**Predestination\_Foreknowledge\_Election De-Mystified**

By Andy Brock

Predestination. What comes to your mind when you hear the word “predestination”? How about “foreknowledge”? Or how about “Election”? For most, it probably conjures up images of a mysterious Biblical word, of God making decrees “in eternity past” or some mystical thoughts of God’s sovereignty and divine knowledge, sort of these esoteric words that Paul wrote that we just can’t hope to ever understand.

If one has been a Christian for any amount of time, there can quite likely be a lot of confusion from all the things we’ve heard about these words over the years and the endless debates over these terms and the related Soteriology that have been raging for almost 500 years now.

Many, if not most Christians I know have long ago just sort of thrown up their hands and said “it’s all too much, I’m just going to chalk it up to one of those mysteries that’s just too high for us to understand that we won’t know this side of heaven.”

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. 9“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isa 55:8,9

Of course it’s true that God’s ways are higher than our ways and that we can’t possibly understand the mind of God or many of His ways.

As Paul pondered this thought he wrote 33Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? 35Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? 36For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory]forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

But, having acknowledged this, as I’ve thought through and studied these things deeply and in detail, the question that comes to my mind is, do you think that it was Paul’s intention as he wrote the letters to the Ephesians, Romans, Galatians, and others for those who would be reading his letters to fully understand the ideas and concepts he was trying to convey to them? It’s hard for me to imagine that Paul (under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit) wrote these epistles knowing that many things he wrote in them would not be understandable to those he was writing to. I can hardly imagine that it was Paul’s intention that there would be confusion surrounding the things he said in his letters.

Perspicuity when used in the theological sense describes things that God has revealed that are clear or plain to understand.

29The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law. Deut 29:29

So yes, there are secret things that belong to the Lord, but the ***things revealed*** belong to us that we may understand and follow them. So by definition the things that Paul wrote and revealed in scripture are the things revealed. Isn’t that the point of scripture?

I fully believe that the things Paul revealed and wrote to us were things he expected us to grasp and understand. Paul stated that part of his purpose as an apostle was to make known to us the mystery of God’s will.

9He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times,… Eph 1:9-10

Paul’s (and the other apostles) stewardship was that God revealed to him the mysteries that God wanted to reveal, and that when we read what he wrote we can understand his insight in that mystery.

Eph 3:2-5 2if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you; 3that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit

Paul prayed that we would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation, that we would be enlightened, so that we would know the hope of our calling.

17that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18*I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. Eph 1:17-19

To those he was writing to, Paul laid out what were his intentions for them. His goal was that we would know what is the hope of Christ’s calling and know what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. Why do I think Paul wanted us to fully understand what he was conveying when he wrote about predestination and foreknowledge and election? Because a full (and right) understanding of these things underpins and elevates our understanding of the hope of His calling and an appreciation and confidence in the riches of the glory of His inheritance He has reserved for us in heaven and a deeper understanding of the surpassing greatness of His power toward us.

This is exactly what I received as I’ve studied what Paul wrote and as the fog of confusion was lifted and I came to a deeper understanding of these things. That’s where my passion to help others understand these concepts comes from as well and what I hope this short study would help to accomplish.

Having said all of this, are parts of Paul’s writing sometimes hard to understand? Remember what Peter, even another apostle, said … 15and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. 2 Peter 3:15-16

So yes, some things Paul wrote are hard to understand and we need to search them deeply and we need, as Paul prayed, a spirit of wisdom and revelation and need the eyes of our heart to be enlightened. But I still contend that Paul would want us to fully understand what he was intending on teaching, being aware of course that we don’t want to be one of those that Peter is talking about that distort what he wrote. We should continue to strive to understand and grasp it and when we do grasp it we will have an even better and deeper understanding of the incredible scope of God’s love and grace for us, which is why I think Paul wrote it.

My goal in this lesson is to make an attempt to as much as possible take the mysteriousness out of these words. Men through the ages, I believe mostly with good intentions, have really clouded what I believe are some pretty simple Biblical concepts with a lot of confusion and baggage.

Let’s start with Predestination. Predestination (Greek proorizo (pro-or-id’-zo) is by definition “to limit in advance,” or “determine before.” In its simplest terms it is simply to set a destiny, to map out a destiny if you will, ahead of time, before you go there, of somewhere you’re going to go or a goal you’re going to get to.

Let’s de-mystify it even further. Every one of us uses predestination almost every day. You use it, for example, every time you go to church. When you walk out of your house Sunday morning and get in your car and punch in the address of the church into Waze or Google maps on your phone, you just pre-set, or determined, a destiny (the destiny being the church). So you “limited in advance” where you were going to go. You limited in advance that you were going to the church. You “determined before,” “pre-set a destiny”, you “predestined” that you were going to church.

