

Sharing Life, Sharing Faith

Discussion #10

I. The Doctrine of Election

Predestination by God of the elect to heaven is a clear Scriptural teaching. Again and again the Word of God speaks of God's gracious gift of election to grace. At the same time, it seems obvious that not all people have faith in Jesus Christ. We might ask the question, "Why some and not others?", or "Does that mean God predestines some people to hell?"

Eternal election is given to demonstrate the matchless glory of God's grace in Christ. Eternal election serves as a constant incentive to walk in the ways of sanctification. Eternal election serves to comfort us when doubts concerning our salvation come. Eternal election serves to comfort us in the ills and tribulations of life. **(Rev. Richard A. Bolland)**

A. Election to Eternal Life

1. The Bible teaches that God wants all men to be saved

It is the revealed will of God that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. **(Rev. Richard A. Bolland)**

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. **(Joel 2:32)**

He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. **(John 1:7)**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. **(John 3:16-18)**

For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live! **(Ezekiel 18:32)**

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. **(II Peter 3:9)**

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." **(Luke 2:10)**

2. **The Bible also teaches that not all men will be saved, that some are chosen, while others are not.**

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."
(Matthew 25:34,41)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. (Ephesians 1:3-5)

3. **On the surface, these two passages seem contradictory, but in actuality they are both absolute truth.**

Christ's vicarious atonement was salvific for all mankind, whether or not they would believe in Christ. In other words, the payment made for sin was for every man, woman and child; past, present and future, regardless of the presence of saving faith in the individuals. This however, emphatically does not mean that all men are saved, but rather that the payment for sin is fully in place for all men.
(Rev. Richard A. Bolland)

There exists a distinct and significant difference between God's foreknowledge and His election. Because God foreknows who shall believe and be saved and who shall be lost does not in any way indicate that the knowing is the cause of the election. (Rev. Richard A. Bolland)

The final consequence of God's eternity is the fact that He knows the future. Since He is outside of time, future and past are exactly the same to Him, and His knowledge of the future is therefore exactly the same as His knowledge of the past.¹ (Aryeh Kaplan)

God sees everything as if it has all taken place already. Everything he wants to happen will certainly happen!² (Martin Luther)

B. Predestination to Hell?

It is absolutely critical that we make the distinction that, while God predestines some to eternal life, He in no way predestines anyone to eternity in hell. This is a doctrine of Calvinist theology. Calvinists reason that "since God predestines some to heaven, it must also be true that he predestines some to hell". Not only is this based on unsound logic, there is very little scriptural support for this idea. However, there are numerous passages in the Bible that explain why all men are not saved, even though it is God's desire that they be saved.

People are damned, not due to a divine election to wrath and hell, but because they are sinners who reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Damnation is totally man's fault, not God's. The fact that not all men are saved is not a result of eternal election to hell, but is the result of human obduracy. **(Rev. Richard A. Bolland)**

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath - **prepared for destruction**? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom **he prepared in advance for glory**, even us whom he called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? **(Romans 9:22-23)**

Calvinists sometime use these two verses as a proof-text that God does predestine some people to hell. But this is an errant interpretation of the text. From the Greek:

Verse 22: **κατηρτισμένα** (*katertismena*) “having been prepared” for destruction
Note that this is the passive form of the verb.

Verse 23: **προητοίμασεν** (*proetoimasen*) which “He prepared beforehand” for glory. Note that this is the active form of the verb.

Note also that in the Greek there are two different verbs used here, even though the English translators use the verb “to prepare” for both.

A closer study of Romans 9:22-23 shows clearly that the election to salvation has no predestination to damnation as its corollary. In two respects the vessels of wrath differ radically from the vessels of mercy. While it is said of the vessels of mercy in the active voice that God had afore prepared them unto glory, the passive voice is used of the vessels of wrath: ready, ripe for destruction. The passive construction is not to be regarded as accidental, but as intended, since the vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy are here compared. The more we note how the words "Which He had afore prepared unto glory" emphasize God's work in the vessels of mercy, the more it strikes us that in regard to the vessels of wrath, in so far as they are "fitted to destruction", there is no mention whatever of any "doing" by God.³ **(Francis Pieper)**

Note that the false doctrine of “double predestination” creates a conflict with regard to the will of God. God tells us specifically that He wants all men to be saved. To say that, in spite of that, God also arbitrarily predestines some men to hell is to call God a liar. “He says one thing and does another.” This is most definitely not the case, and God can be trusted to mean what He says in His word!

