

Slide 1

Are You Predestined?

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If God knows the future, does that mean your future is set, that “whatever will be will be” and you have no say about your destiny?

And what about predestination? Is this word in the Bible, and if so, what does it mean?

To understand Calvinism, you must know how Calvin used these words. But more importantly, you must know what the Bible says about this topic and what it does not say.

Let's begin with the foreknowledge of God. God's foreknowledge means that God knows what happens before it occurs. It is part of the divine attribute we call *omniscience*. This means that God is infinite in knowledge. God knows everything that can possibly be known. God does not lose knowledge by forgetting. He does not increase His understanding through learning and experience. He knows everything in what we experience as the past, present and future.

The Bible clearly teaches the foreknowledge of God. Here are just some of the verses that talk about this attribute: **Slide 2**

- “Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure'” (Isa. 46:9-10).
- Peter preached that Jesus was “delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23).
- Peter later said his readers were “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (I Pet. 1:2). The word in the Greek is *prognosis*, which is of course the word from which we get our English word prognosis.
- Paul used the verb form (*proginosko*) in Romans 8:29: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son” and also in Romans 11:2: “God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.” It is also used in I Peter 1:20: Christ “was

foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.”

- Sometimes this word (*proginosko*) means that human beings knew something previously or planned ahead (Acts 26:5; II Pet. 3:17), but we are focusing on God’s complete knowledge of the future.

When God *foreknows*, He is speaking in terms you and I can relate to. We live in a realm of time and space. God does not. He is eternal. He had no beginning and will have no end. He is above and outside of time; He is “the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity” (Isa. 57:15). God dwells in eternity, not in time. With Him there is no past, present or future. So even the language used to describe God’s knowledge is accommodative. It is so far beyond our feeble understanding that God uses human characteristics to convey the fact, but not the comprehension, of that idea.

The Bible teaches that God even knows what *would have happened* had circumstances been different. In a remarkable passage in Matthew 11, Jesus rebuked the cities who rejected His mighty works: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you" (Matt. 11:21-24).

Jesus tells us what these cities *would have done* if He had done His great works in them. How could Jesus say this? Because that is part of the omniscience of God. He knows these contingent matters the same as He knows matters of fact. It won’t work to say that Jesus is using a hyperbole here. There is nothing in the context to suggest that He is speaking any way other than literally.

Now let's turn to the word predestine or predestinate. **Slide 3** There are only a few times where this word is used in the New Testament. Paul

said in Romans 8:29-30, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

In Ephesians 1:4-5 Paul wrote, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.”

Then a few verses later He said in verse 11, “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.”

The word for predestine is *prooridzo*. It means to foreordain, to decide beforehand, to predetermine. When the disciples were released from the Jewish council, they cited the second Psalm in their prayer to God and said, **Slide 4** “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before (*prooridzo*) to be done” (Acts 4:28).

Paul used this word in I Corinthians 2: “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before (*prooridzo*) the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (I Cor. 2:7-8).

There is no question then about God's relationship to what we call the future. God foreknew that Jesus would die on the cross and He foreknew Christians. God predestined Jesus to die for our sins and he predestined Christians.

Now the question is: what does this mean? How does the Bible use these words?

We'll look first at the foreknowledge of God.

Atheists and skeptics argue that if God knows the future, then the future is predetermined and we cannot change that. This would mean that we have no choice and everything is predetermined. So they tell us that there is a contradiction in what we believe about God. But atheists

cannot prove there is a logical contradiction between divine foreknowledge and human free will.

Liberal theologians have compromised the foreknowledge of God for many years based on this reasoning. Process theology and openness theology say that God must wait to see what we do and then he grows in His knowledge based on that experience. They and others say that God is a finite, that is, a limited God. This false view appeals to people who want a God they can relate to because He is not perfect—like them.

Other theologians and commentators have given unnecessary ground on this topic. Some, for example, say that God foreknows what man will do in the sense that He only knows what man will do *if* certain circumstances occur. This is nothing more than a compromise on the nature of God. God either knows the future or He does not.

Then there are well-meaning Christians who take a modified view of God's foreknowledge because they cannot understand how God can foreknow what man will do without causing it to happen. But that is no ground for qualifying what the Bible says. There are many things we cannot comprehend such as the eternity of God, the Incarnation of Christ, the Trinity, or even how our own spirit dwells in a physical body. We do not comprehend how God transcends time and space. Do we deny these truths because we cannot logically resolve them?

