As part of His eternal plan, God allowed man to use his freedom to rebel against Him. Thus, it is gracious of God to save those who find salvation through Jesus Christ. It is not unjust of Him not to save everyone, since no one deserves to be saved (Matt 20:14; Rom 1:18; 9:15). Election is gracious; it is also unconditional and unmerited (Acts 13:48; Rom 9:11; 1 Peter 1:2). It is an expression of the eternal, sovereign will of God who cannot change (Rom 8:29; 2 Thess 2:13). Therefore, the salvation of the elect is certain (Rom 8:28,33).

Election is a necessary condition for salvation; faith is the sufficient condition. The elect inevitably believe, but they do not believe against their will. They have a God-given desire and ability to trust in Christ for salvation (Acts 13:48; 1 Cor 15:10; Phil 1:29; 2:13). The elect choose God because He effectively calls them through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ; they choose Him because He first chose and called them to Himself (Rom 8:28). That initiating love of God is reflected in Jesus' statement, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you" (John 15:16).

A careful study of the Bible's doctrine of man cures any romantic notion of a human will that is free to choose for or against God. Those who are slaves to sin and its power (Rom 6:6) neither understand nor seek after God in and of themselves (Rom 3:11; John 14:17; 1 Cor 2:14). Outside of Christ, men are spiritually dead rebels who neither desire to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ nor are able to. Apart from God's gracious, free, eternal, and sovereign choice of such sinful men to become His children, none would be saved but would abide forever under His wrath (Rom 1:18).

Election is not to be a source of complacency (2 Peter 1:12) or presumption (Rom 11:19-22) on the part of Christians. They are to make their calling and election certain by growing in godliness (2 Peter 1:2-11) as they respond to God's electing love with gratitude (Col 3:12-17).

God has chosen Christians to bear the image and glory of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Thess 2:14). They have been elected to be holy in conduct, like Christ (Eph 1:4). Like Him, they are also to be glorified in their whole being in the life to come (2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:21). The ultimate goal of our election is that we might bring praise and glory to God (Eph 1:6; Rom 11:33; 2 Thess 2:13).

Also see PREDESTINATION.

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ADOPTION - The act of taking voluntarily a child of other parents as one's child; in a theological sense, the act of God's grace by which sinful people are brought into his redeemed family.

In the New Testament, the Greek word translated adoption literally means "placing as a son." It is a legal term that expresses the process by which a man brings another person into his family, endowing him with the status and privileges of a biological son or daughter.

In the Old Testament, adoption was never common among the Israelites. Adoption in the Old Testament was done by foreigners or by Jews influenced by foreign customs. Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses (Ex 2:10) and another pharaoh adopted Genubath (1 Kings 11:20). Furthermore, there is no Hebrew word to describe the process of adoption. When the Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses, the text says, "And he became her son" (Ex 2:10).

By New Testament times, Roman customs exercised a great deal of influence on Jewish family life. One custom is particularly significant in relation to adoption. Roman law required that the adopter be a male and childless; the one to be adopted had to be an independent adult, able to agree to be adopted. In the eyes of the law, the adopted one became a new creature; he was regarded as being born again into the new family—an illustration of what happens to the believer at conversion.

The apostle Paul used this legal concept of adoption as an analogy to show the believer's relationship to God. Although similar ideas are found throughout the New Testament, the word adoption, used in a theological sense, is found only in the writings of Paul (Rom 8:15,23; 9:4).

In Ephesians, Paul's emphasis was that our adoption rests with God, who "predestined us to adoption as sons" (Eph 1:5). In his letter to the Romans, Paul used the term to describe Israel's place of honor in God's plan (Rom 9:4). However, Gentile believers have also been given the "Spirit of adoption," which allows them to cry, "Abba, Father" (Gal 4:6).

God's adoption of the believer also has a future dimension, the assurance that the believer's body will be resurrected (Rom 8:23).

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IMPUTATION - Charging or reckoning something to a person's account. A good example of the idea of imputation occurs in Philem 18, where Paul says that any wrong or debt caused by the runaway slave, Onesimus, should be "put on my account." Three distinct theological truths in the Bible are directly related to the concept of imputation:

1. The Imputation of Adam's Sin to His Descendants. Rom 5:12-19 declares that God imputes the guilt of Adam's sin to all other members of the human race: "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." "Through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation." "By the one man's offense death reigned through the one." This concept, also called "original sin," is touched on as well in 1 Cor 15:21-22.