Let’s break it down a little bit, which will help us use our everyday process of predestination to help us in looking at what Paul wrote about predestination in scripture. Every instance of predestiny includes five parts. A person or group of people, a starting place (place at which the destination is set) and ending place (the destination), and a starting time (pre, before) and arrival time (at the destination). In the case of us going to church, the person was you or me, the starting place was our house, the ending place was the church, the starting time was maybe 8:30 when we get in the car, the arrival time was maybe 8:50 when you planned on arriving at church. We have now fully defined the five parts of predestination.

The only difference between when we predestine and when God predestines is that when we do it it’s not guaranteed. Your car may have broken down on the way. You may get in a wreck. You may get caught behind a wreck and get to church a half hour late. But when God sets a destiny it’s a sure thing. It will happen and will happen in His perfect timing.

So, hopefully having de-mystified what predestination is and how we can break it down, we can now use it with Paul’s Biblical teaching on predestination to find out what Paul is teaching us about it. Let’s read the scriptures and ask the questions we just learned about predestination. Remember, there’s a person, a start time and arrival time, and a starting and arrival place (in our example it was a physical location, it can also be a position, or a goal). So let’s ask the same questions when we come to Paul’s teaching on predestination. The word is only used by Paul four times, twice each in two chapters, and really only three separate instances as one of the times he uses it twice in the same sentence structure. There are other verses that talk about being chosen, etc. and we will touch on some of those but for now I want to stick to only the verses that use the word predestination.

Let’s go to these verses. They are: Ephesians 1:5, Eph 1:11, Romans 8:29, and Rom 8:30.

Remember the first rule of hermeneutics. What do the words actually say? We don’t want to add words (and meanings) that aren’t there and don’t want to take away words that are there.

So let’s try to determine an answer to the first question by just reading the texts for what they say. Where is the destiny, or in this case the where is not a physical location but what is the destiny, ie. to what are we destined?

Eph 1:5 In love 5He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Eph 1:11 In Him 11also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

Romans 8:29-30 29For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

To what are we destined for, or to?

Eph 1:5; We are predestined to adoption as sons.

Eph 1:11; We are predestined to an inheritance

Rom 8:29 We are predestined to become conformed to the image of His son

Rom 8:30 No answer. Doesn’t say we were predestined to anything here, just says “those whom he predestined,” and goes on to list other things that God gave to those, the same “those” that Paul mentions in verse 29.

So, there is a destiny set for … an adoption, an inheritance, and to be conformed to the image of His son.

Pretty easy so far isn’t it?

Note: We will look at context in more detail a little later, but just quickly now, what is the context of Romans 8? It’s written to the saints in Rome. The context would indicate that their question is something along the lines of “whether their present sufferings are worth it and whether God’s promises to vindicate their sufferings can be trusted”. Paul’s teaching is all about assurance of God’s faithfulness to them in the midst of their suffering and he is encouraging them for those God loves and knows, that God works out all things, even their suffering, for good and He encourages them with a glimpse of what God has in store for them in the future. Is the context Paul is explaining in chapter 8 about how people become saved? Is the question that Paul is answering “How did I become saved”? Not at all. That’s not the context of what Paul is discussing here. Are any of these words in Paul’s teaching about predestination “saved” or “salvation” or a substitute for saved or salvation or do any of them mean saved or salvation? No. We’ll go into more specifics of what these words do mean a little later.

So just a simple reading of these four verses in context, which are the only verses in scripture that use the word predestination (except for one other usage in Acts which is about Jesus) clearly shows that Paul is not teaching that we are predestined to be saved or pre-destined for salvation.

So why does the Calvinist claim that scripture teaches that some are predestined by God to be saved, to salvation? Good question! We can discuss that in more detail at another time. I Don’t want to get off track talking about what it doesn’t mean, but want to discover what it does mean.

What’s next? How about the leaving location, or in this case, our physical/spiritual location/what we are?

It should be clear from reading the text, that the leaving “position” of the person Paul is discussing is one who is a believer. Only a believer in Christ is going to get the destination of being adopted, obtaining an inheritance, and being conformed to Christ. Again, because the Calvinist (and some Arminians) comes to these verses with a pre-supposition for them to say that God pre-destines some to believe, the Calvinist would start with the position as being an unbeliever. In response to this, one, again, we need to read the text for what it actually says, not read into it what we want it to mean. It is speaking of those things that a believer will receive. It’s not speaking of an unbeliever who receives salvation. Two, look at the context of both of these verses. In both Ephesians and Romans in these sections of scripture Paul is clearly addressing believers (“to the saints in Ephesus”, “the faithful in Christ”, “so then Brethren”, …). Paul is not addressing the issue of unbelievers and how they become saved. He is addressing believers and how they can trust in the faithfulness of God and remain strong in the face of suffering.

