



## PREDESTINATION

### QUEST LESSON G-7

The Problem: The question of predestination did not become a serious issue in the Christian Church until the time of Augustine (A.D. 354-430), the famous Bishop of Hippo Regius in North Africa. In opposition to Pelagius, a British monk who taught that man's will can accomplish much toward his own salvation without the assistance of divine grace, Augustine argued that any change in fallen man is solely the work of God's grace. Before the fall, Adam could do good because he had the help of grace. Since the fall, man's will is free to choose only sin. It is not possible for him to choose God's will until grace is active in his life. God gives His grace only to the elect, the ones whom He arbitrarily decides should have His unmerited favor. God's grace given to the elect is irresistible. A person who is predestined by God to salvation will receive His irresistible grace and will inevitably be saved. Those who are not so chosen by God are left in their perdition and will justly receive eternal damnation. [See Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought* (New York: Abingdon, 1971), Vol. 2, pp. 44-47].

Augustine had a great deal of influence on the thinking of the sixteenth-century Reformers. As we do today, they accepted Augustine's understanding of salvation by grace alone. But Luther and Calvin substantially accepted Augustine's doctrine of predestination, modifying it and adding to it according to their own understandings. In his 1525 document, *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther (1483-1546) argued that all things that happen, whether good or evil, are the product of God's unchangeable will. There is no such thing as free will in man. Luther contradicted two current ideas on the free will of man: (i) that man has the power to choose what is right, and (ii) the power to put that choice into action. Luther said that man does not choose God; he is chosen by God. God chooses only the elect whom He has predestined for eternal salvation. The rest of mankind is predestined to eternal rejection. This is the doctrine of double predestination: on the basis of God's unchanging decision, the elect was predestined to salvation, and the wicked to eternal damnation.

In Luther's view, everything foreseen by God must occur just as He foresees it. In fact, everything that He foresees to occur will happen because He has willed it. Luther wrote: "From this, it follows irrefutably that everything we do, everything that happens, even if it seems to us to happen mutably and contingently, happens in fact nonetheless necessarily and immutably if you have regard to the will of God. For the will of God is effectual and cannot be hindered, since it is the power of the divine nature itself; moreover, it is wise, so that it cannot be deceived."

[Luther's Works (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), Vol. 33, pp. 38]. Therefore, if God wills and foresees everything that happens, nothing is left to the free will of man. Even the evil in the world has been willed by God. Yet Luther argues that God is not responsible for evil. His omnipotence moves upon imperfect, fallen natures and the result is that these natures do evil works. The evil is theirs, not God's, and they are justly punished for their sins.

Even so, it is apparent that there is a contradiction in Luther's thought. If all that God foresees happens of necessity because He has willed it, in the final analysis, He is responsible for evil. All of Luther's attempts to resolve that problem were somewhat unavailing. Luther went so far as to suggest that Adam's fall was willed by God. He wrote: "The same must be said to those who ask why he permitted Adam to fall, and why he creates us all infected with the same sin when he could either have preserved him or created us from another stock or from a seed which he had first purged. He is God, and for his will, there is no cause or reason that can be laid down as a rule or measure for it, since there is nothing equal or superior to it, but it is itself the rule of all things." (Luther's Works, Vol. 33, pp. 180-181).

Luther summed up his lengthy argument on the bondage of the will and divine predestination by writing as follows: "For if we believe it to be true that God foreknows and predestines all things, that he can neither be mistaken in his foreknowledge nor hindered in his predestination and that nothing takes place but as he wills it (as reason itself is forced

to admit), then on the testimony of reason itself there cannot be any free choice in man or angel or any creature." (Luther's Works, Vol. 33, p. 293).