There are passages of Scripture which some say prove that God does not really know the future. Some who would be considered conservative preachers as well as liberal theologians quote these verses in an effort to say that God is limited in His knowledge of the future.

The Lord said these words about Sodom and Gomorrah before He destroyed them: **Slide 5** “And the Lord said, ‘Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know’” (Gen. 18:20-21).

If God already knew how evil they were and that He would destroy them, then why would He need to “go down and see”? Why would He say if they are not that evil, “*then* I will know”?

God was speaking accommodatively. His knowledge is so far above ours that He has to speak in terms that we can comprehend. In other words, God must speak as we speak. Otherwise, we could not understand Him about many things.

Calvin himself admits this. He said that God speaks to us in the Bible like a nanny or a babysitter speaks to a young child--in simple words he can understand. He said the beliefs of “the Anthropomorphites also, who dreamed of a corporeal God, because mouth, ears, eyes, hands, and feet are often ascribed to him in Scripture, are easily refuted” (*Institutes*, 1.13.1).

Calvin is right. The Bible does talk about God as a man to illustrate characteristics we can understand. For example, “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (I Pet. 3:12). God’s essence is not material. He is spirit (John 4:24), not flesh and blood which is made of dust. But these simple figures convey the point.

Calvin said, **Slide 6** “God, in so speaking, lisps with us as nurses are wont to do with little children” and adds, “Such modes of expression, therefore, do not so much express what kind of a being God is, as accommodate the knowledge of him to our feebleness. In so doing, he must of course stoop far below his proper height” (*Institutes*, 1.13.1).

This is very common in the Bible. In Genesis 2:2 the record says God “rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.” He cannot be tired literally because He has no physical body. But this is an image we can relate to as humans.

After the first couple sinned, God asked Adam, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9). God knew where he was. The Lord then asked him, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" (Gen. 3:11). Does anyone seriously think God was in the dark here?

Then the Lord said those piercing words to Eve, "What is this you have done?" (Gen. 3:13). This is no different from parents asking a child “What did you do?” when they know exactly what the child did.

God did not ask these questions to get information. He asked them to make a point, to reprimand Adam and Eve. If we do the same today,

why should we interpret these questions as if God literally did not know the answers?

Later when God stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, He said, **Slide 7** “Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Gen. 22:12). Some commentators tell us we should take this verse literally. They ask, “Why did God say ‘Now I know’ if He knew already?”

I would answer: for the same reason He asked Adam where he was. For the same reason He asked Eve what she did. The only difference is that He rebuked Adam and Eve but He praised Abraham for his faith. In all these cases God accommodated His speech to the frailty of man.

There is no way to understand the Bible consistently unless we see this common sense truth. There are hundreds of passages that use this kind of language.

For instance, in Jeremiah 7:25 the Lord said, “Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them.” Without in any way sounding irreverent, I ask: Does anyone think God literally went to sleep and rose up early the next morning? Obviously, this is a human image that shows how earnest God was in pleading with His people.

These examples should suffice. But I would add that if you begin reading in Genesis 1 and make a note of every passage where God speaks in this accommodative way, you will have a very long list by the time you get to the book of Malachi.

A statement in the book of Jeremiah has also given trouble to many Bible interpreters. In Jeremiah 19:5 the Jews did the unthinkable. God said, **Slide 8** “They have also built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or speak, nor did it come into My mind.” The same statement is found in Jeremiah 7:31 and Jeremiah 32:35.

Does this mean God had no idea that the Jews would do this? Some say that is what these verses mean.

God said what these Jews committed did not come into His *mind*. The word *mind* is from the Hebrew word *lev*. For some reason, the KJV and the NKJV translate the word *lev* “heart” in Jeremiah 7:31 but “mind” in Jeremiah 19:5 and 32:35.

The word *leb* is the word for heart in the Old Testament. Sometimes it emphasizes the emotions. It can also refer to the intent of one’s heart. That is the meaning in the context of these verses. God did not *command* the Jews to commit these atrocities. He did not *tell* them to do these abominations. And, He never *intended* for them to do such things. He knew they would do them, but He never wanted them to do this evil.

Therefore, these passages do not deny the plain literal statements in the Bible concerning the foreknowledge of God.

