

**To Choose or Be Chosen:  
C.S. Lewis' Contributions to Free Will and Predestination**  
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**Introduction**

Few doctrines have caused more problems for the unity of the Church than the doctrine of predestination. Predestination is defined as “the divine decree according to which certain persons are infallibly guided to eternal salvation.”<sup>1</sup> Although the doctrine did not originate with John Calvin, Calvin is considered its chief proponent of the Reformation. Predestination, in some form, is found in the beliefs of most Protestant denominations today, including the Church of England.

Yet, one of Anglicanism’s foremost 20<sup>th</sup> century writers, C.S. Lewis, ardently believed in Arminianism, or free will. Arminianism states, “the divine sovereignty was compatible with a real human free will; that Christ had died for all and not only for the elect.”<sup>2</sup> While the doctrine of free will did not originate with Lewis, he influenced numerous Christians to consider it or adopt it.

A complete examination of the historical conflict between the two doctrines is beyond the scope of this work. The paper will demonstrate examples predestination and free will in Scripture. This paper will next examine Calvin’s arguments for predestination and compare them with C.S. Lewis’ writings concerning predestination and free will. The conclusion will propose an attempt to reconcile predestination and free will through Lewis’ works and examine Lewis’ impact on modern Christianity through this reconciliation.

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<sup>1</sup> E.A. Livingstone, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), s.v. “Predestination.”

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. “Arminianism.”

## Predestination in Scripture

Scripture is unambiguous: God chooses people and nations for specific purposes to fulfill His plan for creation. In Genesis 6, God chose Noah to build the ark and survive the Flood. God chose Abraham as the ancestor of Israel, the nation through which He chose to bless the world with the Law and, eventually, salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah's call as a prophet provides another clear example of predestination. According to Jeremiah 1:5, God spoke to Jeremiah, telling him, "before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah honestly records his surprised reaction and his reluctant acceptance of his calling.

Predestination also appears in the New Testament. Jesus told His disciples in his last discourse in John, "you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you."<sup>4</sup> In the same passage, Jesus told the disciples the world would hate them because "I chose you out of the world."<sup>5</sup>

In Acts, the apostle Paul becomes the New Testament's counterpart to Jeremiah. In a dramatic conversion, Paul was called to serve the Church he had been intensely persecuting. When Ananias reminds God of Paul's role as persecutor, God told him, "go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 1:5, English Standard Version. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references will come from the ESV.

<sup>4</sup> John 15:16.

<sup>5</sup> John 15:19.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 9:15.

Paul himself saw his conversion and calling as a repetition of Jeremiah's experience. When writing to the Galatians concerning the supremacy of grace over the Law, Paul described himself as an apostle "not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead."<sup>7</sup> Paul later alluded to Jeremiah's experience in explaining his own calling, telling the Galatians that God "had set me apart before I was born."<sup>8</sup>

Paul never forgot his zealous attempts to please God through persecuting the Church; he also never forgot the grace shown to him through God's forgiveness of that persecution. Paul plainly saw himself as predestined to salvation and apostleship, a view that colored everything he wrote and preached. In Acts, Luke (who, as Paul's companion, was no doubt greatly influenced by Paul) records an instance where the Jews refused to accept Paul's teaching about Christ. According to Luke, "when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed."<sup>9</sup> Later, in the Epistle to the Romans, Paul wrote the words that influenced the Church for centuries concerning predestination:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.<sup>10</sup>

And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad--in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of

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<sup>7</sup> Galatians 1:1.

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 1:15.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 13:48.

<sup>10</sup> Romans 8:28-30.

works but because of his call-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory...<sup>11</sup>

Paul later used the same terms in the Epistle to the Ephesians:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even 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 for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.... In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.<sup>12</sup>

Paul's language would influence theologians from Augustine to the present day.

Luther would begin the Reformation based on Romans, and Calvin would develop the doctrine of predestination based largely on Paul's writings.

### **Free Will in Scripture**

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<sup>11</sup> Romans 9:10-23.

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 1:3-7, 11-12

If Scripture clearly teaches predestination, it also offers unambiguous support for free will.