Luther's 1525 document, *The Bondage of the Will*, was written in answer to Erasmus' book, written the previous year, entitled *On Free Will*. Erasmus (c. 1466-1536), the famous Renaissance humanist, argued that not only does mankind have the power to choose what is right, but also some power to cooperate with God's grace in putting that choice into action. Thus, in rejecting Luther's view of predestination, Erasmus urged that, although God's grace is essential to our salvation, it is to some extent possible for the believer to perform works which in the sight of heaven are meritorious. Such a view was repugnant to Luther.

Although Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560) differed from Luther on the question of predestination, allowing for a measure of human choice in the process by which man is saved, John Calvin (1509-64) placed the doctrine of double predestination at the center of his theological system. Because of Calvin's strenuous defense of the doctrine and its acceptance by leading European theologians in the following centuries, it has become a standard Christian doctrine for millions of Protestants. Still today the Calvinist doctrine of predestination in one form or another is accepted by a large segment of Protestantism.

Calvin summarized his teaching in the following terms: "As Scripture, then, clearly shows, we say that God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to -receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction. We assert that, with respect to the elect, this plan was founded upon his freely given mercy, without regard to human worth; but by his just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment, he has barred the door of life to those whom he has given over to damnation." (Institutes of the Christian Religion, III.XXI.7). In the ages before the creation of our world, God decreed that certain humans would be saved (the elect) and others would be damned, Nothing can change these decrees; men will choose only that which God's decrees have previously decided. The elect receive the irresistible grace of God to choose and perform His will. They are saved solely by His grace, not by their own choice. The divine decree that others are lost is equally unchangeable. Even the fall of Adam was decreed by God. "Yet no one can deny that God foreknew what end man was to have before he created him, and consequently foreknew because he so ordained by his decree... And it ought not to seem absurd for me to say that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his descendants, but also meted it out in accordance with his own decision." (Institutes, III.XXIII.7).

When people responded to Luther and Calvin by pointing out the injustice of punishing the wicked who are as they are because of God's decree, they responded by arguing inconsistently that the lost are punished justly because of their own choice to sin. Moreover, they stressed that we can never understand the hidden mystery of God's will. Our part is to believe in Him despite our inability to understand why He arbitrarily chooses some for salvation and others for damnation. Both Reformers argued strenuously against God's decrees being based on His foreknowledge of human choice. To them, God predetermined man's choice; He did not foresee anything that He did not cause.

Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), the celebrated Dutch Reformed theologian, strenuously opposed the earlier Reformers' doctrine of predestination. He taught that God foresaw who would receive Christ and who would not. Each individual has been given the power to choose or to reject Christ. Those whom God foresaw would exercise their free choice by receiving Christ as Lord and Savior were predestined to salvation. Those whom He foresaw would reject Christ were predestination to eternal rejection. God does not will all things that happen. He had nothing to do with the origin of evil in the universe or our world, and He does not will the sins of mankind. Nor does He will that anyone should be lost. His grace is given to those who choose to believe, and it is kept from those who choose not to believe.

In opposition to the Arminians, the Synod of Dort convened by the Dutch Reformed Church in 1618-19 decided in favor of the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, and the Arminians were then persecuted. The English Westminster Assembly (1647), which produced the "Confession" that gave official expression to the Presbyterian faith, also accepted Calvinistic predestination, but without the teaching that Adam's fall was decreed by God. (See *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*). Since then Calvinistic predestination in one form or another has been very influential in many Protestant churches, even though Arminianism is more acceptable to many others.

Where do Seventh-day Adventists stand on this issue, with the Calvinists or the Arminians? To answer that question it is necessary for us to turn to the Scriptures and determine what they teach. We are not interested in a partisan interpretation of certain passages of Scripture. We want to know the overall Bible message on the question of man's will and predestination.

## Objectives

First, we shall note the Bible teaching that God does not will all that he foresees.

Second, we discover that predestination is based on divine foreknowledge of man's choice

Third, Christ died for all mankind, not just for the elect.

Fourth, the ability to choose or reject Christ is given to all mankind, not just to a chosen group.

Fifth, we shall consider the meaning of Romans chapter 9.