But what about passages in the Bible that say God repented or changed his mind? **Slide 9**

In Genesis 6 we read, “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart” (Gen. 6:5-6). That’s the NKJV. The KJV and ASV say the Lord repented.

The Hebrew Scriptures commonly use what is called parallelism. This means there are two statements and the second one is usually either synonymous with the first or the opposite of it. The technical terms are synonymous parallelism and antithetic parallelism.

In Genesis 6:6, the Bible says the same thing in two different ways. Why? For emphasis. It repented the Lord that He made man and it grieved Him in his heart are two slightly different ways of saying the same thing.

There are many other verses that describe God in this way. In I Samuel 15, the Bible uses the same Hebrew word found in Genesis 6:6 translated “sorry” or “repent.” It is the word *nacham*.

Let’s use the KJV for emphasis. In I Samuel 15:11 God said, “It repenteth (*nacham*) me that I have set up Saul *to be* king.” Yet in verse 29 Samuel said, “And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent (*nacham*): for he *is* not a man, that he should repent (*nacham*).” But then

in verse 35 the Bible says, “The Lord repented (*nacham*) that he had made Saul king over Israel.”

Twice in this chapter the Bible says that God repented and twice it says that He does not repent. Skeptics are quick to say that the Bible contradicts itself here. But it's absurd to think an inspired writer would be so thoughtless as to blatantly contradict himself in the space of so few verses.

The interpretation of Hebrew is highly contextual. This is of course true of any part of the Bible, but it is especially true of Hebrew where the same word can have different meanings depending on the way it is used. In I Samuel 15, there is a sense in which God repented. He was grieved over what Saul did. He was sorry. But in the sense of changing His mind, God did not repent. He could not. God does not change (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17).

God does not and cannot *literally* repent. If God literally repented, that would not just mean that He was unaware of what would happen. It would also mean that He made a mistake! When Bible readers try to interpret these statements literally, they change the meaning of Scripture and distort the nature of God Himself!

If God must wait to see what will happen, then He is subject to time. That would make Him bound by time and limited by it. That cannot be. If God is infinite, then He is not bound by time or space.

Another example is Exodus 32. When the Israelites rebelled at Sinai, God told Moses, “Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation” (Exod. 32:10). But Moses pleaded with the Lord and the Lord “repented” (KJV) or “relented” (NKJV) of what He threatened to do (Exod. 32:14). Some say this is an example of God not knowing what would happen and changing His mind about what He said.

But again, God often speaks for the sake of the person he is addressing in the Bible and for the benefit of those who read it. Notice John 6. The Bible says, “Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?’ But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do” (John 6:5-6).

When the Bible says that God tests people, it doesn't mean that God is testing them so that he can discover what is in their hearts and what they will do. He tests us in the sense that he brings to the surface what is inside of us so that we as well as others can see it and, as a result, grow personally and glorify God.

In the case of Moses in Exodus chapter 32, God put Moses to the test in this sense when he offered to make a great nation of him. That was a tremendous offer which lesser men would have accepted without hesitation. But not Moses. He was content with his role and was a very meek man. These things obviously are recorded for our benefit, but we do not know how much this experience may have helped Moses to grow as well.

It is no surprise that Calvin explained these verses in the same way. He taught that descriptions of God in the Bible are adjusted to our situation as earthly beings. He said, "He is described not as he is in himself, but in relation to us, in order that our acknowledgment of him may be more a vivid actual impression than empty visionary speculation" (*Institutes*, I.10.2). Notice again his words: "Such modes of expression, therefore, do not so much express what kind of a being God is, as accommodate the knowledge of him to our feebleness. In so doing, he must of course stoop far below his proper height" (*Institutes*, I.13.1).

Here is what Calvin said about God repenting in I Samuel 15: **Slide 10** "When it is said that God repented of having made Saul king, the term change is used figuratively" (*Institutes*, I.17.12). He adds, "What then is meant by the term repentance? The very same that is meant by the other forms of expression, by which God is described to us humanly. Because our weakness cannot reach his height, any description which we receive of him must be lowered to our capacity in order to be intelligible. And the mode of lowering is to represent him not as he really is, but as we conceive of him" (*Institutes*, I.17.13).

This is a simple yet key admission on Calvin's part. I will say more about that shortly.