Although God had chosen the Hebrews for His own nation, each generation received the choice whether or not they would follow His Law and receive the blessings promised for those who did. Joshua recorded one of the more prominent instances. Near death, Joshua reminded the nation of God's provision and called on the new generation to "choose this day whom you will serve."<sup>13</sup> The Israelites declared, "we will serve the LORD."<sup>14</sup>

In another instance, the prophet Elijah castigated the Israelites for wavering between service to God and Baal, challenging them to choose one or the other. The episode ended with God sending fire from heaven to consume Elijah's sacrifice and calling the nation back to Him.<sup>15</sup>

As with predestination, the New Testament provides clear examples of free will. When Jesus called the disciples, they responded by following Him. However, Scripture also gives numerous examples of men who refused His call. In one instance, a man refused to leave his parents.<sup>16</sup> In the most famous case of refusal to follow Jesus, the rich ruler, upon hearing that he must sell his possessions and follow Christ to receive salvation, "went away sorrowful."<sup>17</sup> Rather than choose to follow Christ, the man chose material wealth and spiritual poverty.

The words of Christ Himself also speak to freedom of choice for salvation. When speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus told him that God the Father sent Him into the world so that

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<sup>13</sup> Joshua 24:15

<sup>14</sup> Joshua 24:21.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Kings 18.

<sup>16</sup> Luke 9:59-60.

<sup>17</sup> Mark 10:22.

“whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”<sup>18</sup> Jesus closed the Sermon on the Mount by saying that “everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”<sup>19</sup> Later, Jesus stated, “everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.”<sup>20</sup> In another passage, Jesus told the crowd, “if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”<sup>21</sup> In Jesus’ last words in Scripture, John recorded Him saying in Revelation, “whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”<sup>22</sup>

One more verse will suffice for evidence of free will in Scripture. Peter, writing in his second epistle, told the letter’s recipients, “the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”<sup>23</sup> Free will advocates can argue that God cannot predestine all men from eternity and simultaneously wish that none should perish.

### **Calvin on Predestination**

John Calvin published his first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1536. The definitive edition was published in 1559. While the 1536 edition contained only six chapters, the 1559 edition was dramatically larger, both in size and in scope. Calvin’s chief aim was the defense of the sovereignty of God, not the advocacy of predestination. Calvin’s readers finish the

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<sup>18</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 7:24.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 10:32.

<sup>21</sup> Mark 8:34.

<sup>22</sup> Revelation 22:17 (King James Version).

<sup>23</sup> 2 Peter 3:9.

*Institutes* fully convinced of God's providence, omniscience, and omnipotence. To Calvin, God's providence "was inseparably joined to creation and was itself a kind of continuation of the creative process."<sup>24</sup> Calvin encouraged believers to "know God as the sovereign disposer of all good" to whom we confidently go in prayer, knowing "that he is both able and willing to make the best provision for us."<sup>25</sup> God's majesty, according to Calvin, determines all, leaving no room for chance.

Calvin fully believed God controlled all of creation; and if God controlled all creation, He must, by necessity, determine the eternal fate of His created. To Calvin, "the will of God is the supreme rule of righteousness, so that everything which he wills must be held to be righteous by the mere fact of his willing it."<sup>26</sup> Therefore, whatever God ordains is good, and God ordains all creation to His glory. Among that which God ordains is the eternal destiny of all humanity.

According to Calvin, humanity was beyond hope of salvation on its own accord. The doctrine of Total Depravity is described in the *Institutes*:

We thus see that the impurity of parents is transmitted to their children, so that all, without exception, are originally depraved. The commencement of this depravity will not be found until we ascend to the first parent of all as the fountain head. We must, therefore, hold it for certain, that, in regard to human nature, Adam was not merely a progenitor, but, as it were, a root, and that, accordingly, by his corruption, the whole human race was deservedly vitiated.<sup>27</sup>

Calvin believed God predestined the elect to eternal glory:

We must therefore come to that smaller number whom Paul elsewhere describes as foreknown of God (Rom. 11:2); not foreknown, as these men imagine, by idle,

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<sup>24</sup> Timothy George, *The Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988) 206.

<sup>25</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1559 edition [book online, .pdf format] Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/>, 545.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 602.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

inactive contemplations but in the sense which it often bears. For surely when Peter says that Christ was "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," (Acts 2:23), he does not represent God as contemplating merely, but as actually accomplishing our salvation. Thus also Peter, in saying that the believers to whom he writes are elect "according to the foreknowledge of God," (1 Pet. 1:2), properly expresses that secret predestination by which God has sealed those whom he has been pleased to adopt as sons.<sup>28</sup>

Calvin also believed God chose others for eternal destruction, writing, "those, therefore, whom God passes by he reprobates, and that for no other cause but because he is pleased to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines to his children."<sup>29</sup>

