

Predestination in the Orthodox Concept

Objective

Understand the concept of predestination from an Orthodox perspective

Scriptural Verse

“Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29)

References

- “Salvation in the Orthodox Concept” by H.H. Pope Shenouda III
- "Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans" by Father Tadros Yacoub Malaty
- Holy Bible
- SOTERIOLOGY (Servants' Preparation Program 2003), www.suscopts.org

Introduction

Grace is a gift, not a reward. If grace were a reward, humans could purchase their salvation through good works. They could earn their redemption. This is totally contrary to the New Testament proclamation of the doctrine of grace.

Lesson Outline

1. Gift of Grace (The Calvinist View)

- Primarily theorized by Calvin, has some basis from St. Augustine's theories on original sin and grace.
- God has selected some people to salvation and others to eternal damnation before the foundation of the world.
- No effort is possible to save those who are predestined to hell.
- Good or evil deeds serve for the fulfillment of the predestination.
- No one else is redeemed by Christ and saved except the elect only.
- God's grace works only in the elect.

2. Biblical Teaching

A. The Universal Saving Will of God:

1. “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” (Ezekiel 33:11)
2. “God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved.” (1 Timothy 2:4)
3. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16)
4. “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins and not ours only but also for the whole world” (1 John 2:2)
5. “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15)

B. Human Free Will:

1. "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19)
2. "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword" (Isaiah 1:19-20)
3. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself" (Matthew 16:27)
4. "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17)
5. "If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor" (Matthew 19:21)
6. "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him..." (Revelation 3:20)
7. "How often I wanted to gather your children together... but you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37)
8. "You are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:40)
9. "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come" (Matthew 22:2-3)
10. "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11)

C. God's Foreknowledge:

1. God, through His divine foreknowledge and recognition of what would take place in the future, knows who would do the things that please Him in righteousness and goodness using their free will.
2. God also knows who would choose to do evil and disobey Him misusing the gift of free will.
3. God's foreknowledge does not interfere with our given free will.
4. Moreover, the divine universal saving will of God is different from His foreknowledge in case of those who perish.
5. In other words, God wants them to be saved but He knows that they will take the wrong decisions.

3. Predestination in the Orthodox Concept

1. St. Paul said, "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose ... for whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:28-30).
 - a. Notice that St. Paul said that all things work together for good to those who love God, he did not say, to whom God loves.
 - b. Because it depends on them not on God.
2. Likewise he said, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have come into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).
 - a. Their salvation depends on their response to the grace of God.
3. Therefore, we believe that God's predestination for salvation is not due to His will:
 - a. God wants all to be saved.
 - b. Rather it is due to His divine foreknowledge, "Whom He foreknew, He also predestined" (Romans 8:29).

- c. The same is clear from the words of St. Peter, “elect according to the foreknowledge of God” (1 Peter 1:2).
- d. The key point is to differentiate between God’s will and His foreknowledge.
- e. Jacob and Esau:
 - i. It is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated” (Romans 9:13)
 - ii. Both Jacob and Esau were called to salvation, for God loves all equally and He doesn’t show partiality (Deuteronomy 10:17).
 - iii. But God foreknew how these two individuals would freely respond to His call:
 - 1. Esau was hated (rejected), only because God foreknew he would choose wrongly and be wicked.
 - 2. Jacob was loved (accepted) because God foreknew he would participate in the faith of Abraham and serve God’s purposes.
 - iv. God’s foreknowledge did not interfere with their free will.
 - v. Therefore, St. Paul said, “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!” (Romans 9:14)
- f. St. Paul
 - i. Though at one time St. Paul persecuted the Church, God foreknew he would repent and had elected him before he was born:
 - 1. “God who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace” (Galatians 1:15).
 - 2. St. Paul’s persecution of the Church is a clear manifestation of free will, for obviously God’s Predestination (from the womb) did not interfere with his free will.
- g. The potter and the clay:
 - i. It is written, “Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?” (Romans 9:21)
 - ii. The potter (God) has power over the clay to make whatever he wants from it whether a vessel for honor or for dishonor.
 - iii. But the potter (God) is also wise and just.
 - iv. It is absurd that a wonderful lump of clay comes into the hands of this wise potter and he makes it a vessel of dishonor.
 - v. On the other hand, if the clay is rough and not fit to be a vessel for honor, the potter, then, will be obliged, due to its bad state, to make from it a vessel for dishonor.
 - vi. Thus it all depends upon the condition of the clay because the potter’s will is to make all the clay vessels of honor.
 - vii. “Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down. And to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good which I said I would benefit it” (Jeremiah 18:6- 10)

- viii. It is clear from the above passage that God (the potter) is even willing to revoke His judgment if a person turns from his evil way and seeks his own salvation.
- ix. The story of Nineveh is a clear example.
- h. The principle of predestination and election, as the Protestants teach it, implies injustice and partiality and contradicts God's love and justice and human free will.
 - i. It also leads sinners to despair, feeling that their striving to repent is in vain and useless since they are vessels predestined for dishonor and damnation.
 - ii. As for the righteous, it leads them to slackness and negligence.
 - iii. Moreover, it leaves many questions unanswered:
 - 1. Why did God give the world His commandments, if indeed people were predestined for salvation and damnation?
 - 2. Why would the devil toil in tempting the elect, if they will certainly be saved?
 - 3. On what basis would reward be given to the elect, if they had no choice in their destiny?
 - 4. Why would God punish a person predestined to perdition?

Conclusion

God elects His people based on His foreknowledge of their love and dedication to Him. He does not show partiality or injustice by selecting certain people for salvation and not others.

Activities/Discussion Points

Divide the group into two and give each group one of the questions below for discussion

1. Why did God select the Israelites to be His people but reject them later?
2. How did Adam commit sin? Was it by his choice?