The end result of this doctrine is a lack of assurance of God’s grace. It leads to doubt and fear **in those who have been given the gift of faith**. We all have times when our faith seems very weak, and we doubt. The teaching that God predestines some people to hell would, in those moments, be enough to cause real despair and anguish, as one is led to suspect that he may be one of the ones predestined to hell, in spite of his desires to the contrary. Dr. Jay Adams is a Calvinist professor at Westminster Theological Seminar, and he has written a book on pastor counseling. In it, he advises pastors that “that if

someone comes in expressing uncertainty about salvation, you can't tell him Christ died for him, because you can't be sure whether he's one of the elect”.

C. **Why are Some Saved and not Others?**

The hidden will of God regarding the question, "Why does God choose some and not others?" remains hidden and is not exposed in the Scriptures. To attempt to divine the hidden will of God is foolishness and arrogance on the part of man. We wish to say only what the Scriptures say; no more and no less, and we will not attempt to answer questions the Scriptures themselves do not answer. **(Rev. Richard A. Bolland)**

According to our reasoning either all men should be saved or all men should be lost. But God acts differently. Why? Scripture does not answer this question and forbids us to seek the answer...**the answer is beyond us.** Men who persist in the attempt to find the answer will inevitably turn to Calvinism and deny the universality of grace, or to synergism and teach that Christians owe their conversion and salvation to their "Good" conduct.⁴ **(Francis Pieper)**

They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.
(II Thessalonians 2:10)

There can be no conflict between God's universal will that all men be saved and the fact that men will refuse to receive the grace offered in the Gospel by their own sinful, willfulness. **(Rev. Richard A. Bolland)**

The reason why not all who hear the Word believe it (and thus receive the greater damnation) is not that God has not allowed them to be saved. Instead, it is their own fault, for they heard the Word not so that they might learn from it but only to despise, revile, and ridicule it; and they resisted the Holy Spirit who wanted to work in them through the Word, as happened at Christ's time with the Pharisees and their adherents.⁵
(Solid Dec. XI, 78)

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. **(Matthew 23:37)**

D. **What Election Means in our Christian Witness**

1. **It gives us absolute assurance of our own salvation**

The elect on earth are seen in these vestments: They hear the gospel, believe in Christ, pray and give thanks, are sanctified in love, have hope, patience, and comfort under the Cross; and although all this is very weak in them, yet they hunger and thirst after righteousness.⁶ **(Solid Dec. XI, 30)**

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. **(Romans 3:22-24)**

2. It means that all people need to hear the word!

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Yes, it's true that what is predestined will happen. However, we aren't commanded to know what is predestined. In fact, we are forbidden to know it. We test God when we delve into unknowable matters. What we cannot know, we should leave to God. Let the future remain in darkness. Let it stay secret and hidden. In the meantime, we should do what we know we ought to. We should live by God's Word and the light he has given us.⁷ (Martin Luther)

II. Buddhism

A. History

Buddhism was founded approximately 2500 years ago by Siddharta Gotama, also known as the Buddha. He claims to have become fully enlightened at the age of 35. The word Buddha comes from the word 'budhi', or 'to awaken'. Buddha is not a god, but merely the word used for a fully awakened person, the first of which was Siddharta. There are about 300 million followers of Buddhism throughout the world. It is growing rapidly in the West, due in part to disaffection with "organized religion", as well as the rise in post-modern thought.

B. Beliefs and practice

Buddhism teaches that truth and enlightenment come from within, and that all of us are essentially good people. However, **note that this is in reality a religion based on law.** There are certain things you must do. The basic requirements, or "path" of Buddhism is summarized as follows:

to lead a moral life,
to be mindful and aware of thoughts and actions, and
to develop wisdom and understanding

Traditionally, Buddhism teaches the existence of the ten realms of being. At the top is *Buddha* and the scale descends as follows: *Bodhisattva* (an enlightened being destined to be a Buddha, but purposely remaining on earth to teach others), *Pratyeka Buddha* (a Buddha for himself), *Sravka* (direct disciple of Buddha), *heavenly beings* (superhuman [angels?]), *human beings*, *Asura* (fighting spirits), *beasts*, *Preta* (hungry ghosts), and *depraved men* (hellish beings).