So the beginning “destination” if you will is a believer in Christ and final “destination” is one who is adopted, given an inheritance, and transformed to image of Christ.

The next question may at the surface seem like the same one we just answered. But hang with me, it is a different question and is important that we answer it.

Who is the “us”, “we”, and “those” that Paul says are destined?

In Eph 1 who is destined? It’s “us” and “we”. Who is us and we? That’s easy. We just discussed this. Who is the letter addressed to?

To the saints who are at Ephesus and *who are* faithful in Christ Jesus: 2Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

So the immediate us and we are the saints in Ephesus. Does what Paul write to them apply to you and I as well? I think that we all would agree that, yes, it does. What Paul writes to the Ephesians applies to all New Testament saints.

What about the passage in Romans? Who is this letter written to? The church in Rome of course. So, like in Ephesians, it’s those in the church in Rome Paul is talking about here, right? Well, yes, ultimately that’s correct. What Paul writes here is to be applied to the Saints in Rome. And of course, as with the Ephesians, ultimately to all New Testament saints, of which we are a part.

But who are actually the ones predestined in verses 29 and 30? Are they the present day saints in Rome that Paul is ultimately writing about or could Paul be referring to another group of saints? If another group, why would Paul be referring to them?

This one might get a bit stickier but as with any sticky passage, we should be able to determine the answer using good Biblical hermeneutics and inductive interpretation. But warning, it may require that we completely remove all our pre-suppositions that we come to these verses with.

I know of four different interpretations to these verses. One of them Calvinist. One of them Arminian. And two of them more of the Traditional.

I’m only going to touch on three of these very quickly. Due to keeping this to a reasonable length, I’m not going to go into each of these in detail. I want to spend the most time showing you what I believe to be the interpretation that is most supported by the context, by what Paul is trying to teach, is the most simple and least mysterious, and is supported by the actual words written, not what we conjecture Paul might mean.

The Calvinist says that this is the Golden chain of salvation. That Paul is saying that God foreknew in eternity past who He would select for salvation and who He would pass over, and He is laying out how God foreknew (and therefore according to the Calvinist systematic fore-determined) who He would select for salvation, predestined to salvation those He selected, then he called them with an “inner irresistible call”, then He justified them, then He glorified them.

What is the main error with this interpretation? We’ve already determined that none of the three things God destined us to have to do with how we are saved. That’s not what the text says. It only comes to say this if this is read into the text.

The Arminian view is that Paul is teaching that God foreknew in eternity past who would believe and from there on they go on with the interpretation fairly similar to the Calvinist.

What’s one of the main things wrong with this interpretation? Same as above. How we come to be saved is not what the text says it’s about.

The third, more traditional view, is that foreknow is also talking about God foreknowing in eternity past who would be saved and it is about the Roman and New Testament saints, but that the predestination used here is not to salvation, but to be transformed, and the rest of the chain is about what had happened or will happen to the Roman believers and therefore all saints. I believe this view could be correct, and is fairly on target, but this view still has some problems.

One of the problems with all three of these views is that all the words written here are in the past (aorist indicative) tense. So Paul’s words indicate things that have already happened. That’s not a huge problem until to get to the word glorified. If Paul is speaking of present day and future to be New Testament saints here, most of them aren’t even born yet and they certainly aren’t glorified yet, and Paul says “He also glorified” (past tense), so these three interpretations all share this problem.

So how do the above three views get around this problem? They all three purport that they can get inside Paul’s head and though Paul wrote glorified, they know that Paul ***really meant*** something along the lines of “it’s such a sure thing that they will be glorified that they are as good as glorified therefore Paul just wrote that they were glorified as if it’s already happened.” Problem 1) That’s not what Paul wrote. If we are going to change the meaning of what a Holy Spirit inspired writer wrote, we better have a really good reason for doing so (ie. it doesn’t fit the context and/or would contradict other scripture otherwise, etc.) and really good evidence for doing so. Problem 2) I read recently from a New Testament Greek scholar who wrote of this section of scripture, that it’s of course possible that this could be what Paul was doing, but in Greek literature it was very rare that one would use this literary use of language. Problem 3) There was no need for Paul to do this. If Paul (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) had wanted to say of the Roman saints and future N.T. saints that they “will assuredly be glorified” could he not have very easily written those words? Paul, just a few verses earlier in verse 18, was in fact speaking of a future glorification and he said “with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” If Paul had meant to write of a future glorification of “those” he is speaking of, he could have easily have used the same language he used earlier in verse 18? In addition, there is no reason for Paul not to write these words if he had meant this as he would not be contradicting other scripture by saying “will assuredly be glorified”. On the contrary, by using the words he used, if it was interpreted in one of the first three ways I’ve noted above, this would create confusion by saying “He also glorified” of saints who weren’t yet glorified. So we have no real reason to say that when Paul wrote it in the past tense that’s not exactly the way he intended on writing it, except for the fact that up to this point we don’t have a good, valid interpretation of this passage that would fit with that usage. But of course, that’s not the way to study scripture. We don’t come up with an interpretation and fit scripture into our interpretation. We come to scripture for what it says and let scripture drive our interpretation.