Commentators and preachers who are against Calvinism sometimes go from one extreme to another. They misinterpret passages and give up vital ground on the attributes of God of God.

For instance, I Peter 1:20 plainly says Christ was foreordained **Slide 11** “before the foundation of the world” to be the sacrificial lamb for the sins of man. In an attempt to refute Calvinism, some expositors claim that the “world” here is not the creation of the physical universe. Instead, they say that this “world” is actually an age or period of time. They argue that Peter is not saying God foreknew before Genesis 1 that man would sin and Jesus would die on the cross, but rather that God planned after man sinned and *before the Mosaic age or dispensation*, that Jesus would be the sin offering.

But this will not work. In Ephesians 3:11 Paul said the wisdom of God is to be made known by the church “according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The plan of God regarding his son Jesus Christ is *eternal*. God has always known that He would send His Son. He did not deliberate for boundless ages and then decide to create the world and later send Jesus to die for our sins.

Another problem is that this view does not help the case these interpreters are making. Surely they believe in the foreknowledge of God to some extent. They would have to believe in it in order to believe in prophecies of Jesus. And if God could foreknow Jesus’ death before the Mosaic age began, then why could He not know the same before the world itself began?

This interpretation just moves God’s foreknowledge closer to the time of the events He foreknew. And if foreknowledge before the universe began means predestination without free will, then why wouldn’t the same apply to things God foreknew before the Mosaic age?

“Before the foundation of the world” in I Peter 1:20 is from *pro kataboles kosmou*. It is the exact expression Jesus used in His prayer to God in John 17:24: “You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” Does that merely mean the Father loved Him before Sinai? It is the same set of words the Bible uses in Ephesians 1:4: “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.”

The word *kosmos* can also be used to represent the people or the ways of the world, but in the context of the verses we’re considering it

refers to the physical universe. The word *aion* is the more usual word for an age or dispensation.

These arguments are an attempt to refute Calvinistic predestination, but they misinterpret the plain force of the words in these verses.

Another common argument is that God can limit his knowledge. **Slide 12** Here is an example: “As God’s omnipotence implies *his power to do all things*, so God’s *omniscience* implies his *power to know all things*... Though God *can* do all things, he *does* not all things... Therefore it does not follow that, because God *can do all things*, therefore he *must do all things*. God is omniscient, and *can know* all things; but does it follow from this that he *must know all things*?” (Adam Clarke, *Commentary on Acts 2:47*, p. 702).

This is a faulty analogy. God’s omnipotence means He has the power to do whatever can be done and of course whatever is in harmony with His nature. But His omniscience is not just the power to know all things. It is knowledge of all things.

God does not limit His power when He does not use it. He has the power to destroy the earth at this second. The fact that He does not use it does not limit that power. He still has it. But if God does not know something, then His knowledge *is* limited. Knowledge is not something God “exercises” as much as it is an attribute He *possesses*.

One very good book against Calvinism argues along the same lines. It calls attention to the fact that there are some things an omnipotent God cannot do. He cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). He cannot make two hills without a low place between them. But lying is against the nature of God, and making two hills without a valley is against the nature of his creation. Aquinas rightly said of the latter that it is better to say that such things cannot be done, than to say that God cannot do them.

But this book also attempts to draw a parallel to God’s knowledge: “If there are some things which God cannot do, though omnipotent, may there not be some things which he DID not know, though omniscient?” (T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, p. 77). Again, notice the

change in wording. He talks about what God “cannot do” and what He “DID not know.” “Cannot” and “Did not” are not the same.

Also, notice that the writer says there are *some* things God chose not to foreknow. This means that there are other things He does foreknow. Does His foreknowledge of those things mean that the people had no choice in what they did?

If God foreknew even *one thing* that *one person* did in the future without violating that person’s free will, then the whole case against infinite divine foreknowledge falls. If God foreknows one thing in the future without removing free will, then He knows all things people do in the future without cancelling their free choice.

The only way that preachers and commentators can deny foreknowledge is to deny prophecy. Are they willing to do that?

This same writer says, “God can limit the exercise of His own attributes.” We would ask, can God limit the exercise of His eternity? Can He limit His immutability or unchangeable nature?

This objection is also raised: “But if you say that God cannot choose to limit His knowledge, then you are limiting His power. You are saying there is something God cannot do.” Again, my question is: If you say that God cannot limit His eternity or His immutability, are you limiting God?