### I. God Does Not Will All That He Foresees

If God willed all that He foresaw would happen, as the Reformers taught, He would be ultimately responsible for all the evil in our world. He foresaw everything that would occur (Isaiah 46:9-10), but He did not cause the sin, suffering, and misery of mankind.

## The Word

1. Even though God foresaw the destruction of the wicked at the end of the world, what has His will always been in regard to them, and in regard to humanity in general? 2 Peter 3:9-14, 17; 1 Timothy 2:4.
2. To how many people in our world is the grace of God extended? Titus 2:11.
3. To how many is the love of God available? How many does God wish to save? John 3:16-17.
4. Because God does not will that anyone should be lost, what message did He give through Ezekiel? Ezekiel 18:31-32; 33:11-16.
5. Even though God does not will that the wicked be destroyed, what does He foresee will happen to them at the end of time? 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 21:27.

Explanation: God foresees the destruction of the wicked at the second coming of Christ, yet He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). So concerned was Peter that the believers to whom he was writing should be saved at the second advent, he urged that they beware of falling away into sin and of being lost at last (verse 17). Only God could foresee who would be true till the end and who would fall away, but He did not wish that anyone should be lost. The point is that God's foreknowledge is not the same thing as His will for mankind.

Paul stressed the same message. God's design is that "all men" should be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). The Lord knows that, because not all will choose Christ as Savior and Lord, not all will be saved. But He wishes that it could be so and does all that an infinitely loving God can do to make it so. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). God's grace has not been made available only to those whom He has predestined for salvation; it is readily available to all]. As John so beautifully explained it, "God so love the world," that He planned for "the world" to be saved through Christ (John 3:16-17). His grace and love were not reserved for a select class, while the rest were left untouched and unmoved. God has no favorites in respect to salvation. All people are His children, and He wishes to save them all.

This message was emphasized forcefully by the prophet Ezekiel. The ancient Israelites were urged to put away their sins and turn to the Lord precisely because: God has "no pleasure in the death of him that dieth" (Ezekiel 18:31-32). There is no suggestion in Ezekiel's discussion that God's will in regard to humanity is fixed, with the righteous being arbitrarily chosen and the wicked irrevocably rejected. Quite the contrary, the Lord plead with His people on the basis of his willingness to forgive their sins and grant them eternal life if only they would repent (Ezekiel 33:11-16). If a righteous person turns away from the Lord and lives in sin again, he will be lost. And the repenting sinner will be saved. God most certainly did not will that certain ones should be lost because He foresaw that it would be so. Despite his foreknowledge of the ultimate damnation of the wicked, He moved upon their hearts with earnest entreaties. In fact, He foresaw that some wicked people would respond to His pleas and finally be saved.

It is a terrible insult to the Deity to argue, as the predestinarians do, that all that God foresees is His will for humanity. Did God will that Adam would fall into sin, that pre-flood mankind would live in moral degradation and ultimately be destroyed, that the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah would become so debased that He would have to rain fire and brimstone upon them, that the Jews would reject Christ and subject Him to merciless torture, and that the history of our world would be filled with the record of hatred, violence, disease, and death. To credit all that to the will of God is preposterous in the extreme! Such a doctrine drives people away from Christ because they cannot believe that a loving God would choose such evil.

Relevance: The truth is that God employs His omnipotence to allow man the right to choose. God could have willed everything that happens, and the Stoic philosophy that all things happen of necessity would then be true. Instead, because of His infinite love for mankind, the Lord gave him the ability to choose. Thus, what God foresees will happen in the future is often not His will, but the will of those who reject Him.

## II. Predestination Is Based On Divine Foreknowledge

The Bible teaching is that God first foresaw how people would decide, then He predestined to salvation those whom He knew he would accept Christ. He did not impose arbitrary decrees upon humanity that some would be saved and others lost.

