

## Ephesians: Predestination

1. We cannot read the book of Ephesians without dealing with this subject and we might as well deal with it head on. There are varying approaches and levels of implication in this subject and it is helpful to put them on the table so that we can try to not get them mixed in together. What is the debate about? That is even complex.
  - a. Are we responsible moral agents? Is it right to punish someone for a choice they make?
  - b. Are we real historical agents? Is the future open or closed?
  - c. Are we the exception to the cause and effect universe or do we just fool ourselves?
  - d. Is God fair?
2. Physics. I made a couple of copies from an article in the NY Times that looks at the issue from the perspective of contemporary physics and brain studies. The article suggests that we are the monkey riding the back of the tiger making up a story for what the tiger does. Choice is a pervasive and stubborn illusion but is not real. The story then notes that this notion troubles people because of the issue of moral agency. "Would it be right to punish Hitler if he had not choice in the matter." I find that question an interesting one because if there is no true agency what is the point of asking the question? What is the point of us doing or discussion anything then?
3. Free willers: "The future is open, each individual is a real agent. It's all up to us." OK, but there are problems here too. I tend to resist the term "Free will" because there is so much that is clearly not "free" about it. How much of our lives are really the result of choices on our part and how much is beyond our agency? List some things we didn't decide. They are all some of the most determinative issues of our lives and we had absolutely no say in the matter. I prefer the term "real agency" because we do in fact seem to have agency and we can't live without believing that we do it seems. Our wills are not free just like our choices are not limitless. I can't decide to live on a moon circling Saturn. I can't decide to grow gills and breath water. I can't decide to be 5 years old again. I have choices to make which are restricted by my context and conditioned by my genetics, my biology and my past.
4. God and Time: The philosophy gets pretty deep pretty fast. We have difficulty thinking outside of time yet at least since the Greeks we have been drawn to this thinking. When we read "before the foundations of the world" and "pre-destination" we imagine a time-line and we imagine something happening prior to that timeline determining something happening further down the line. When you apply this to God, however, things get strange fast.
  - a. Both a Biblical worldview and the current scientific perspective see the universe around us to be a limited temporal event. The creation has a beginning. God, however, has none and no first cause. Is time part of creation? Physics would say yes. The Bible doesn't address it as such but there are places that certainly hint at it. God does not experience time as we do. In fact you probably can't say "God experiences" because that would place something over God, something binding him other than himself. Same with time. Time seems to have no hold in God.
  - b. Plato imagined that the physical world we see around us is an expression of an ideal "form". These forms or archetypes are timeless or eternal. Christians following these

ideas have located these archetypes (Jung) in the mind or will of God. Augustine called them “divine ideas”. We derive the notion of “eternity” as a mode of existence outside of time. We seem to be able to throw the word around well enough but we have a tremendous amount of difficulty imagining the rules of activity in such a state. Is there sequence in eternity? Can one say X comes before Y when there is no time? We are even further confused if we try to discuss the relationship between these two modes. God clearly traverses between them but then we have difficulty talking about it and it has created ancient and modern theological wars most recently the “freedom of God” fight.

- c. Peter Kreeft in a talk he gives on CS Lewis’ thoughts on the subject has helped me recently.
  - i. He notes the relationship between story and archetype. It is through story that we experience the archetypes: heroism, love, betrayal, goodness, grace, perdition, etc. yet we always know that no story perfectly embodies these things. Through the story we glimpse them, display them, participate in them, but always imperfectly. So we imagine we’ll simply describe them as they are in their purest form only to discover we can’t do it. We can only connect with them through story.
  - ii. Tim Keller notes that to read the Bible correctly you need to read it diachronically (through history: creation-fall-redemption-restoration) but also synchronically (Systematic theology loci: God, humanity, salvation, etc.) We cannot know the one without the other. We have often tried to capture the synchronic without the diachronic but it always comes up short. Theme and plot are bound.
  - iii. See the handout on CS Lewis’ The Great Divorce
  
5. A False Choice? Nearly every modern discussion assumes the choice between “free will” and “determinism” is a zero-sum-game. It is one or the other. The Bible makes no such assumption. The Bible, to the great frustration of systematic theologians seems endlessly inconsistent on the matter. The Bible wants to claim both that God has everything well in hand and things will work out exactly according to his plan AND there is real agency, evil is real, powerful, challenging God’s will, human agency has an enormous part to play in the story. Ephesians says you’re predestined, chosen from the foundations of the earth while Joshua says “choose you this day who you will serve” and when we chose wrong there is sometimes hell to pay.
  
6. If you look at how we live you might see that in fact this is the only way it can be for us to really have agency. The logical outcome of both exclusivistic positions leads to death.
  - a. You cannot live as a consistent determinist. Everything in our world says “choices matter” from the smallest to the largest. Our choices aren’t perfectly “free”, but they are choices and they have consequence. To not live this way is to die of starvation.
  - b. If you believe that the world is completely determined by all of our choices you would dare not be an agent either. You cannot know the consequence of any of your choices because they are part of a chain. We would be paralyzed if this were true because the smallest choice could have the most devastating consequence. See the movie “The Butterfly Effect”. Suicide is the logical recourse.
  - c. We make real choices with real consequences, but God still holds the future.

7. If we see that in fact the only practical and inescapable perspective is one embracing something that seems inconsistent we begin to face the reality that we bear a deep assumption within our hearts that we are both smarter than God and more moral than God. God wants to say “I don’t have to choose between agency and adoption” but we say “yes you do!” The problem is that we have ample evidence to demonstrate that in fact things can be no other way yet we persist in our perspective.
8. Sign on the gates of the kingdom
  - a. Outside looking in: “Come!”
  - b. Inside looking back: “It couldn’t have been any other way”
  - c. Walking into a maze vs. looking back over the pathway that you walked
9. Salvation fully defined can only come by grace
  - a. We reduce “salvation” to “making the cut” and it can turn us into the greedy kid at Christmas. What we fail to recognize is that “salvation” is not fundamentally about our context but our condition. What fell in the garden? Condition fell, context followed. How does redemption work? Condition restored, context follows.
  - b. If salvation is our thing, something we earned even by the slightest choice or by making faith a sufficient work to acquire the benefits of Christ, it will lead to our own self-righteousness which will lead to the assumption that we are above God. In such a state we assume the context fixes us or at least we unchanged receive a new context (only to spoil it again!)
  - c. If salvation is purely a gift of grace, then the condition changes because we receive a gift and learn to give in response. Verse 3. From there restoration flows.