So, is there a good, solid, biblical interpretation that fits with what we’ve learned so far and with the context of what Paul was teaching that doesn’t result in the problems with the above interpretations and requires no conjecture of what Paul “really meant”?

Yes, there is. I will warn you, however, that when you first hear this, it will sound a bit foreign to your ears, because, although it was common in the past, it has been literally drowned out by the Calvinist/Arminian assumptions and interpretations of our day. Hear me out and then do your own study to determine for yourself if this doesn’t make the most sense and end with no contradictions or conjecture. So stay with me.

I believe the key to correct interpretation of these passage depend on four things. The word proginosko (translated foreknowledge), the tenses of the words that Paul says that God did to “those,” the context of what Paul was writing, and what Paul wanted his readers to understand about God.

I hope to, as I go through this, kill two birds with one stone. Correctly interpret this passage, and while doing this also help to de-mystify the word foreknowledge.

Romans 8:29-30 28And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. 29For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

We’ve already looked at the tenses of the words Paul uses and noted that they are all past tense. So in order for an interpretation to simply flow with the words Paul uses, the “those” Paul speaks of would need to be of the past.

**Foreknowledge**

One critical question to any interpretation must start with how the word *proginosko* (foreknowledge) is used in this passage? This word can and is translated and used in two ways in scripture.

One is to mean God's foreknowledge of what would happen in the future.

It’s used this way in 1 Peter 1:1-2,

To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen 2according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

Here Peter speaks of God's foreknowledge (*prognosis*) of His ***plan*** of salvation, to those who were chosen according to God’s foreknowledge of the previously mysterious plan that Paul says is no longer mysterious because he revealed to us what that plan was (Eph 3:2-13)! There is no mention in scripture of a “decretive” or “secret” will of God. God, in His good pleasure, has made His will and His plan known to us!

With all wisdom and understanding, 9 ***he made known to us the mystery of his will*** ***according to his good pleasure***, which he purposed in Christ, 10to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. Eph 1:9-10

Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, 3that is, ***the mystery made known to me by revelation***, as I have already written briefly. 4In reading this, then, ***you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ***, 5***which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets***. 6***This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel***, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. Eph 3: 2-6

Neither Peter nor Paul say believers were chosen to be believers unconditionally according to God’s foreknowledge. The Holy Spirit certainly could have stated the unconditionality of the choice if He had wanted to. But they were chosen according to God’s foreknowledge of His *plan* of salvation of the world.

11***In him*** we were also chosen, having been predestined ***according to the plan of him*** who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will Eph 1:11

Again, this plan isn’t some mysterious, unrevealed plan that God keeps hidden “in His secret counsel”. He has completely revealed His plan through Paul and other writers of scripture. In addition, God clearly tells us in scripture what His requirements are for being chosen according to His plan. He chooses those who come to Him in true repentance with a humble heart (60 to 70 passages can be given to support this) and we have access to His grace that He has promised us through faith (Rom 5:2).

A different form of foreknowledge is used in the same way in Galatians 2:8,…

8The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” 9So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

The scripture (breathed by God, so we can essentially say God) foresaw (*proeido*) that God would in His plan of salvation, justify the Gentiles through faith. What did God foresee? That He would justify a select few of the Gentiles by unconditionally choosing them for salvation? No, God foresaw He would justify the Gentiles ***by faith*** (in other words, conditionally by faith), in the same way that Paul taught throughout Romans that God justified Abraham and the Old Testament saints.

So these are two examples of the way foresee and foreknowledge is used when speaking of God’s past foreknowledge of events and His ways of what He would do in the future.

But this word is also used, more regularly, to mean "to know before" or "to have known before" as in "I knew something or someone in the past" (ie: I knew that before or I knew him before as I used to work with him years ago). Scripture passages that use proginosko in this way:…

2 Peter 3:17 17You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand [*proginosko]*, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, 18but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

You knew this in the past, beforehand.

1 Peter 1:20 20For He was foreknown [*proginosko*] before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21who through Him are believers in God…

Christ was known by God in the past (before creation)

Acts 26:5 5since they have known [*proginosko*] about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived *as* a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. 6And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers…

The Jews knew about Paul and his life in the past.