This view tries to avoid the position of predetermination. It says that God chose not to know that man would sin. This means that God closed His eyes to the future that He could have known. Why would God do that? To avoid the pain of knowing? To excuse Himself of the awesome responsibility of creating beings that sinned? These things are not consistent with the love of God in creating man.

Besides, how could God choose not to know a thing unless He knew it?

But here is something that people who use these arguments don’t understand. These attempts are well intentioned but they miss the point because they are based on a misunderstanding of Calvinism. Calvin *did not* base his doctrine of predestination and election on the foreknowledge of God.

Calvin specifically denies that God predestines because He foreknows it. He calls foreknowledge by the name prescience. He wrote, “We, indeed, ascribe both prescience and predestination to God; but we say that it is absurd to make the latter subordinate to the former” (*Institutes*, III.21.5). **Slide 13** Calvin did not say that God predestines because He foreknows. He said that God foreknows because He predestines! He “foreknew, because he had so ordained by his decree” (*Institutes*, III.23.7).

Notice again that he has a hierarchal view of God’s attributes. He implies that God’s foreknowledge is “subordinate” to predestination which of course in his thinking is part of God’s sovereignty.

Where does the Bible separate the attributes of God like this and make some subordinate to others? Herein is the root issue with Calvinism. It goes all the way to the nature of God.

God’s attributes are one. His love, justice, power and immutability can only be separated from each other in finite human thinking, not as they are in His essence.

Here is what Calvin said in the same section: “When we attribute prescience to God, we mean that all things always were, and ever continue, under his eye; that to his knowledge there is no past or future but all things are present...This prescience extends to the whole circuit of the world and to all creatures.”

But the basis of his argument is the sovereign decree of God expressed in his theory of predestination. In contrast to foreknowledge, he says, **Slide 14** "By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death." That is Calvinism. Foreknowledge is not the issue. God’s sovereignty is.

Calvin criticized “the error of those who deduce election from prescience” (*Institutes*, III.22.2). He said the whole question about whether God’s foreknowledge necessitates what happens is a moot point. “If God merely foresaw human events, and did not also arrange

and dispose of them at his pleasure, there might be room for agitating the question, how far his foreknowledge amounts to necessity; but since he foresees the things which are to happen, simply because he has decreed that they are so to happen, it is vain to debate about prescience, while it is clear that all events take place by his sovereign appointment."

The arguments we just examined against Calvinism assume that Calvin's doctrine of election logically depends on the foreknowledge of God. They assume that if they can qualify the meaning of foreknowledge then Calvin's system will fall. That is a mistake.

So, in the end these arguments are futile as far as Calvinism is concerned. They attempt to deliver a death blow to Calvin's theology, but they weaken the case for the omniscience of God.

Since the real issue is predestination, let's turn our attention to that aspect of the study. We've already seen the passages where it occurs. There's no question about the basic idea of the word. The more pertinent question concerns the way it is used and how it is applied.

We just saw what Calvin said. Predestination to Calvin means that "All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation."

This plainly contradicts the teaching of Scripture. Paul said in I Timothy 2:4 that God **Slide 15** "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." There is no way to reconcile this verse with what Calvin taught. God's will is not for some to be saved and for others to be lost. God wants *all* to be saved! He does not want only some to know the truth while He decrees that others can never know it. He wants *all people* to know the truth.

One of the first principles of Bible interpretation is that we should interpret more difficult passages in light of more plain verses. First Timothy 2:4 is a straightforward, clear statement. There is nothing difficult about these words. God wants all men to be saved. On the other hand, any Bible student who has read the book of Romans knows that there are sections in it that are harder to interpret. Remember that Peter said Paul wrote "some things hard to understand" (II Pet. 3:16).

So when we see, for instance, a passage like Romans 9:15—"For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whomever I will have

mercy””—we are dealing with a passage that requires far more thought. This verse is in a particular context about national Israel, and it is a quotation from an Old Testament passage that has nothing to do with salvation. I will say more about Romans 9 in a future lesson. For now I am emphasizing the need for using this common sense principle of interpreting the Bible. Romans 9 must be interpreted in light of I Timothy 2:4.

