

that we should be holy and blameless before Him. (1:4b)

We who are in Christ are “*holy and blameless.*” We are not worthless sinners saved by grace, but “*holy and blameless*” saints who sometimes commit acts of sin (Ephesians 1:1, 4b). In fact, when we are presented “*before Him*” (Ephesians 1:4b) after physical death, we will “*stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy*” (Jude 24). How so? We, based on what Jesus has done, have been made “*the righteousness of God*” (2Corinthians 5:21). We are also “*forgiven*” (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 2:13), a fact also addressed in Ephesians 1:7. We are “*justified*” (Romans 5:1), “*glorified*” (in soul and spirit—Romans 8:30), never to be condemned by God (Romans 8:1), “*complete*” (Colossians 2:10), and much more—all because God “*crucified*” and eradicated everything He couldn’t stomach about us (Romans 6:6) and made us into “*new*” creations in Christ (2Corinthians 5:17). Thus, Paul has every right to say, “*just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him*” (Ephesians 1:4a-b).

In love (1:4c)

Much debate exists as to where the phrase, “*in love,*” should be attached. Some think it belongs at the end of the previous phrase, “*that we should be holy and blameless before Him.*” Others view it as relating to the first phrase of verse 5, “*He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself.*” The debate exists because verses 3-14 are one unending sentence in the Greek. The New American Standard Version attaches “*in love*” to the beginning of verse 5, so we will study it from this vantage point. Actually, it makes little difference, for all that God does, since His very nature is “*love*” (1John 4:8, 16), is done in unconditional, agape love.

In love (1:4c) He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (Ephesians 1:5)

Ephesians 1:5 contains “*predestined,*” an intriguing term indeed. Does God predetermine, through a selection process, who will go to heaven and who will go to hell; or is the individual allowed to choose his own destiny? Let’s look at this passage phrase-by-phrase and try to determine Paul’s intent.

In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, (1:4c, 5a)

One thing is certain. We were “*predestined...in love*” (1:4c)—unconditional, agape “*love.*” So with proper motives and tremendous compassion God predestines His people. But what does Paul mean by the phrase, “*He predestined us*”? Is he saying that God predetermined (from eternity past, by means of an eternal decree) that a portion of mankind would be saved and the remainder condemned? This conclusion doesn’t seem to agree with 1Timothy 2:4, 2Peter 3:9, and other similar passages. Is Paul teaching that man has no choice in where he will spend eternity? Should this be the case, it seems that God could have created Himself a family of robots and saved His Son the pain of the cross. For God to have “*selected*” (from eternity past) those who will receive salvation, never allow the remainder to believe, and follow by sending His Son to Calvary makes absolutely no sense! Why? The cross grants man a choice as to where he will spend eternity.

The Scriptures teach that the cross represents man’s prerogative to make a choice. In fact, God’s Word verifies that two trees in the history of man represent man’s freedom to choose his destiny: “*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*” (Genesis 2:17) and the cross, or “*tree*” of Christ (Galatians 3:13). Predestination, therefore, may point to something other than God selecting from eternity past who will be lost or saved. Let’s examine this word in its Scriptural context.

“*Predestined*” is used only six times in Scripture (Acts 4:28; Romans 8:29; Romans 8:30; 1Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:5; Ephesians 1:11), four of which refer to the church (Romans 8:29; Romans 8:30; Ephesians 1:5; Ephesians 1:11). These passages, examined in context, reveal that God did not predestine us to become believers, but rather that as believers we have received a glorious future destiny. Therefore, predestination has nothing to do with who will become believers, but relates to the destiny granted to an individual in conjunction with being made “*new*” (2Corinthians 5:17). Thus, New Testament believers are predestined in association with being saved. Consider the following, noticing that I repeat myself quite often, saying the same thing in different ways. I have found repetition to be a profitable tool when communicating truths that are somewhat controversial.

The phrase, “*predestined us to adoption as sons*” (Ephesians 1:5a), along with Romans 8:23, prove that a person is not predestined until he receives Christ. “*Us*,” the first word after “*predestined*” in Ephesians 1:5a, confirms this truth. Because Ephesians was written to believers, “*us*” refers to believers. Consequently, only believers are predestined—not prospective believers who will later be saved. To what are believers predestined? They are “*predestined...to adoption as sons*” (Ephesians 1:5). When do they receive this adoption? Romans 8:23 provides the answer:

And 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. (Romans 8:23)

The “*adoption as sons*” occurs when the New Testament believer receives a new body, an event that transpires long after spiritual regeneration/salvation—except in the case of those who are saved (born-again) shortly before the Rapture of the church. Thus, we were predestined when we were placed into Christ after believing

Him for salvation. Hence, we were not predestined to “be saved,” but rather were predestined to “*adoption as sons*” in conjunction with being made new. Even Paul has not yet received the “*adoption as sons*” to which he was predestined when he believed, an event that will transpire when all church saints receive their resurrected bodies in accordance with 1Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1Corinthians 15:35-58—verses which deal with the Rapture of the church.