Calvin reached this conclusion only by diligently studying the Scriptures and Augustine, not because he desired the eternal condemnation of any malcontents in his life. In painful honesty, Calvin wrote, "the decree, I admit, is, dreadful; and yet it is impossible to deny that God foreknow what the end of man was to be before he made him, and foreknew, because he had so ordained by his decree."<sup>30</sup> Still, once Calvin had concluded God ordained "the end of man," he defended the conclusion with all the power his intellect could muster. For example, Calvin refused to take the "easy way" and say God chose the elect based on His foreknowledge that they alone would accept His salvation. Calvin wrote, "this is not the language of him who says, 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you,' (John 15:16). For had he chosen us because he foreknew that we would be good, he would at the same time also have foreknown that we were to choose him...."<sup>31</sup> Rather, Calvin fully believed — and taught — that "since the arrangement of all things is in the hand of God, since to him belongs the disposal of life and death, he

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 594.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 601.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 605.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 596.

arranges all things by his sovereign counsel, in such a way that individuals are born, who are doomed from the womb to certain death, and are to glorify him by their destruction.”<sup>32</sup>

Calvin may have believed that God ordained all things, but he also believed and taught human responsibility for righteousness. This responsibility included the duty of the Church to spread the gospel. To Calvin, only God knew the identity of the elect; therefore, the Church must preach to all people so the elect have an opportunity to respond to the grace of God. Calvin wrote,

because we know not who belongs to the number of the predestinated, or does not belong, our desire ought to be that all may be saved; and hence every person we meet, we will desire to be with us a partaker of peace. But our peace will rest upon the sons of peace. Wherefore, on our part, let correction be used as a harsh yet salutary medicine for all, that they may neither perish, nor destroy others. To God it will belong to make it available to those whom he has foreknown and predestinated.<sup>33</sup>

Since all people, elect and reprobates, were held to the standard of God’s majesty and holiness, there was no room for any to accuse God of injustice. To this charge, Calvin replied, “for if predestination is nothing else than a dispensation of divine justice, secret indeed, but unblamable, because it is certain that those predestinated to that condition were not unworthy of it, it is equally certain, that the destruction consequent upon predestination is also most just.”<sup>34</sup>

Calvin’s theology, in reality, was simple. God is sovereign and holy. As a holy God, He holds all humanity accountable to His standard of holiness. In His sovereignty, God chooses the eternal destiny of all humanity. Calvin primarily emphasized the sovereignty of God, not predestination. To Calvin, predestination was merely a logical consequence of God’s sovereignty.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 604.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 609.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 605.

Those predestined to heaven were to be thankful for the blessing of election. Those predestined to hell were to realize their condemnation was just. Above all, God's sovereignty is preserved.

### **Predestination and Free Will in Lewis' Writings**

In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes of his "particular brand" of Christianity, referring to himself as "a very ordinary layman of the church of England."<sup>35</sup> In writing of his beliefs, he quotes Uncle Toby, a character from the novel *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Stern: "They are written in the Common-Prayer Book."<sup>36</sup>

In spite of his assurances to the contrary in *Mere Christianity*, Lewis' writings contradict the "Common-Prayer Book" in the doctrine of predestination. In the 1662 edition of the *Book of Common Prayer*, Article XVII reads as follows:

#### **Of Predestination and Election.**

PREDESTINATION to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore, they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season: they through Grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.

As the godly consideration of Predestination, and our Election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal Salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their

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<sup>35</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), viii.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, x. Thanks to Thomas Thurman for pointing out the literary reference, 25 June 2010.

love towards God: So for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchedness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.

Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in Holy Scripture: and, in our doings, that Will of God is to be followed. which [sic] we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God.<sup>37</sup>

Article XVII reads as if it were taken directly from Calvin's *Institutes*: the predestination of the elect, the reprobation of the condemned, and the supremacy of the purpose of God are all to be found in Article XVII.

Lewis, however, disagreed with Calvin concerning Total Depravity. In his atheistic years, Lewis was constantly bothered by the fact that, in spite of our wickedness, humanity in general — and Christians in particular — constantly attributed the Creation to a perfectly good Creator: “The direct inference from black to white, from evil flower to virtuous root, from senseless work to a workman infinitely wise, staggers belief.”<sup>38</sup> In spite of our evil and wickedness, some good remains in fallen man, primarily because God created us and saw that “it was very good.”<sup>39</sup> Otherwise, humanity would never have believed in an infinitely Good Creator. And, if God were truly good, Total Depravity must be false:

If [God] is not (in our sense) ‘good’ we shall obey, if at all, only through fear — and should be equally ready to obey an omnipotent Fiend. The doctrine of Total Depravity — when the consequence is drawn that, since we are totally depraved, our idea of good is worth simply nothing — may thus turn Christianity into a form of devil-worship.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> 1662 Book of Common Prayer [book online], <http://www.eskimo.com/~lhowell/bcp1662/index.html>.