God also wants all men to come to the knowledge of the truth according to this verse. When we read a verse like II Thessalonians 2:11—“And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie”—we are again looking at a more difficult section of Scripture relatively speaking. The context is the man of sin and the followers he has deceived. Who are these people? Verse 10 says they “did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved.” It was “for this reason” that God sent them a strong delusion or working of error. These people had already rejected the truth. This passage does not say that God in any way keeps an honest soul from seeing the truth. The people in this verse had already made their choice, and God allowed them to go even farther into error as He often does in Scripture. This passage may seem obscure if we read it alone, but the light of I Timothy 2:4 puts it into perspective.

How does Calvin deal with a passage as plain as I Timothy 2:4? He says the context is praying for government leaders. Then he says that the expression “all men” refers to *the elect in all classes or orders of men*, even rulers who are often evil (*Institutes*, III. 24.16). According to Calvin, Paul is saying that we ought to pray that *all kinds of sinners* should be saved, even government officials.

But that is not what Paul said. He did not tell us to pray that these leaders might be saved. He said to pray for them in order that “we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (I Tim. 2:2). Of course, it is good to pray for their salvation, but that is not what this passage is about. “All men” refers to all people. Jesus died for all.

That is what Paul continues to stress. After he writes that God wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, he adds, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the

man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (I Tim. 2:5-6).

This is the uniform teaching of the New Testament. Hebrews 2:9 says that Jesus became a little lower than the angels so that “He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” But Calvin says no, He only died for the elect.

I John 2:2 says, “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” This verse makes a clear distinction between Christians and “the whole world.” If Calvin is correct, it would have been pointless and even *false* for John to write those last words—that He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world!

II Corinthians 5:15 says in plain words, “He died for all.” Calvinists must reinterpret and reshape all these verses to fit them into their mold.

Paul also wrote in I Timothy 4:10 that God is “the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.” The word “especially” is from *malista*. It means “especially, chiefly, most of all, above” (Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 387). It is used later in this book in chapter 5 verses 8 and 17.

God is the Savior of Christians in a way that is over and above His being Savior to others. God is the Savior of all men in the sense that He offers salvation to all. But He is the Savior of Christians in the sense that He actually saves them based on their obedience. He is potentially the Savior of any man, but He is actually and in reality the Savior of the obedient. And those who are obedient chose to be so.

God offers salvation to all. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). That is why Jesus died on the cross. That is why He said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16). It is why He said, “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:17). But Calvinism renders these and so many other passages meaningless.

Another passage that leaves Calvinists at a loss for words is II Peter 3:9: **Slide 16** “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” God is not willing that any should perish; He is willing that all should come to repentance.

Calvin admitted that this is a strong objection to his teaching on election (*Institutes*, III.24.16). But he was so stubborn in his error that he twisted even these plain words. He said repentance is something God gives, not something man chooses.

That is absurd since the word repent means to change one’s mind and the Bible commands us to repent (Acts 2:38; 17:30). But Calvin tried to use the last part of the verse to cancel out the first! Peter says that God does not want anyone to perish, but Calvin says that God wants many people, in fact most souls, to be lost in hell forever!

If a Calvinistic preacher is consistent, how can he urge sinners to be saved? How can he have any interest in evangelism, especially foreign missions? Calvinism says to sinners, “You are lost and headed for hell, but there is nothing you can do to change that. If God has decided to save you, He will do it in His time. But if He has decided to condemn you, then there is no hope for you.” Contrary to a current fad, Calvinism is not “cool.” In fact, it is downright cold.

Thank God this is not true. Thank God for verses like I Timothy 2:4 and II Peter 3:9.

But we still haven’t dealt with the word “predestined” in Scripture. If Calvin’s doctrine of predestination is false, then what *does* this word mean?

Ephesians 1:4-5 says that God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world and predestined us to the adoption of children.

Some who oppose Calvinism respond by saying this only means that God chose and predestined a certain *class* or *category* of people, not that He chose the people in that group. In other words, this interpretation holds that God predestined that those who believe and obey Him will be saved.

But how could God know there would be a group of saved people without knowing who was in it? Or did He know this group would even exist (according to this interpretation)? This view says that God only foreknew that IF anyone obeyed Him, then that person would be chosen and adopted as a son.

But that is not what the passage says. The Bible says that God chose “us” which refers to individuals, not a collective abstract group. Romans 8 is also clear when Paul says “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined” (Romans 8:29). And, ironically, this interpretation, though opposed to Calvinism, is very similar to what Calvin said about I Timothy 2:4.