### The Word

6. According to Paul and Peter upon what was God's predestination, or election, of His people based? Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 1:2.
7. 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.
8. Is there a possibility that God's elect people, who have been predestined to be saved, could eventually be lost? 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).
9. Who only remains the chosen of God? 1 Peter 2:1-9; James 2:5
10. Who only remains the chosen of God? 1 Peter 2:1-9; James 2:5.
11. 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.
12. Did God foresee or predetermine that Christ would not sin? 1 Peter 2:21-23; Hebrews 4:15.

Explanation: We will make a brief comment on each of the passages listed above:

Romans 8:29: Paul taught that those who were predestined to salvation were those whom God foreknew. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." [The Greek verb *proginosko* means "to know beforehand, to have foreknowledge"; the verb *proorizo* means "to decide upon beforehand, to predestine"]. The statement obviously means that divine foreknowledge of the individual came before divine predestination. God did not arbitrarily decide that certain people should be saved. Because, in the ages before the creation of our world, he foresaw that certain ones would accept Christ, God determined that He would save them from sin, give them the new birth experience, and invest them with the glory of the character of Christ. These are the "elect. verse 33), or the chosen ones. [The noun *ekloge* means "selection, election, choosing." The adjective *eklektos* means "chosen, select, elect, choice." The verb *eklegomai* means "to choose, select (for oneself)."]

1 Peter 1:2: Peter reiterates Paul's message. The "elect" are those whom the "foreknowledge of God the Father" identified as believers who could be sanctified by the inner work of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 11: When Paul wrote that "God hath not cast away his people Which he foreknew" (vs. 2), he did not mean that the whole Israelite nation was still God's chosen people. This is very clear from the context. The ones God "foreknew" are like the 7,000 in the time of Elijah who had not bowed the knee to Baal (vs. 4). They were the "remnant according to the election of grace" (vs. 5). Even though the nation Israel generally was blind, the elect remnant had received God's

blessing (vs. 7). The greater part of Israel was rejected by God because of unbelief (vs. 20). They would be accepted again, as the Christian Gentiles were accepted, if they would believe in Christ (vs. 23). Therefore, the remnant of Israel that were accepted by the Lord were those who had retained their faith. They were elect or predestined to salvation because God foresaw that, unlike the majority of their fellow Israelites, they would be faithful to Him. God's predetermination that the remnant should be saved was based on His foreknowledge of their belief in Him.

See 1: This chapter must be interpreted in light of what we have already discovered. Paul did not contradict his message to the Romans in what he wrote to the Ephesians. The early verses of this chapter are often taken in isolation from the later ones. God chose His people "before the foundation of the world" (vs. 4). Back there, they were predestined to be His children (vs. 5). But these verses do not say that God's choice of His people before the creation of the world was based upon His purely arbitrary decision, quite apart from His foreknowledge of their faith. Verse 11 repeats the point that Christians were "predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." But what was God's will? The next verse says it very simply: "That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ" (vs. 12). It was God's will to make holy those whom He foresaw would trust in Christ. The Ephesian Christians trusted in Him after they had heard the preaching of the Gospel (vs. 13). Then Paul adds, "... in whom [Christ] also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (vs. 13-14). They did not belong to Christ and obtain their inheritance (vss. 11, 14) until they had received the Holy Spirit (cf. Romans 8:9). But they received the Holy Spirit only when they believed. It was then that God's predetermined will could be carried out in their lives. The passage does not say that God predestined their belief. He foresaw their belief and, in view of it, predestined them to an eternal inheritance (cf. vss. 11, 14). Verse 19 speaks of "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe." The next chapter underlines the point: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (2:8). Salvation is a gift of God's grace, but it must be received (cf. Romans 5:17) by faith. Faith does not earn grace; it receives it. There is no salvation for an individual unless he chooses to receive God's grace. God does not impose His grace upon us, so we cannot resist receiving it. This teaching of Augustine and the Reformers was unbiblical. We must choose to receive it, and that choice is faith! Because God foresaw that choice, He predestined us to salvation.