Rom 11:2 2God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew [*proginosko*]. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about* Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 3

Speaking of Israel whom God knew in the past.

Again, although God does have foreknowledge of what is called the future to us, this word is more regularly not used in this way, but in a much more common way. We practice this kind of “foreknowledge” quite often. We might say “I knew that (foreknew that) long before it was newsworthy” or “I knew him (foreknew him) before he was a Christian, he’s a totally different person now.” This type of foreknowledge is not a great mystical concept.

Paul uses this word in this way to the same readers in the same section of his letter to the Romans in chapter 11, verse 2 (Paul is teaching the same theme throughout Romans 9-11. Chapter 8 is sort of a pre-amble that flows into Romans 9 so it’s somewhat connected to chapters 9 through 11). In 8:29, I believe that there is more evidence that Paul is using the word in the more regular, or common way (of knowledge of past events), than there is evidence that Paul is using in the more uncommon way (of knowledge of future events). The “those” I believe Paul is referring to are the “saints of Old, ” the Old Testament Saints. I believe he is doing something similar to what the writer of Hebrews is doing in chapters 11 and 12 when he desires his readers to be encouraged and persevere in the face of their sufferings by considering the “great cloud of witnesses” of faith of the past. I believe Paul is doing the same thing here when he refers the saints in Rome to be encouraged and persevere in the face of their sufferings by considering the Old Testament saints who loved God and were known by God.

Consider an example. Your previous boss at work just retired, and you’re getting a new boss. You and your co-workers have some fear and trepidation about what this new boss will be like. But one of your co-workers speaks up and says, “oh, you have nothing to worry about. I’ve known him before (“foreknew” him), he used to be my boss at a previous job. He’s smart, fair, and good to work for.” So your fears are allayed by your co-worker’s assurances.

Could that be what Paul is doing here? What is the context of this part of Romans and what point is Paul trying to get across to his readers that he would use proginosko about the saints of old in this way?

Chapter 8 is about assurance. Assurance of God's goodness and faithfulness to those who love Him (and are therefore known [*ginosko*] by Him).

Paul starts by assuring the Roman believers that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Paul assures them that they have the spirit of God living in them and that this Spirit will give life to their mortal bodies after they die. He assures them they are sons of God and have now received the spirit of adoption and are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ and that we may also be glorified with Him (in the future. Note that here, where Paul is speaking about the present day New Testament Roman Christians, he uses the future tense. Again, if Paul in verse 30 then were speaking of the present day New Testament Roman Christians, would he not have again used the future tense?). Paul goes on to encourage them in the midst of their sufferings. He speaks of creation itself groaning to be set free, just as the spirit of adoption in the believers is groaning as they eagerly await their future adoption as sons and the redemption of the body (the transformation to be conformed to the image of Christ). He encourages them to persevere. He finishes with this truth. We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

I believe Paul then looks for a proof to assure them that what he just said is true and has worked in the past. You want to be assured of God's faithfulness in working out all things for the good of those who love Him? I give you exhibit number one. Just look at the “great cloud of witnesses” who loved God in the past and who God knew [loved] before [*proginosko*], the O.T. saints. They can bear witness to how God was faithful and worked out all things for good through them. He has conformed them to Christ, He called them (because of their faith), He declared them righteous (justified them), and He glorified them.

So be assured you Roman Christians, as God was faithful to them, He will be faithful to you and He will do the same for you, who in the present day love God and are known (loved) by God.

Paul then goes on with this theme, to encourage them and assure them of God’s love, power, and faithfulness through the end of chapter 8 with some of the greatest words in all of scripture.

This interpretation fits with the end of what we are predestined to, it fits with the most common usage of the word foreknow, it fits the tenses of the words used with no need for conjecture or getting into Paul’s head to change the meaning of the words he used, it perfectly fits the context of this section of scripture and with the broad teaching of scripture, and it fits perfectly with what Paul is trying to teach his readers (and us). And it isn’t hard to grasp or understand.

I challenge you to study and consider this reading for yourself.

So, back to predestination. We have come to our last two questions. When is it that we were given our destiny (the starting time) and when will we arrive at our destiny (the arrival time)?

This is a critical question. I think most if not all of us have been programmed from 20 or 30 years of Protestant Post Reformation preaching and teaching to think that the starting time is eternity past and the ending time is today, or the believer’s lifetime. You certainly would believe that if you accepted Calvinist or Arminian thought, which is that God predestined us in eternity past to salvation.

Let’s start with arrival time.