Romans 8:29 states:

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; (Romans 8:29)

Long before time began, God looked ahead (by means of His eternal foreknowledge) and saw that many people would put their trust in Christ during the church age. “*In love*” (Ephesians 1:4c) He decided that these individuals, once they chose to receive Christ and were placed in Christ (1Corinthians 12:13; 2Corinthians 5:17), would be given a glorious future destiny (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:5)—that of receiving a resurrected body at the Rapture of the church. Therefore, in association with choosing to accept Christ, they would be predestined “*to become conformed to the image of His Son*” (Romans 8:29), or predestined “*to adoption as sons*” (Ephesians 1:5)—pointing to that day when their glorified souls and spirits will be joined to their glorified bodies—a body like Christ possessed once He was resurrected.

It should be apparent by now that the members of the body of Christ are not adopted as sons in the most extreme sense until they receive their resurrected bodies at the Rapture of the church. Romans 8:23 states:

And 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. (Romans 8:23)

Believers now have “*the first fruits of the Spirit*” (Romans 8:23), a “*spirit of adoption as sons,*” for Romans 8:15 states:

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)

New Testament believers, having received a “*spirit of adoption*” (Romans 8:15), are “*sons*” (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6-7) who are “*led by the Spirit of God*” (Romans 8:14). As a result of possessing the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17), they have already received the down payment (first fruits, or earnest) of what is to come (Romans 8:23). But only when their bodies are resurrected (1Thessalonians 4:13-18) will they lay hold of, in the fullest sense, all that this sonship involves.

Taking what we have discovered, we can draw the following conclusions: Believers today, not yet having received their resurrected bodies, have received “*a spirit of adoption as sons*” (Romans 8:15). They are holy, blameless, complete, justified, glorified, forgiven, children of God who are presently being taught and trained by the Spirit, Son, and Father. One day they will receive their new bodies, at which time they will receive that for which they were predestined when they were made new in Christ—the “*adoption as sons*” (Ephesians 1:5; Romans 8:23). They will have been holy and blameless in their person (in soul and spirit) since the day they were saved and entered into God’s family (Ephesians 1:4), but after their bodies are resurrected they will be holy and blameless in soul, spirit, and body. Hence, for the first time while living in a body, every aspect of their behavior will be totally perfected. Why? The power of sin, which lived in their unredeemed bodies (Romans 7:23), will not reside in their resurrected bodies. Also, their brains, which stored their unrighteous habit patterns, will be replaced with brains free of such patterns. As a result of the training received while in their earthly bodies (through the Son and the Spirit—in fact, the entire Godhead), and because of their new resurrected bodies (along with having seen the Godhead after physical death), they will be mature saints who can be trusted with the responsibility and authority given them while reigning with Christ during His one-thousand-year reign on the earth (Revelation 20:4). But even after receiving their redeemed (resurrected) bodies and later reigning with Christ, they will be no more holy and blameless in their souls and spirits, and no more a part of God’s family, than when God saved them subsequent to their repenting and believing while depraved.

Yes, we were made holy, blameless, righteous, and glorified children of God (in soul and spirit) the moment we were born again (saved/justified). But the Godhead is now growing us up, preparing us for the day when we will reign with Christ. Only when we receive “*our adoption as sons*” (Romans 8:23; Ephesians 1:5), through the “*mortal*” putting “*on immortality*” (1Corinthians 15:51-53) at the Rapture of the church (through church saints receiving resurrected bodies), will we be fully ready and prepared to reign with Christ.

In Galatians 4:6, Paul states:

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Galatians 4:6)

Did you hear that? The Holy Spirit entered your spirit crying, “*Abba! Father!*” In other words, He (the Spirit) makes us mindful of the fact that Jehovah God is our Father. In crying, “*Abba! Father!*,” the Holy Spirit brings an awareness that salvation includes much more than getting out of hell and into heaven. He allows the believer to see that one day all church saints will be, in the fullest sense, adopted as “*sons*”—receive the “*adoption as sons*” that Paul addresses in Romans 8:23 and Ephesians 1:5. Galatians 4:5 states:

in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:5)

God not only redeemed us (Galatians 4:5) and gave us “*a spirit of adoption as sons*” (Romans 8:15), but also granted us the privilege of one day being fully adopted “*as sons*” (Galatians 4:5) through the resurrection of our bodies (Romans 8:23). Also, in 2Corinthians 3:18, we find that our behavior is transformed as we choose to pursue God’s heart. Consequently, one of the Spirit’s main purposes is to assist in bringing God’s sons to a place of maturity so they can experience all that sonship entails.