1. The Four Noble Truths

- a. Life is suffering
- b. Suffering is caused by craving and aversion
- c. Suffering can be overcome and happiness obtained
- d. The 8-fold path is the way to overcome suffering

2. The Eight-Fold Path

- a. **Right view** -- the right way to view the world. Wrong view occurs when we impose our expectations onto things; expectations about how we hope things will be, or about how we are afraid things might be.
- b. **Right intention** -- If we are able to abandon our expectations, our hopes and fears, we no longer need to be manipulative.
- c. **Right speech** -- Once our intentions are pure, we no longer have to be embarrassed about our speech. We say what needs to be said, very simply in a genuine way.
- d. **Right discipline** -- We need to give up our tendency to complicate issues. We practice simplicity.
- e. **Right livelihood** -- It is only natural and right that we should earn our living. Often, many of us don't particularly enjoy our jobs. The truth is, that we should be glad of our job, whatever it is. We need to perform it properly, with attention to detail.
- f. **Right effort** -- When we see things as they are, we can work with them, gently and without any kind of aggression whatsoever.
- g. **Right mindfulness** -- We are mindful of the way we talk, the way we perform our jobs, our posture, our attitude toward our friends and family, every detail.
- h. **Right concentration** -- Right absorption means that we are completely absorbed in nowness, in things as they are. This can only happen if we have some sort of discipline, such as sitting meditation. Sitting meditation cuts through our absentmindedness. It provides a space or gap in our preoccupation with ourselves.

3. The Five Precepts

- a. Do not take the life of anything living
- b. Do not take anything not freely given
- c. Abstain from sexual misconduct and sensual overindulgence
- d. Refrain from untrue speech
- e. Avoid intoxication (or losing mindfulness)

4. God

Buddhism refer to God as “the originating principal”, also know as Brahman. It is somewhat unclear what role this Brahman had in the creation. According to some, he is the creator of the world, but also the creation itself. The natural world is a manifestation of God and the two cannot be separated.

- C. Some quotes from the “Buddhism Basics” website which help to illustrate some of the basic beliefs. (emphasis added)

Truth

“Buddhist teachings can be understood and tested by anyone. Buddhism teaches that *the solutions to our problems are within ourselves not outside.*”

Creation

“If we were to borrow a western expression, we could say that *"in the beginning" things were going along quite well. At some point, however, there was a loss of confidence in the way things were going.* There was a kind of primordial panic which produced confusion about what was happening. Rather than acknowledging this loss of confidence, there was an identification with the panic and confusion. Ego began to form. This is known as the first skandha, the skandha of form.”

Meditation

“When you sit, let things settle and allow all your discordant self with its unguineness and unnaturalness to dissolve, out of that rises your real being. You experience an aspect of yourself which is more genuine and more authentic-the "real" you. As you go deeper, *you begin to discover and connect with your fundamental goodness.*”

Karma

Karma should not be confused with fate. Fate is the notion that man's life is preplanned for him by some external power, and he has no control over his destiny. Karma on the other hand, can be changed. *Because man is a conscious being he can be aware of his karma and thus strive to change the course of events.* In the Dhammapada we find the following words, "All that we are is a result of what we have thought, it is founded on our thoughts and made up of our thoughts."

Death

In Tibet the day of death is thought of as highly important. It is believed that as soon as the death of the body has taken place, the personality goes into a state of trance for four days. During this time *the person does not know they are dead.* This period is called the First Bardo and during it Lamas (monks) saying special verses can reach the dead person.

It is believed that towards the end of this time the dead person will see a brilliant light. *If the radiance of the Clear Light does not terrify them, and they can welcome it, then the person will not be reborn.* But most flee from the Light, which then fades.