2. The Imputation of the Believer's Sin to Christ. In addition to guilt imputed from Adam's sin, each individual is also charged with guilt for his personal sin. This Paul describes as "imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Cor 5:19). The Lord Jesus, whose supernatural conception and birth freed Him from guilt from Adam's sin and who committed no personal sin, had no sin counted against Him. But when He died as our substitute, God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21) so that He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). This is made explicit in the Book of Isaiah, where the prophet says of the Lord Jesus, "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:6).

3. The Imputation of Christ's Righteousness to the Believer. "The blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness" is the theme of the fourth chapter of Romans (also 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9). Jesus became the Holy and Just One (Acts 3:14) through His perfect obedience to God's Law (Rom 5:19). These qualities are imputed in turn "to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Rom 4:24). Because of this the believer will appear before God "faultless" (Jude 24). We can stand in God's presence because Jesus has imputed His righteousness and holiness to us through His sacrificial death on the Cross.

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SANCTIFICATION - The process of God's grace by which the believer is separated from sin and becomes dedicated to God's righteousness. Accomplished by the Word of God (John 17:7) and the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:3-4), sanctification results in holiness, or purification from the guilt and power of sin.

Sanctification as separation from the world and setting apart for God's service is a concept found throughout the Bible. Spoken of as "holy" or "set apart" in the Old Testament were the land of Canaan, the city of Jerusalem, the tabernacle, the Temple, the Sabbath, the feasts, the prophets, the priests, and the garments of the priests. God is sanctified by the witness of believers (1 Peter 3:15) and by His judgments upon sin (Ezek 38:16). Jesus also was "sanctified and sent into the world" (John 10:36)

Sanctification in the Atonement. As the process by which God purifies the believer, sanctification is based on the sacrificial death of Christ. In his letters to the churches, the apostle Paul noted that God has "chosen" and "reconciled" us to Himself in Christ for the purpose of sanctification (Eph 1:4; 5:25-27; Titus 2:14).

Old Testament sacrifices did not take away sin, but they were able to sanctify "for the purifying of the flesh" (Heb 9:13). The blood of the new covenant (Heb 10:29), however, goes far beyond this ritual purification of the body. The offering of Christ's body (Heb 10:10) and blood (Heb 13:12) serves to purge our conscience from "dead works to serve the living God" (Heb 9:14). Because our cleansing from sin is made possible only by Christ's death and resurrection, we are "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1:2; Acts 20:32; 1 Cor 1:30; 6:11).

Sanctification: God's Work. We are sanctified by God the Father (Jude), God the Son (Heb 2:11), and God the Holy Spirit (2 Thess 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). Perfect holiness is God's command (1 Thess 4:7) and purpose. As Paul prayed, "Now may the God of

peace Himself sanctify you completely" (1 Thess 5:23). Sanctification is a process that continues during our lives as believers (Heb 10:14). Only after death are the saints referred to as "perfect" (Heb 12:23).

Sanctification: The Believer's Work. Numerous commands in the Bible imply that believers also have a responsibility in the process of sanctification. We are commanded to "be holy" (Lev 11:44; 1 Peter 1:15-16); to "be perfect" (Matt 5:48); and to "present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness" (Rom 6:19). Writing to the church of the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul made a strong plea for purity: "This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thess 4:3-5).

These commands imply effort on our part. We must believe in Jesus, since we are "sanctified by faith in Him" (Acts 26:18). Through the Holy Spirit we must also "put to death the evil deeds of the body" (Rom 8:13). Paul itemized the many "works of the flesh" from which we must separate ourselves (Gal 5:19-21). Finally, we must walk in the Spirit in order to display the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-24).

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JUSTIFICATION - The process by which sinful human beings are made acceptable to a holy God. Justification by Grace. Christianity is unique because of its teaching of justification by grace (Rom 3:24). Justification is God's declaration that the demands of His Law have been fulfilled in the righteousness of His Son. The basis for this justification is the death of Christ. Paul tells us that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Cor 5:19). This reconciliation covers all sin: "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Heb 10:14). Justification, then, is based on the work of Christ, accomplished through His blood (Rom 5:9) and brought to His people through His resurrection (Rom 4:25). When God justifies, He charges the sin of man to Christ and credits the righteousness of Christ to the believer (2 Cor 5:21). Thus, "through one Man's righteous act, the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life" (Rom 5:18). Because this righteousness is "the righteousness of God" which is "apart from the law" (Rom 3:21), it is thorough; a believer is "justified from all things" (Acts 13:39). God is "just" because His holy standard of perfect righteousness has been fulfilled in Christ, and He is the "justifier," because this righteousness is freely given to the believer (Rom 3:26; 5:16).

