

What Is Predestination?

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R. C. SPROUL

What Is Predestination?

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Chapter One

The Inevitable Question

No doctrine in the Christian faith engenders more debate than the doctrine of predestination. On seminary campuses and now especially online, people display a fiendish delight and inherent fascination with this doctrine, and it has fueled many midnight discussions and fierce social media debates.

Not only are people significantly divided over their views of predestination, they're also profoundly divided on how the doctrine should be treated. Some are convinced

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that, like religion and politics, it should never be discussed in polite company. Such people view predestination as a topic that ends in godless controversy and useless debate, and they think it has no value in terms of spiritual edification. Others believe that the doctrine of predestination is fundamentally important to a complete perspective of our relationship to God and our salvation, and they consider it wickedly neglectful to ignore or denigrate its importance in any way.

Martin Luther affirmed the central place of predestination and the importance of teaching it. He called it the *core ecclesia*, meaning “the heart of the church.” While Luther was at times given to overstatements and hyperbole, this is not such an instance. No other doctrine more clearly demonstrates our utter dependence on divine grace and mercy than the doctrine of predestination. No other doctrine is more comforting to the personal struggle of faith than the doctrine of election.

All the saints of history who believed that predestination belongs at the very heart of our understanding of Christianity—Augustine, Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards—believed just as strongly that great care must be taken in handling the doctrine, for it can be easily

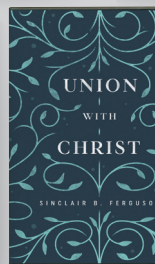
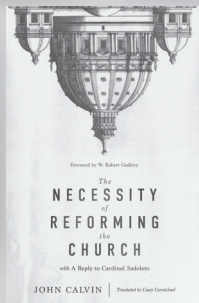
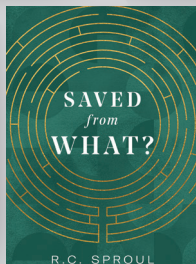
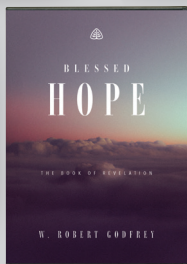
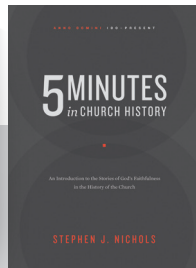
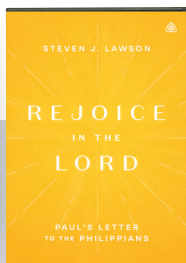
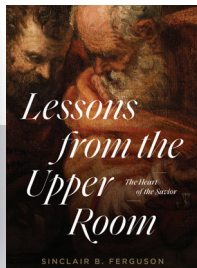
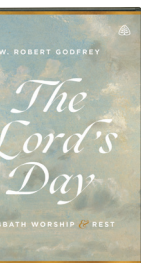
distorted and seriously misunderstood. Such misunderstandings can lead people into such a distorted view of God that He becomes almost demonic.

Much is at stake in how we understand predestination, and we must be extraordinarily sensitive and careful in how we handle this doctrine. It is profoundly important to our understanding of the character of God, His grace, and our own salvation, yet it is a volatile issue, and one by which many people have run into ruin by their lack of care in understanding it.

Historically, virtually every denomination and every church that has a confession of faith or creed has developed some doctrine of predestination. We cannot say that Presbyterians believe in predestination and Methodists don't, or that Episcopalians believe in predestination but Roman Catholics don't. Every church and every Christian has some doctrine of predestination because the Bible has a doctrine of predestination. Any church body or individual Christian who takes seriously the contents of the New Testament must sooner or later struggle with this doctrine.

The word *predestination* wasn't invented by Augustine or Luther or Calvin. It is found in the New Testament itself, and therefore, it is not peculiar to a movement in church

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