As we studied, our destination is adoption as sons, receiving of an inheritance, and being conformed to the image of Christ. If the Calvinist/Arminian interpretations are correct, these things would need to be synonymous and concurrent to and with salvation? So, let’s answer that question. Are we adopted, do we receive an inheritance, and do we become fully conformed to the image of Christ when we believe? When do those things happen for a believer?

Let’s first look at adoption. Go to Romans 8:23-25, only a few verses in front of the 29-30 verses we’ve been looking at.

23And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, ***waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons***, ***the redemption of our body***. 24For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; ***for who hopes for what he already sees***? 25But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance ***we wait eagerly for it***. Romans 8:23

Have our adoption and redemption of our body happened yet? No. We wait eagerly for our adoption. We have hope for it because we’ve not yet experienced it. With perseverance we wait eagerly for it. Our adoption is in the future. What do we have now? Look a few verses earlier.

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a ***spirit******of******adoption*** as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” Romans 8:15

We do have the spirit of adoption now. But the actual adoption is in the future.

4But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5so that He might redeem those who were under the Law***, that we might receive the adoption as sons***. 6Because you are sons, God has sent forth the **Spirit of His Son into our hearts**, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then ***an heir*** through God. Galatians 4:4-7

Again, we have the Spirit of His Son in our hearts now. We will receive the adoption as sons and an inheritance, but even though now we are heirs, we haven’t yet received the adoption or inheritance.

This verse speaks of both our adoption and inheritance. Let’s look at a few others that speak of our inheritance.

Go back to Ephesians 1, just a few verses after the predestination verse…

13In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also [[r](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=eph+1&version=NASB#fen-NASB-29220r)]believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God’s own* possession, to the praise of His glory. Eph 1:13-14

The Holy Spirit is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession. One doesn’t give a pledge to something he already has. He gives a pledge as a guarantee to something he will receive in the future. So the Holy Spirit is given now, as a pledge to the inheritance we will receive in the future.

Look at one other place, 1 Peter 1:3-4

3Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The inheritance is when and where? Reserved in heaven. Obviously in the future.

What about our being transformed to the image of Christ and the redemption of our bodies?

Have we been transformed to the image of Christ yet?

2Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3 1 John 3:2

We will we be like Him, conformed to His image, when Christ appears.

50Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

When will we be transformed/changed? In the future.

So, when is the arrival time of our destiny? It’s in the future, in heaven, when we are with Christ. It is not now, the present day.

So, to review, the “who” is us, saints. The original location, or original condition, is as a believer. The arrival location/arrival condition is adoption, inheritance, and transformation to the image of Christ. The time of arrival is in the future, in heaven.

So to wrap up what scripture teaches of our pre-destination we’re left with only one question. When is the starting time, the time in which our destination was determined? Is it in eternity past or is it in the present? Was this destiny determined before the world was created and we were born or after we were born, during our lifetime?

**Election**

Since we’ve already shown that Paul in these four verses, is not teaching predestination to salvation, we take away the necessity for it to be in eternity past. What then is the meaning of Ephesians 1:3-4?

Eph 1:3-4 3Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, 4just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

First, again let’s practice good hermeneutics. What does this verse actually say?

Did He simply “choose us” before the foundation of the world? No. That’s not what it says (but I can’t tell how many times I’ve heard this verse quoted with these words).

Did He choose us “to be” in Him? No. That’s not what it says. This verse would take on a completely different meaning if these words were used.

Did He choose us to be saved before the creation of the world? No. Even though that’s what the Calvinist thinks in his mind that it means when he reads it. That’s not what it says.

***He chose us in Him*** before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

He chose us in Him when? Before the foundation of the world.

Questions: What does “in Him” mean? Were we “in Him” before the creation of the world? When were we in Him, or in Christ?

Let’s first answer the question of when we were, or became to be, in Him.

Romans 16:7 7Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were ***in Christ before me***.

These two saints were in Christ before Paul. Therefore, Paul was not in Christ until sometime after these two saints were in Christ (not before creation, but sometime during their lifetimes and Paul’s lifetimes).

12*remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13But now ***in Christ Jesus*** you who ***formerly were far off*** have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Eph 2:12-13

The individual Gentiles were formerly corporately, as a people, separate from Christ (in the past they were not in Christ), but now they, through the implementation of God’s plan (which He foreknew (Gal 3:8 8The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith)), have been both corporately brought near (through the gospel) and individually brought near (through the blood of Christ) and are now “in Christ Jesus” through faith (for those who believe in Christ of course).

13And ***you*** also ***were included*** ***in Christ*** ***when you heard the message of truth***, the gospel of your salvation. ***When you believed***, you were marked ***in him*** with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory…. Eph 1:13-14

We were included in Christ when we heard the message of truth and when we believed.