Certainly, when Paul stated that “*He predestined us to adoption as sons*” (Ephesians 1:5a), he realized that becoming an adopted son in the truest sense would be a future event for him and his readers. This event occurs in the future for us as well. Therefore, to be predestined to adoption as sons does not mean that we were predestined from eternity past to be saved. Rather, it communicates that in conjunction with a New Testament believer being saved/justified, he is predestined to be adopted as a son in fullest measure (Ephesians 1:5a) at the Rapture of the church. Only then will he be “*conformed to the image of*” Christ in every respect (Romans 8:29)—spirit, soul, and body. We must be mindful, however, of the following truth.

At the point of salvation/justification, the New Testament believer is made into a finished product in his soul and spirit (in his person). He is as “*holy and blameless*” (Ephesians 1:4), “*justified*” (Romans 5:1), “*righteous*” (2Corinthians 5:21), “*forgiven*” (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 2:13), “*complete*” (Colossians 2:10), and “*glorified*” (Romans 8:30) in his person (soul and spirit) as he will ever be. But only at the resurrection does he receive an immortal body (1Corinthians 15:53)—a body like Jesus’ resurrected body. Hence, the resurrection is the piece of the puzzle that allows our bodies “*to be conformed to the image of God’s Son*” (Romans 8:29). To this we were predestined (Romans 8:29) when we accepted Christ—not beforehand. Thus, all individuals who adhere to the idea that God predestined the “elect” to salvation from eternity past by means of an eternal decree are in error.

Jesus was not only “*the first-born from the dead*” (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5), but “*the first-born among many brethren*” (Romans 8:29). In fact, even though Jesus has always been the eternal Son of God (Romans 8:58), only through His resurrection was He “*declared the Son of God with power*” (Romans 1:4). Therefore, when we receive our resurrected bodies we will be sons in the fullest sense. To this resurrection we have been predestined, and we were predestined when—not before—we became believers.

Paul, in Romans 8:30, gives us further insight as to “when” we were predestined:

and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:30)

“*Predestined,*” “*called,*” “*justified,*” and “*glorified*” are all in the aorist tense, pointing to past, completed action. Consequently, the entirety of the action contained in Romans 8:30 would have been applied to all the believers in Rome by the time they received Paul’s epistle. Why? They were believers—not potential believers. This same truth applies to all New Testament believers, for they are “*predestined,*” “*called,*” “*justified,*” and “*glorified*” by God the instant they repent and believe while depraved.

Romans 8:30 does not, as some theologians have erroneously assumed, provide the chronological order of events in the life of a believer. In other words, the passage does not teach that God first predestined the elect to be saved from eternity past, then called them when it was time for them to be saved, then justified them, and will, in the future, glorify them. This arrangement is impossible since all of these verbs are in the past tense. Yet, Arminianism and all forms of Calvinism (including Reformed Theology) perceive Romans 8:30 as teaching that all believers (past, present, and future) were predestined to salvation from eternity past by means of an eternal decree. Such a view, however, would allow Romans 8:30 to teach that the “*predestined*” of Arminianism and Calvinism who are not yet in existence are presently “*called,*” “*justified,*” and “*glorified*”—since “*predestined,*” “*called,*” “*justified,*” and “*glorified*” are all in the past

tense. Stated differently, had future believers been “*predestined*” to salvation from eternity past, they would presently be “*called,*” “*justified,*” and “*glorified.*” This arrangement would cause them to be “*justified*” and “*glorified*” prior to existing as well as “*justified*” and “*glorified*” at physical birth. Therefore, passages such as Ephesians 2:3 discredit both Arminianism and all forms of Calvinism (including Reformed Theology), for all persons arrive on the earth “*children of wrath.*”

Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (Ephesians 2:3)

If you are a believer, the entirety of the action included in Romans 8:30 has already transpired. Let’s dig even deeper into this subject matter.

We will first deal with what it means to be “*called*” (Romans 8:30). Greek words such as *kletos*, *kaleo*, *kaleomai*, and *klesis* are normally translated “called” or “calling” and point to two different scenarios in Scripture: (1) that we have been invited by God to receive Christ (2) that the New Testament believer receives a specific office (gifting or purpose) once placed in Christ—after repenting and believing while depraved. Let’s examine these two scenarios in more detail.

Paul, in 1Corinthians 1:9, states:

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1Corinthians 1:9)

Unquestionably, we were “*called (invited) into fellowship with*” Christ. However, God did not force, elect, or predestine us to be saved.