<sup>38</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 3.

<sup>39</sup> Genesis 1:31.

<sup>40</sup> *The Problem of Pain*, 29.

Thus Lewis denounced Total Depravity. A God who wanted His creation to love Him could not coerce worship through fear. Lewis later wrote, “I disbelieve [Total Depravity], partly on the logical ground that if our depravity were total we should not know ourselves to be depraved, and partly because experience shows us much goodness in human nature.”<sup>41</sup>

According to Lewis, humanity knew its depravity because it never completely forgot the holiness of God.

Lewis’ writings demonstrate that he agreed with Calvin concerning God’s sovereignty. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis wrote, “In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself.”<sup>42</sup> Lewis also agreed that God grants all good things to His creation, writing, “Every faculty you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given you by God.”<sup>43</sup> As with Calvin, Lewis saw God as the Supreme Ruler of all creation. God is “totally purposive and totally foreseeing.”<sup>44</sup> Nothing happens without His approval, and nothing happens without His knowing it.

However, Lewis also knew that an omnipotent God was still limited in many ways. Lewis wrote in *The Problem of Pain*, “[God’s] Omnipotence means power to do all that is intrinsically possible, not to do the intrinsically impossible. You may attribute miracles to Him, but not nonsense.”<sup>45</sup> Sovereignty and omnipotence do not confer the power to do the impossible.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>42</sup> *Mere Christianity*, 124.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>44</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 200.

<sup>45</sup> *The Problem of Pain*, 18.

If God is sovereign, how can He not predetermine the destiny of each human? Lewis read the Scriptures and saw a different attribute of God: “God is love.”<sup>46</sup> It is love, according to Lewis, that compelled God to create humanity, and it is love that compels Him to offer free will to the pinnacle of His earthly creation: the freedom to choose to love Him, and the freedom to engage in prideful rebellion. In *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis writes,

I am going to submit that not even Omnipotence could create a society of free souls without at the same time creating a relatively independent and ‘inexorable’ Nature.... The freedom of a creature must mean freedom to choose: and choice implies the existence of things to choose between.<sup>47</sup>

Writing in *Mere Christianity*, Lewis said,

Free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having.... The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. And for that they must be free.<sup>48</sup>

What a striking statement! The happiness God desires for humanity is so great that He voluntarily limits His sovereignty so that we may achieve it.

Is the evil in the world today worth the price of our choice? Lewis thought so: “God knew what would happen if they used their freedom the wrong way: apparently He thought it worth the risk.... If God thinks this state of war in the universe a price worth paying for free will — that is, for making a live world in which creatures can do real good or harm and something of real importance can happen... — then we may take it it is worth paying.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> 1 John 4:8.

<sup>47</sup> *The Problem of Pain*, 19-20.

<sup>48</sup> *Mere Christianity*, 48.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

Lewis realized the evil lurking within humanity. Lewis also knew that God loved us anyway: “[the Christian] does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us.”<sup>50</sup> In this line, Lewis echoes the Apostle Paul: “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”<sup>51</sup> Because of God’s love for us, Jesus died to accomplish our salvation and make it possible for us to choose to love God.

Lewis believed salvation was available to all people, but not because of our innate goodness. Humanity may not be totally depraved, but we are still without strength to achieve our own salvation. According to Lewis, “only a bad person needs to repent: only a good person can repent perfectly.”<sup>52</sup> . Jesus alone was able to meet the criteria required for humanity’s salvation, for only He “could surrender His will, and suffer and die, because He was man; and He could do it perfectly because He was God.”<sup>53</sup> When Jesus died, His death was for the “sins of the world.”<sup>54</sup> Still, each individual must choose whether to accept the gift of salvation:

The business of becoming a son of God, of being turned from a created thing into a begotten thing, of passing over from the temporary biological life into timeless ‘spiritual’ life, has been done for us. Humanity is already ‘saved’ in principle. We individuals have to appropriate that salvation. But the really tough work — the bit we could not have done for ourselves — has been done for us.<sup>55</sup>

Choice means risk; it is impossible to offer the choice of love without offering the choice of rejection. Lewis recognized this choice leads some people to choose to reject God and suffer

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>51</sup> Romans 5:8.