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized **in**to **Christ** Jesus have been baptized **in**to His death? Rom 6:3

Therefore there is **now no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus. Rom 8:1

I have been crucified with **Christ**; and it is no longer I who live, but **Christ** lives **in** me; and the *life* which I now live **in** the flesh I live by faith **in** the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. Gal 2:20

But Christ lives in me (now, but He didn’t before I was in Him), the life which I **now** live (in Christ, now that I am in Christ) ….

So it’s clear that we were not “in Christ” in the past, before we were born or even when we were born, or before we were saved, but are in Christ after we are saved and he lives in us. So, if God chose us “in Him (in Christ)” means that God chose an individual right then and there in eternity past “in Him,” (remember, not “to be” in him, but in Him) we would have been in Christ since the creation of the world and from the time we were born. But it’s clear there was a time in our life that we were not in Christ, and we became in Christ when? When we believed (confessed with our mouth and believed with our heart Rom 10:9). So God chose us in Him cannot mean God set an individual’s destiny to salvation (remember, it doesn’t say chose us “to be” in Him) in eternity past, and it cannot mean either that God set our individual destiny to adoption or inheritance or conformance to Christ in eternity past, because we weren’t in Him in eternity past (unless we were in Christ, then out of Christ, then back in Christ!). So what did God choose before the creation of the world if He didn’t simply choose us or choose us “to be” in Him?

God did choose an individual, an elect one, before the creation of the world. Jesus himself is the elect of God (remember Christ, Messiah, means the anointed one, the chosen one).

Isa 42:1, Matt 12:18 “Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen; My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased;

Isa 42:6 “I am the Lord, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations.

1 Peter 1:4 4And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God

Christ is the foundation of one’s election. Only in union with Christ do we become members of the elect. No one is elect apart from union with Christ through faith (…so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead Rom 7:4 … ). ***God chose us not individually apart from Christ, but only with respect to our connection to the one chosen, elect one*** (Eph 1:4, 6-7, 9-10, 12-13) and to his body (the body of Christ (Eph 4:12)). I think I of chosen “in Christ” as also being chosen “through” Christ, or possibly better stated, through union with Christ (Rom 3:22, Rom 5:11, Rom 5:17, Rom 7:4, I Cor 1:9, 1 Cor 8:11, Gal 3:26). God chose Christ as His elect one. He decided beforehand (Eph 1:4a) that all who are sealed in Him by faith (Eph 1:13) would be made holy and blameless (Eph 1:4b), through Him would be adopted (In love 5He predestined us to adoption as sons ***through*** Jesus Christ to Himself… Eph 1:5), In Him would receive an inheritance (***In Him*** also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined… Eph 1:11), and by being known and loved by Him would be conformed into the image of the Chosen One. We are in such a union with Christ that when we become in Him, we also share in His election, even to the point that one could say we were chosen, or elected, along with Christ, or through Christ, or in Christ, when He was elected, before the foundation of the world (by the way, I’ve just explained the concept of what I call “corporate election of individuals to salvation in Christ”).

How do we get “in Him?” Is it through unconditional election before the world began and before we were born and through irresistible grace which regenerates you by the Holy Spirit so you can believe? No, for one reason, because there is no election apart from Christ. If we were unconditionally “chosen before the foundation of the world (leaving out “in Him),” this would be an election apart from Christ and not conditional on being in Christ (remember, the Calvinist will say that one is unconditionally chosen, irresistibly regenerated, which then places one in Christ. This is not being chosen in Christ, but being chosen “to be placed in Christ”). This would not be an election “in Him.” This same section of Ephesians that we saw earlier not only tells of when we get in Him, but clearly tells us *how* we get to be “in Him.”

13And you also were included ***in Christ*** when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. ***When you believed***, you were marked ***in him*** with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory….

Scripture is extremely clear throughout especially the New Testament that it is through faith that we become “in Him”. We hear the gospel, we believe, we are then sealed “in Him” by receiving the Holy Spirit. Scripture never, not in a single place that I can find, teaches that we first receive the Holy Spirit and are regenerated and given new life so that we can believe. Faith and belief always precede receiving the Holy Spirit and regeneration/being made a new creation (Gal 3:14 … receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (not the promise of faith through the Spirit), Acts 11:17 … God gave to them the same gift [Holy Spirit] as He gave to us *also after believing* in the Lord Jesus Christ (not the gift of belief after being given the Holy Spirit), Romans 5:2 we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace (not introduction by grace (irresistible or otherwise) into this faith), sell also Rom 10:9,10, Eph 1:13, 1 Cor 1:21, Ezek 18:31-32, John 20:31, John 5:39-40, John 6:53,57, John 7:37-39, Acts 15:9, John 1:12-13, Rom 9:30-32, John 12:36, Gal 3:2,5, 2 Cor 3:14-16, 1 Tim 1:16, Col 2:12, James 1:18, Acts 16:30, Acts 2:37).