Justification by Faith. Although the Lord Jesus has paid the price for our justification, it is through our faith that He is received and His righteousness is experienced and enjoyed (Rom 3:25-30). Faith is considered righteousness (Rom 4:3,9), not as the work of man (Rom 4:5), but as the gift and work of God (John 6:28-29; Phil 1:29).

The New Testament sometimes seems to speak of justification by works. For example, Jesus spoke of justification (and condemnation) "by your words" (Matt 12:37). Paul said, "the doers of the law will be justified" (Rom 2:13). And James concluded that "a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

These statements seem to conflict with Paul's many warnings that "by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Rom 3:20), and that the attempt to be justified through law is equivalent to being "estranged from Christ" and "fallen from grace" (Gal 5:4).

The solution to this problem lies in the distinction between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:16-25). Not only is Christ's righteousness legally accounted to the believer, but Christ also dwells in the believer through the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:10), creating works of faith (Eph 2:10). Certainly God's works may be declared righteous (Isa 26:12). If this is true, then the order of events in justification is grace, faith, and works; or, in other words, by grace, through faith, resulting in works (Eph 2:8-10).

The Results of Justification. The negative result of justification is what we are saved from: "Having now been justified...we shall be saved from wrath" (Rom 5:9). The positive result is what we are saved to: "Whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Rom 8:30).

Paul also notes "peace with God" (Rom 5:1) and access to God's grace (Rom 5:2) as positive benefits. The believer in Christ may look forward to the redemption of his body (Rom 8:23) and an eternal inheritance (Rom 8:17; 1 Peter 1:4).

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GRACE - Favor or kindness shown without regard to the worth or merit of the one who receives it and in spite of what that same person deserves. Grace is one of the key attributes of God. The Lord God is "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth" (Ex 34:6). Therefore, grace is almost always associated with mercy, love, compassion, and patience as the source of help and with deliverance from distress.

In the Old Testament, the supreme example of grace was the redemption of the Hebrew people from Egypt and their establishment in the Promised Land. This did not happen because of any merit on Israel's part, but in spite of their unrighteousness (Deut 9:5-6). Although the grace of God is always free and undeserved, it must not be taken for granted. Grace is only enjoyed within the COVENANT—the gift is given by God, and the gift is received by man through repentance and faith (Amos 5:15). Grace is to be humbly sought through the prayer of faith (Mal 1:9).

The grace of God was supremely revealed and given in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus was not only the beneficiary of God's grace (Luke 2:40), but He was also its very embodiment (John 1:14), bringing it to mankind for salvation (Titus 2:11). By His death and resurrection, Jesus restored the broken fellowship between God and His people, both Jew and Gentile. The only way of salvation for any person is "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15:11).

The grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ is applied to human beings for their salvation by the HOLY SPIRIT, who is called "the Spirit of grace" (Heb 10:29). The Spirit is the One who binds Christ to His people so that they receive forgiveness, adoption to sonship, and newness of life, as well as every spiritual gift or grace (Eph 4:7).

The theme of grace is especially prominent in the letters of the apostle Paul. He sets grace radically over against the law and the works of the law (Rom 3:24,28). Paul makes it abundantly clear that salvation is not something that can be earned or merited; it can be received only as a gift of grace (Rom 4:4). Grace, however, must be accompanied by faith; a person must trust in the mercy and favor of God, even while it is undeserved (Rom 4:16).

The law of Moses revealed the righteous will of God in the midst of pagan darkness; it was God's gracious gift to Israel (Deut 4:8). But His will was made complete when Jesus brought the gospel of grace into the world (John 1:17).