<sup>52</sup> *Mere Christianity*, 57.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>54</sup> John 1:29.

<sup>55</sup> *Mere Christianity*, 181.

the consequences of that choice. In one of the most powerful explanations for the necessity of hell, Lewis wrote,

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “*Thy* will be done.” All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.<sup>56</sup>

Therefore, both Lewis and Calvin agree on the sovereignty of God. Both agree that Jesus’ death brought the hope of salvation to fallen humanity. Are two of Christianity’s greatest thinkers to remain divided by the subject of predestination?

### **A Possible Reconciliation**

Lewis, of course, had read Calvin’s *Institutes*; he was also thoroughly versed in Scripture. Lewis recognized predestination when he saw it, and he saw it aplenty in Scripture, Augustine, and Calvin. However, Lewis saw predestination not as a blessing only, but as a major responsibility on those chosen. “When we look into the Selectiveness which the Christians attribute to God we find in it none of that ‘favouritism’ which we were afraid of. The ‘chosen’ people are not chosen for their own sake... but for the sake of the unchosen.”<sup>57</sup>

It is in this statement that a glimmer of reconciliation becomes possible between the two warring camps. Lewis conceded that God predestined nations and individuals, but he saw what Calvin could not: God can — and does — allow free will to humanity.

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<sup>56</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 75.

<sup>57</sup> *Miracles*, 190.

God chose nations and people to accomplish His redemptive work, culminating in Christ but continuing even today. Still, in His desire to give us the ultimate happiness in our relationship with Him, God allows all humanity to choose salvation and the resulting relationship with Him.

The question remains: is this approach feasible? The answer is yes; not only is this possibility feasible, but it should be highly desirable to the Church as a whole.

First, Lewis' contention that both are possible removes the stigma of predestination by treating it as the exception, not the rule. God predestines certain individuals for the accomplishment of His will, but anyone else can come to Him by choosing to do so. Those predestined to eternal life bear a massive responsibility to achieve the will of God in their lives and must be eternally grateful for the blessing of eternal mercy.

This approach also removes the sticky problems of Scripture exemplified in the Pharaoh of Exodus. If it is possible for God to predestine people to eternal life, it is also within His sovereignty to predestine certain individuals and nations to condemnation so that the greater good will be accomplished. The birth of Jesus, in the circumstances in which it occurred, would have been impossible without the Exodus.

A combined approach to predestination and free will also accounts for the entirety of Scripture. As demonstrated earlier, Scriptural evidence attests both to predestination and free will. Those who attempt to skew Scripture to fit their opinions on this issue do great harm to the Church. Hyper-Calvinists have often hindered missionary efforts by over-emphasizing predestination. On the other hand, free will advocates often risk downplaying the sovereignty of God and elevating human will above God's omnipotence.

It is impossible to examine Lewis' approach to predestination without conceding the possibility of error on his part. What Lewis saw as free choice, Calvin would claim was pre-determined. Lewis, however, had a ready answer for this claim:

If that were true, if God *foresaw* our acts, it would be very hard to understand how we could be free not to do them. But suppose God is outside and above the Time-line. In that case, what we call 'tomorrow' is visible to Him in just the same way as we call 'today.' He does not remember you doing things yesterday; He simply sees you doing them, because, though you have lost yesterday, He has not. He does not 'foresee' you doing things tomorrow; He simply sees you doing them: because, though tomorrow is not yet there for you, it is for Him... In a sense, He does not know your action till you have done it: but then the moment at which you have done it is already 'Now' for Him.<sup>58</sup>

This statement points to a potential problem in Lewis' understanding of God's knowledge: a desire to defend free will to the detriment of God's omniscience. However, the opposite claim may be made concerning Calvin's determination to defend predestination as a prerogative of God's sovereignty.

In the end, one must conclude the possibility that both Calvin and Lewis were correct in their approaches to salvation. Scripture teaches both the certainty of predestination and the possibility of free will, but both within the sovereign will of Almighty God. Believers who wrongly elevate either of these doctrines above the sovereignty of God do so only by ignoring the totality of Scripture. One cannot examine this issue without realizing the grim truth of God's proclamation through Isaiah: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."<sup>59</sup> Two of Christendom's brightest minds — John Calvin and C.S. Lewis — could not adequately explain God's ways in the matter

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<sup>58</sup>ibid., 170.

<sup>59</sup> Isaiah 55:9.

of salvation. God is God, and He will accomplish the salvation of His Creation in ways unimaginable by mortal man.

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## Outline

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