The most common use of “called” or “calling” in Scripture is in relation to the New Testament believer’s office, gifting, or purpose. Paul was “*called as an apostle*” (Romans 1:1), a special office (gifting, purpose) indeed. Paul encouraged the church at Ephesus by saying:

...walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, (Ephesians 4:1).

Evaluating Ephesians 4:1 in context with Ephesians 4:1-16, we discover that Paul is addressing the different callings, giftings, or offices within the body of Christ. The believers at Ephesus were to “*walk in a manner worthy of*” their “*calling,*” office, or gifting (Ephesians 4:1). Paul, in Colossians 3:15, states that the believers at Colosse “*were called in one body,*” meaning they were called to office (given a special spiritual gift) when placed into the “*body*” of Christ—after repenting and believing while depraved. They were all called to allow “*the peace of Christ*” to “*rule in*” their “*hearts*” (Colossians 3:15) while serving in their particular individual gifting—a wonderful purpose indeed. Coupling what we have gleaned with Ephesians 4:1, the “*calling and choosing*” described in 2Peter 1:10 took place in conjunction with our being made new in Christ:

Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; (2Peter 1:10)

Consider as well that we were “*called as saints*” (Romans 1:7) the moment we were placed “*in Christ*” (1Corinthians 1:2) through the power of the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 12:13) after repenting and believing while depraved. What a noble purpose—to live, through Christ’s strength, as a “*saint*” should live.

Consequently, the fact that the New Testament believer is “*called*” can point to something other than being called or invited to be saved. New Testament believers, in conjunction with being saved, are “*called*” to a particular gifting, office, or purpose within the body of Christ. Paul seems to be referencing this calling in Romans 8:30:

and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:30)

God also justifies New Testament believers once they exercise “*faith*” in Christ—“*justified*” (Romans 8:30; Romans 5:1) meaning “to be made righteous.” This just standing before God was granted the instant we became children of God. But when were we “*glorified*” in soul and spirit (Romans 8:30)? We were “*glorified*” at the same time we were “*justified*”—when we became children of God and were made new (2Corinthians 5:17). Our new man is a “*holy*” (Ephesians 1:4), “*blameless*” (Ephesians 1:4), “*complete*” (Colossians 2:10), “*sanctified*” (Hebrews 10:10), “*perfect*” (Hebrews 10:14), “*glorified*” (Romans 8:30) “*saint*” (Ephesians 1:1)—and more. Therefore, according to Romans 8:30, a New Testament believer is not only called (receives a special office, gifting, or purpose) and justified (made righteous and is totally forgiven) at the point of salvation/justification, but is also glorified (made into a holy, blameless, perfect, glorified saint). Could the New Testament believer also be “*predestined*” at the same time? Absolutely, and Romans 8:30 makes it even more certain (placing “*predestined*,” “*called*,” “*justified*,” and “*glorified*” in the past tense in regard to church saints), proving that Paul and his readers (who were believers) had already been “*predestined*,” “*called*,” “*justified*,” and “*glorified*.” Remember: The New Testament believer receives a glorified body through resurrection at the Rapture of the church (1Corinthians 15:35-58). Only then will we be like Christ in body, which will house our previously glorified soul and spirit.

Conclusively, Scriptural predestination does not include the idea that God predetermined (from eternity past) where individuals will spend eternity. Rather, a New Testament believer is “*predestined*” by God at the same time that he is “*called*” (given a special office, gifting, or purpose within the body of Christ), “*justified*” (made righteous by God after repenting and believing), and “*glorified*” (in soul and spirit). All of this action occurs at the same time—when the New Testament believer is placed in Christ and made new after repenting and believing while depraved. His future destiny is that of being “*conformed to the image of*” God’s “*Son*” (Romans 8:29) and to be fully adopted as a son (Romans 8:23; Ephesians 1:5) when he receives his redeemed (resurrected) body (Romans 8:23). Note: Paul probably places “*predestined*” before “*called*,” “*justified*,” and “*glorified*” in Romans 8:30 because predestination is mentioned in the preceding verse (Romans 8:29). Consequently, Romans 8:30, by no stretch of the imagination, describes the chronological order of events in the life of a believer. How could it do so when all the action transpires the moment a New Testament believer is placed in Christ after repenting and believing while depraved?

We were “*predestined...to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself*” (Ephesians 1:5a). If we were “*predestined...through Jesus*,” and if we were not placed in Him until we repented of our sins and accepted Him as Savior, we could not have been predestined until we were placed in Him through the power of the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 12:13) after repenting and believing. So again Paul confirms that believers were not predestined to salvation from eternity past as Arminianism and all forms of Calvinism (including Reformed Theology) suppose. Paul will verify this same truth in Ephesians 1:6, for tying verse 5 in with verse 6 confirms that we did not receive the grace to be predestined until we were “*in the Beloved*.” We will deal with this phrase in more depth shortly.