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REDEMPTION - Deliverance by payment of a price. In the New Testament, redemption refers to salvation from sin, death, and the wrath of God by Christ's sacrifice. In the Old Testament, the word redemption refers to redemption by a KINSMAN (Lev 25:24,51-52; Ruth 4:6; Jer 32:7-8), rescue or deliverance (Num 3:49), and ransom (Ps 111:9; 130:7). In the New Testament it refers to loosing (Luke 2:38; Heb 9:12) and loosing away (Luke 21:28; Rom 3:24; Eph 1:14). In the Old Testament redemption was applied to property, animals, persons, and the nation of Israel as a whole. In nearly every instance, freedom from obligation, bondage, or danger was secured by the payment of a price, a ransom, bribe, satisfaction, or sum of money paid to obtain freedom, favor, or reconciliation. Men may redeem property, animals, and individuals (slaves, prisoners, indentured relatives) who are legally obligated to God or in bondage for other reasons. God alone, however, is able to redeem from the slavery of sin (Ps 130:7-8), enemy oppressors (Deut 15:15), and the power of death (Job 19:25-26; Ps 49:8-9).

The New Testament emphasizes the tremendous cost of redemption: "the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:19; Eph 1:7), which is also called an atoning sacrifice, "a propitiation by His blood" (Rom 3:25). Believers are exhorted to remember the "price" of their redemption as a motivation to personal holiness (1 Cor 6:19-20; 1 Peter 1:13-19). The Bible also emphasizes the result of redemption: freedom from sin and freedom to serve God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

How can we fail to rejoice, having been freed from the oppressive bondage of slavery to sin (John 8:34; Rom 6:18), the law (Gal 4:3-5; 5:1), and the fear of death (Heb 2:14-15)? "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

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FORGIVENESS - The act of excusing or pardoning another in spite of his slights, shortcomings, and errors. As a theological term, forgiveness refers to God's pardon of the sins of human beings.

No religious book except the Bible teaches that God completely forgives sin (Ps 51:1,9; Isa 38:17; Heb 10:17). The initiative comes from Him (John 3:16; Col 2:13) because He is ready to forgive (Luke 15:11-32). He is a God of grace and pardon (Neh 9:17; Dan 9:9).

Sin deserves divine punishment because it is a violation of God's holy character (Gen 2:17; Rom 1:18-32; 1 Peter 1:16), but His pardon is gracious (Ps 130:4; Rom 5:6-8). In order for God to forgive sin, two conditions are necessary. A life must be taken as a substitute for that of the sinner (Lev 17:11,14; Heb 9:22), and the sinner must come to God's sacrifice in a spirit of repentance and faith (Mark 1:4; Acts 10:43; James 5:15).

Forgiveness in the New Testament is directly linked to Christ (Acts 5:31; Col 1:14), His sacrificial death on the cross (Rom 4:24), and His resurrection (2 Cor 5:15). He was the morally perfect sacrifice (Rom 8:3), the final and ultimate fulfillment of all Old Testament sacrifices (Heb 9:11-10:18). Since He bore the law's death penalty against sinners (Gal 3:10-13), those who trust in His sacrifice are freed from that penalty. By faith sinners are forgiven-"justified" in Paul's terminology (Rom 3:28; Gal 3:8-9). Those who are forgiven sin's penalty also die to its controlling power in their lives (Rom 6).

Christ's resurrection was more than proof of His deity or innocence; it was related in a special way to His forgiveness. Christ's resurrection was an act by which God wiped out the false charges against Him; it was God's declaration of the perfect righteousness of His Son, the Second Adam, and of His acceptance of Christ's sacrifice (1 Tim 3:16). Because He has been acquitted and declared righteous, this is also true for those whom He represents. Thus, Christ's resurrection was a necessary condition for the forgiveness of man's sins (1 Cor 15:12-28). To be forgiven is to be identified with Christ in His crucifixion and resurrection.

Christ has the authority to forgive sins (Matt 1:21; Heb 9:11-10:18). This forgiveness is an essential part of the gospel message (Acts 2:38; 5:31). But blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (attributing to Satan a deed done by Jesus through the power of God's Spirit) is an unpardonable sin (Mark 3:28-29) - not because God cannot or will not forgive such a sin but because such a hard-hearted person has put himself beyond the possibility of repentance and faith.

God's forgiveness of us demands that we forgive others, because grace brings responsibility and obligation (Matt 18:23-35; Luke 6:37). Jesus placed no limits on the extent to which Christians are to forgive their fellowmen (Matt 18:22,35; Luke 17:4). A forgiving spirit shows that one is a true follower of Christ (Matt 5:43-48; Mark 11:25).

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