2 Peter 1:9-15: If a person lacks faith and the spiritual races (vss. 5~8), he is "blind," even though he was once "purged from his old sins" (vs. 9). This person was once a born-again Christian, but he has now lost the presence of Christ in his life. Peter urges the believers not to let this happen to them: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (vs. 10). So there is a very real possibility of a Christian falling into sin and losing his calling and election. While, by faith, he is a partaker of the divine nature (vs. 4), he is an elect, predestined child of God. God had foreseen his faith and had predetermined to give him the blessing. But after he falls into sin, he becomes blind and loses his calling and election. Hence, Peter's instruction that the believers persevere in the Christian way.

2 Timothy 2:10,12,18: The elect may lose salvation. Paul's 'Service and suffering were designed to encourage the elect to continue in the faith (vs. 10). There was a tragic possibility that the elect would deny Christ and so be denied by Him (vs. 12). In fact, some who had followed unfaithful men, had already lost their faith (vs. 18).

Colossians 3:12, 25: The "elect of God" are given specific instruction in regard to correct Christian attitudes and service (vss. 12-17). The faithful will receive "the reward of the inheritance" (vs. 24), but the one who does wrong "will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality" (vs. 25). Thus, the elect who turn from their faith and do wrong will lose the inheritance and be lost.

1 Peter 2:1-9: The "chosen" generation (vs. 9) are those who believe in Christ (vs. 7). But those who reject Him are rejected by Him, despite their former relationship with Him (cf. Hebrews 6:4-6; 1 Corinthians 9:27).

1 Peter 1:19-20; 1 Corinthians 2:2,7,8; Revelation 13:8: Christ was "foreordained before the foundation of the world" to be the Savior of mankind. But to argue that, therefore, Christ could not have failed in His divine mission by choosing to sin is to ignore the significance of the temptations confronting Him (Hebrews 4:15). Unless there was a possibility of failure, there was no contest, and the fact of His sinlessness would have no significance for us in our battle with sin. Peter could write that Christ is your "example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21), because Christ overcame in the

same way that we may overcome (cf. Revelation 3:21). Hence, God foresaw that Christ would choose not to sin; He did not foreordain it. Christ was foreordained to be our Savior because God foresaw that He would succeed in His mission and never choose to sin.

Relevance: God's predestination of the saved was based on His foreknowledge that they would choose Christ. Such predestined believers may lose their "elect" status by lapsing again into sin. Only as they maintain constant dependence upon God's free grace, by choosing Christ daily, can they remain the predestined children of God. God did not arbitrarily decree that anyone should be saved or lost. God foresaw the ultimate decision of every human being, and on that basis was able to determine beforehand whether they should be saved or lost.

### III. Christ Died For All Mankind, Not Just For The Elect

The predestinarians often teach that Christ died only for those whom He had decreed to save. He bore their guilt on the Cross but did not bear the guilt of those whom He had decreed to damn. This is quite contrary to Bible teaching.

#### The Word

13. For the sins of how many did Christ die? 1 John 2:2; John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 19.
14. Because of Christ's death, for how many is the gift of justification available? Romans 5:18.
15. Did Christ come to save the elect only, or the whole world? 1 John 4:14; John 6:51; 12:47.

Explanation: The beloved Apostle John emphasized strongly that Christ died for all mankind. "And he is the propitiation [expiation] for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). He had heard John the Baptist announce that Christ is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Even though God cannot finally remove the guilt of those who reject Christ, His loving purpose in having Christ died for all was that all should be saved. Paul stressed the same thrilling message. He said, "if one died for all, then were all dead" (2 Corinthians 5:14). "And... he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (verse 15). In other words, Christ died for all so that all would accept Him and be saved from sin. In this sense, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (verse 19). He foresaw that He would not be able to save all because not all would accept Christ. Nevertheless, He provided all with the same wonderful opportunity by atoning for their sins and giving them the ability to choose Christ as their Substitute. (See also verses 20, 21).