The person then becomes conscious that death has occurred. At this point the Second Bardo begins. The person sees all that they have ever done or thought passing in front of them. While they watch they feel they have a body but when they realize this is not so, they long to possess one again. Then comes the Third Bardo, which is the state of seeking

another birth. *All previous thoughts and actions direct the person to choose new parents, who will give them their next body.*

D. Witnessing to Buddhists

1. Be a friend. Listen to them, and ask respectful questions, not just about the religion of Buddhism but how that person became a Buddhist. Most, but not all, American Buddhists are those who have become disenchanted with the faith of their childhood and have embraced Buddhism because it is different and “cool”. By listening to their story, you will be given many clues as to what their thoughts and experiences are about Christianity.
2. Note that Buddhists believe that truth and enlightenment comes from within, and that we are essentially very good. This may be a good starting point. Discuss the concept of absolute truth as being something outside ourselves. Buddhists too have been influenced by post-modern thought, and they believe that truth is subjective and depends on individual perception.
3. Remember your law and gospel lessons. Don’t be afraid to point out that people are not essentially good, and use yourself as an example. A question you might ask would be why Buddhists meditate on forgiveness if we are basically good. Obviously we must do wrong things, or we wouldn’t need to be forgiven.

III. Scenarios

- A.** Divide into pairs. Read the text of the following scenario. First, pick out the false ideas in this meditation. Then, discuss how you would converse with someone who practices this meditation. On what areas would you focus your conversation? Spend 5 minutes or so discussing this, then come back together with the group and share your thoughts.

A meditation on forgiveness:

Please put the attention on the breath.

Have forgiveness in your heart for anything you think you've done wrong . Forgive yourself for all the past omissions and commissions. They are long gone. Understand that you were a different person and this one is forgiving that one that you were. Feel that forgiveness filling you and enveloping you with a sense of warmth and ease.

Think of your parents. Forgive them for anything you have ever blamed them for. Understand that they too are different now. Let this forgiveness fill them, surround them, knowing in your heart that this is your most wonderful way of togetherness.

Think of your nearest and dearest people . Forgive them for anything that you think they have done wrong or are doing wrong at this time. Fill them with your forgiveness. Let them feel that you accept them. Let that forgiveness fill them. Realizing that this is your expression of love.

Now think of your friends. Forgive them for anything you have disliked about them. Let your forgiveness reach out to them, so that they can be filled with it, embraced by it. Have a look again and see whether there's anyone or anything, any where in the world, towards

whom you have blame or condemnation. And forgive the people or the person, so that there is no separation your heart.

Now put your attention back on yourself. And recognize the goodness in you. The effort you are making. Feel the warmth and ease that comes from forgiveness.

- B.** You have been having lunch with a co-worker once or twice a week for the past six months. More often than not, the subject of religion comes up. He has stated on numerous occasions that he believes that people are basically good, and that if God really is going to judge us when we die, He will be fair and kind and judge us according to the good we have done. You have spoken often about God's law, and how you haven't been able to keep it. You have also spoken of Jesus Christ, and his sacrifice on our behalf. Your friend has not appeared to be interested in this up to this point. Today, he surprises you and says, "I've really been struggling with some of the things you've said. I'm starting to see that I'm not doing quite so good as I thought I was either. I have done a lot of wrong things in my life. I've been reading my Bible a little bit, and it is really hitting home to me, and I can see what you are saying about Jesus Christ. I think you're right, he really is the Son of God, and he really did die as a sacrifice for sin. I'd like to have that forgiveness too. What would I have to do?"

What do you tell him?

IV. Journal Sharing

V. Next Month

A. Creation

B. New Age Thought

C. Outside Reading

--Predestination, The Lutheran Viewpoint, by Rev. Bolland

¹ Kaplan, Aryeh, "The Aryeh Kaplan Anthology Vol I., © 1979, 1998, Mesorah Publications, Brooklyn NY, pg 144

² Luther, Martin, "Faith Alone", © 1998 World Bible Publishers, Iowa Falls, Iowa, pg. "March 24"

³ Pieper, Francis, "Christian Dogmatics", Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO Vol. III, pg 497

⁴ Pieper, Francis, Op. Cit.

⁵ Book of Concord, Formula of Concord Solid Declaration IX:78, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis MO, pg 653

⁶ Book of Concord, Formula of Concord Solid Declaration XI:30, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis MO, pp 645-646

⁷ Luther, Martin, Op. Cit., pg "March 23"