Let me try to give an allegory to help explain the concept I believe scripture teaches (that my wife first came up with, of course 😊).

There once was a land that was ruled over by a Sovereign King. The King knew that a terrible disaster was coming in the near future. The King, because he loved his people dearly, in his sovereign will determined that he would provide a way of escape from the coming disaster. The King built a large, massive ship and gave the ship to his son and appointed (selected, you might say elected) his son to be the owner and captain of this ship (and in their tradition of naming their ships, named the ship the H.I.M.). He made a decree and posted it throughout the kingdom that whoever would trust in the king, believe that he was telling the truth about the coming disaster and would come away with the king, he would take them with him on his ship to the safety of the foreign shore which he promised would be safe, beautiful and good. The king provided warning after warning of the coming disaster and assured all of his people that there was no way that they could stand against this disaster by themselves in this land.

The king went beyond this however. He made a decree and promised his subjects that not only are you going to be safe with me, but I’m cleaning out all the vaults. I’m taking all the gold and silver with me, and when we get to our destination I’m making the decision now to choose that everyone that was faithful to me and joined me and stuck by me, I’m making them royalty. Because they made the decision to get into my son’s ship (to get into H.I.M.), I’m choosing now to officially adopt them as my own prince and princesses and they will be as brothers and sisters with my son. I’m going to give them an inheritance out of the royal vault and new houses and their own piece of land as their inheritance in the new land. All I’ve chosen (elected) to give to my son, I’ve chosen (elected) that these will share in as well.

The only requirement is that you must forsake your land and homes here and put your faith in my promises I’ve given you and as a result get in my son’s ship. When you’ve gotten into H.I.M., you will be destined to obtain all of these things I’ve promised you when we arrive at the new land.

Some believed the king was being truthful and trusted in the King and his Son, left their homes and went into H.I.M. and were ultimately saved and rewarded just as the king had promised before the ship sailed. Others were stubborn and would not trust the words of their wise sovereign to leave the comfort of their homes and way of life to board the ship. They stubbornly refused to believe there was an impending disaster coming and they suffered the consequences when the disaster did arrive.

4For he chose us ***in him*** before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7***In him*** we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace 8that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, 9he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed ***in Christ***, 10to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

11***In him*** we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12in order that we, who were the first to put our hope ***in Christ***, might be for the praise of his glory. 13And you also were included ***in Christ*** when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked ***in him*** with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory…. 18I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, ***the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people***, 19and his incomparably great power for us who believe. … 22And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

As did the king, God chose before the creation of the world and through His Spirit revealed what the destiny would be of those who would make the choice to forsake all else and be in Christ. But until that day that I made that choice that was not my destiny. Only after I chose to trust that the promises of God were true and place my trust in Him, was I was in Christ and given the destiny (pre-destined) to be holy and blameless, to be adopted by God, receiving an inheritance from God, and being conformed to Christ. God chose before the foundation of the world what my destiny would be in Christ if I would be in union with Him. But the time that that destiny was determined to be my destiny was when I came to be in Christ, which was when I was saved. Likewise, as Paul pointed out in Romans, the beginning of the destiny of Abraham was when he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. One’s destiny in Christ begins for him or her when he or she believes and trusts in God.

**Summary**

So let’s summarize. The ones who are given a destination are believers in Christ. The starting location is as a believer in Christ, one who is in Christ, and who has the spirit of adoption. The arrival location is in heaven and is to actual adoption as God’s children, is to an inheritance given by God, and is to being conformed into the image of Christ. The starting time is when I became a believer and became one who was in Christ. The arrival time is when I am in Christ’s presence in heaven.

We have now unraveled what scripture teaches when Paul uses the word predestination, we’ve hopefully somewhat de-mystified foreknowledge, and hopefully somewhat simplified what scripture teaches about election when it speaks of the elect believer.

I hope going forward these words will not confuse or intimidate, but will instead, when we hear them, give us great encouragement, joy, peace, and excitement as our spirit groans within us as we eagerly await our adoption as sons and daughters and the redemption of our body as we think about the incredible things God has in store for us. As Paul ended this section of Romans after thinking of these things, he wrote “To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Some helpful links for more study:

<https://soteriology101.com/2016/11/18/3-things-you-should-know-about-election/>

<http://www.beyondthefundamentals.com/class-notes.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0TUH60Cd78&t=394s>

(on Election)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvAWMRlt6mQ>

(on Romans 8:28-30)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48q-i3JuLUk&t=2044s>

(Biblical Election-Three Views)