Paul announced that Christ's sacrifice made justification available for all humanity (Romans 5:18). The reason that rejection of Christ is the greatest of all sins is that He bore our eternal loss on Calvary. As the lost face the judgment throne of God at the end of time (Revelation 20:11-15), they can never argue that Christ did not die for them or make justification available to them. They can never claim that they were predestined to be damned and had no choice in the matter. Christ offers Himself as the Savior of the whole world (1 John 4:14; John 6:51; 12:47), not as a discriminating judge who chooses some to life and the rest to eternal destruction.

Relevance: Praise the Lord, all classes, races, and nationalities have a Savior from sin and destruction. Whoever you are, Christ offers you eternal life. Every provision has already been made that you might be saved. The only ingredient that the Lord awaits is your acceptance of His free offer of grace.

### IV. The Ability To Choose Or Reject Christ Is Given To All Mankind

The predestinarians argue that man has no freedom to choose Christ. They say that man will be saved only if he is chosen by Christ. What do the Scriptures teach on this question of the human capacity to choose?

#### The Word

16. What Old Testament statements imply that everyone has the power of choice? Deuteronomy 30:19; Joshua 24:15; Proverbs 1:28-30; Isaiah 65:12.
17. What is available to all if they have faith in Jesus Christ? Romans 3:19-22.

18. How did Paul receive the power to put his good choices into action? Romans 7:18,24,25.
19. How many did Jesus say He would draw to Himself? John 12:32; compare 6:44-45.
20. What invitation does Christ give to all? Matthew 11:28-30.
21. How many have the ability to believe and be saved? John 1:7,9,12; Isaiah 45:22.
22. How many would Christ have believed in Him? Revelation 22:17; John 17:21,23.

Explanation: The many Old Testament calls for God's people to choose His way and put away their sins imply that they had the power of choice. The blessings and curses that God put before Israel would have been meaningless unless \_ they possessed the ability to choose Him (Deuteronomy 30:19; compare chapters 28-29). Joshua's command to Israel, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15) would have been quite irrelevant if they had lacked the power to choose. The people responded by choosing God (vss. 21, 24), and a covenant was made between them and God (vss. 25-27). "And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Israel" (verse 31). The people's choice led to obedience because their covenant relationship with God made them recipients of divine power. The people chose God, He came into their lives, and they then had the power to obey. Of course, His grace, in the form of divine conviction, engendered their choice in the first place. But the point is that God could not make a covenant with His people until they responded to His grace. We know that grace was available to all because all the people were invited to choose.

The book of Proverbs reminds us that failing to "choose the fear of the Lord" results in rejection by God. If we turn away from God, rejecting His counsel and leading in our lives, we cannot expect that he will answer us in time of need (Proverbs 1:28-30). But if we choose Him and walk in His way, we will be blessed. The wise man added, "But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil" (verse 33). Such instruction would be quite meaningless if the sixteenth-century Reformers were correct in arguing that human beings have no ability to choose God.

Isaiah completely shatters the concept that only the elect are called by God. "Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spoke, ye did not hear; but did evil before my eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not" (Isaiah 65:12). God's grace led Him to call these people, but they chose evil rather than God's will. His grace was by no means irresistible! They resisted His call and were rejected by the Lord.

The Lord has taught us through the Apostle Paul that "the righteousness of God" is given to all who believe in Christ (Romans 3:22). We are not left in doubt about how many are offered this gift, for Paul adds: "... for there is no difference: For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (vs. 22-23). The "all" who have sinned are offered, without distinction, the gift of Christ's righteousness if they will believe. The passage means nothing unless all have the ability to choose belief in Christ.

Before Christ was living in his life, the Apostle Paul had the capacity to choose what was right, but not the capacity to follow through by doing what he had chosen (Romans 7:18). Only when he invited Christ to come into his heart was he able to be an overcomer (Romans 7:24-25). The righteous presence of Christ, by the Holy Spirit, provided the power and victory over sin that he craved (Romans 8:9-14),

Jesus said that, after His death, He would "draw all men "unto Himself (John 12:32). If all are drawn, all have the power to choose Christ. Jesus also said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44). But all are drawn to Him! That being so, all have the ability to come to Him by their own choice. That is why Jesus' very comforting invitation to burdened souls is given to all humanity (Matthew 11:28-30).

John the Baptist bore witness to the fact "that all men through him might believe" (John 1:7). Jesus has given light to "every man that cometh into the world" (vs. 9). Those who respond to the light that He gives by believing in Him and receiving Him are given power "to become the sons of God" (vs. 12). Long before, Isaiah had emphasized the same truth. He extended God's loving invitation to all: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22).

It is not Christ's will that only an elected group of arbitrarily chosen people should believe in Him. He wants the whole world to believe, for He says, "whosoever will, Tet him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). Jesus prayed, "... that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21; cf. vs. 23). Such a prayer implies that the whole world has the ability to believe.

Relevance: Do you believe in Christ? Have you exercised your ability to choose by receiving Him as your Savior and Lord? When you do that, you become one of the predestined or elect, children of God.

## V. The Meaning Of Romans Chapter 9

Predestinarians use this chapter in an attempt to establish their view that, quite apart from any human choice, God decreed who should have mercy and who should be lost. What does the chapter really teach?

### The Word

23. Who are the true children of Abraham? Of whom is Isaac a symbol? Romans 9:7-9; compare Galatians 3:28-29; 4:22-26.
24. What second illustration does Paul give that salvation is by faith-grace not by works? Romans 9:10-16
25. What other illustrations does Paul give? Romans 9:17-21
26. Why does God give mercy to some and destruction to others? Romans 9:22-24, 30-33.

Explanation: We will take each section of the chapter in turn and provide a brief explanation:

Romans 9:7-9: What is meant by the statement of the Lord, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." (Compare Genesis 21:12-13). The Lord's statement to Abraham did not mean that God had chosen Isaac for salvation and Ishmael for damnation. It meant that the Lord had selected Isaac as the father of the chosen nation and the forefather of the Messiah. God promised to make a nation of Ismael's descendants also, and He took care of Hagar and Ishmael in a miraculous way (Genesis 21:13-20). But since Sarah was Abraham's true wife, and Isaac's birth when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 was a divine miracle, the Lord insisted that Isaac should be the one to have the birthright and so to be the patriarch of the chosen people. Abraham prayed that Ishmael might be the one chosen by God to inherit the special promises of God, but the Lord declared otherwise (Genesis 17:17-21) Even so, God gave special promises to Abraham regarding Ishmael. "And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation" (verse 20).

The point is that Paul's use of this story in Romans 9 was not intended to establish that Isaac was predestined to be saved and Ishmael to be damned. Because Isaac was a child of promise, conceived miraculously in a manner quite contrary to normal physical possibilities, he is used in Scripture as a symbol of salvation by faith. God promised Isaac to Abraham and Sarah, they believed the promise, and God fulfilled it. Hence, Isaac is used by Paul as an analogy of those who rely upon faith in Christ for salvation. Most of the Jews tried to earn salvation by their works, as Abraham had tried to fulfill God's promise of a son by taking Hagar in place of Sarah. Therefore, Paul uses Ishmael, the child of human works, as an illustration of those who depend on works for salvation (compare Galatians 4:22-24, 29-31). A remnant of the Jews, as well as the Gentile Christians, accepted salvation by faith in Christ. It is these that Paul represents by his reference to Isaac (compare Galatians 4:27-28; 3:28-29).

Romans 9:10-16: Paul uses a second illustration to explain Salvation by faith-grace by contrast with salvation by works. Jacob, like Isaac, is used as the symbol of those who are saved by grace, not by their own works. And Esau is the symbol of those who are rejected by God. Paul's point is not that God arbitrarily gave salvation to Jacob and denied it to Esau. (See Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 207-208). The statement to Rebekah at the birth of the boys, "... and the elder shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23), meant that God had chosen Jacob to have the spiritual birthright and to be the patriarch of the family. Both brothers were to be guilty of serious sins (see Genesis 25:27-34; 27:1-41). Jacob repented and, by faith, accepted God's salvation, but Esau persisted in his rebellious way of life. Jacob was not chosen by God because of his future good works but because the Lord foresaw (Romans 8:29) that he would be a genuine believer who would receive the free gift of grace. Esau was rejected because God foresaw that he would not choose to receive



divine saving grace. God offered both men salvation (cf. Isaiah 45:22); one responded to the invitation, the other did not. The passage does not teach that God's pre-election of Jacob was independent of Jacob's choice of grace; it teaches that God's predestination was independent of Jacob's good works (vs. 11). Faith is not a work that saves us; it is a response to divine grace. We are not saved by our own wills (vs. 16) but by God's grace. Even so, we must will to receive His saving grace (compare Romans 5:17). Esau could have made the same response as Jacob but chose not to. God did not "hate" him (v. 13) in the modern sense of the term. The Greek word (*miseo*) is used in the New Testament in the sense of "to love less" or to put to one side. (See Luke 14:26; John 12:25; Matthew 6:24; cf. Malachi 1:3-4).

Romans 9:17-21: The reference to Pharaoh is interpreted by some to mean that God deliberately hardened Pharaoh's heart because he was predestined to be lost. Our study has revealed that the ones upon whom the Lord chooses to have mercy (vs. 18) are those who believe in Him. Pharaoh chose not to accept God's warnings and believe. Certainly, God is often said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 8:15, etc.), but Pharaoh is also said to have hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:32; 9:34; 1 Samuel 6:6). The paradox is explained by two facts: (i) in Scripture God is often said to cause that which He allows, even though the real cause is the devil; (ii) God's loving appeals will soften one heart and increasingly harden another because one will choose to accept them and another will not. Appeals rejected result in deepening alienation from the Lord.

Verse 17 quotes Exodus 9:16. God said that He had raised up Pharaoh, "for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth" (vs. 16). In context, God's statement is part of His rebuke for Pharaoh's unwillingness to respond to His appeals. The Lord added (Exodus 9:17): "As yet exaltest thou thyself against my people, that thou wilt not let them go?" A little later Pharaoh admitted that God is righteous and that he and his people were wicked (vs. 27). The divine purpose would have been fulfilled however Pharaoh reacted to God's appeals. If Pharaoh had responded positively surely God's name would have been exalted in the earth. When Pharaoh chose to reject God, he was destroyed, and the Lord's name was exalted. There is, however, absolutely no suggestion that because Pharaoh was predestined to be lost, he had no choice but to react negatively to God's appeals. God wills to have mercy upon believers, and wills to reject unbelievers. The vessel made for honor (vs. 21) is the one who chooses to believe; the vessel made for dishonor is the one who chooses not to believe.

Romans 9:22-24, 30-33: The ones chosen for wrath are those who, like the ancient Israelites, sought righteousness by works instead of by faith. The ones chosen for mercy are the ones who, like the Christian Gentiles, attained righteousness by faith. Verses 30-33 provide the punch line of the whole chapter. The elect are those who have faith in Christ; the damned are those who do not have faith.

Relevance: Romans 9 must be interpreted in the light of the overall teaching of Scripture on the question of human choice and divine predestination. The message throughout the Bible is that God predestined to salvation those whom he foresaw would accept Him. He has given light and the power to choose to every human soul; hence no one is lost who accepts Christ and allows His Spirit to reign in his heart. Have you chosen Him as your Lord and Savior? There is forgiveness, power over sin, and eternal life with Christ available for you if you receive 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 difference would the message of this lesson make in the treatment of certain peoples who are regarded as inferior because they have been predestined to be cursed or damned?