The Bible does teach that God chose and predestined Christians before the world began. So if that predestination is not Calvin’s version of predestination, then what is it?

Ironically, Calvin himself had the key. He admitted the right approach in principle. Do you remember what he said about accommodative language in the Bible about God? He conceded that when the Bible says God repented, it is not speaking literally. He said that God stoops down to our level and speaks as a man so that we can understand.

If he had applied that same reasoning to the issue we are looking at, we wouldn’t be having this discussion.

The Bible uses this kind of language many times in the Old Testament, but it occurs in the New Testament as well. For instance, Hebrews 8:12 is a quotation from Jeremiah 31. It says God “will remember no more” their sins. **Slide 17** God, then, forgets our sins. We know that is not literal. To forget literally means to be unaware of something once known, either temporarily or permanently. That is not possible with God.

But we understand what this means. God forgets our sins by not holding them against us, by forgiving us. He certainly still has knowledge of them. The Bible uses this expression because we can relate to it.

The Bible says God is a jealous God. The Lord said not to have any other gods before Him. “For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous

God” (Exod. 20:5). **Slide 18** Exodus 34:14 says, “You shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”

The Bible talks about man’s jealousy and God’s jealousy. There is no real distinction in the Hebrew; the same Hebrew root (*qana*) is used for both.

The explanation is simple. This is a human affection applied to God, not in the selfish sense we experience, but in a pure sense of righteous possessiveness and zealous devotion.

E. W. Bullinger wrote a book called *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*. He listed many other examples of accommodative language. He called them cases of *condescension* because God condescends to our level and speaks to us in human ways we can understand. The ones we have mentioned are just a few.

When you think about it, you realize that God must speak to us in this way. There is no way we can comprehend God in His essence, in His glory, in His perfection. If God talked to us on His level, we would be overwhelmed and unable to understand. So He uses the language of the nature He gave us to help us see His nature.

Calvin agrees with these examples. When the Bible says God *repented*, it is speaking accommodatively. When the Bible says God does not *remember*, it uses the word as an analogy to human experience. When the Bible says God is *jealous*, it uses a common human feeling to illustrate God’s devotion to His people and His expectation of the same from them. **Slide 19**

If we recognize this principle in these cases, why should it be hard to understand verses that say God *predestinates* us? God predestinates in the same way that He forgets what man did in the past. He does not literally forget. He does not literally predestinate.

A challenge for Calvin and his followers is this: Explain how you know that God’s *repenting* in Scripture is accommodative. Give the proof from Scripture. Show the hermeneutical steps involved. When you do, then you have explained why God’s *predestinating* is accommodative. Or, stated in a different way, explain why you interpret the word “repent” accommodatively, but the word “predestinate” literally.

Here is another example of how subjective and inconsistent Calvin is on this point. In the *Institutes*, he looks at passages which say that the elect were enemies of God before they were saved—Romans 5:10, Colossians 1:21-22 and others. That raises a difficulty for Calvin. How could God be an *enemy* of the elect if He favored them and chose them before the world was made? Calvin's answer was this: those passages are accommodative, not literal. He said, "Such modes of expression are accommodated to our capacity" (*Institutes*, 2.16.2). And we would ask: Then why can you not see that God *choosing* and *predestinating* the saved is also accommodative language?

Ephesians 1:4 says that God *chose* us before the foundation of the world. This doesn't mean God chose us arbitrarily. It doesn't mean He chose us against or without any decision on our part. It means that God knew who would believe and obey Him and in that sense God chose us. Calvinists read too much into the word "chose" in Ephesians 1:4. God chose us before we chose Him. He did not choose us by *making* us choose Him. As long as we don't attach an arbitrary meaning to this word, we should have no problem understanding the point.

You may ask, "But why didn't God speak clearer if that is what He meant? Why didn't He explain that His infinite knowledge transcends time?" The answer is obvious. God is communicating the best He can given our ignorant state. We can't possibly grasp how there is no past, present, or future with God.

Preachers and teachers carefully observe the *tense* of verbs in the Bible—sometimes more than is needed. But tense is an aspect of time which is a feature of this physical world. God cannot be defined by or confined to tenses. That is why He calls Himself the great "I Am" (Exod. 3:14). Thus, even in Ephesians 1:4 where God says he *chose* us *before* the foundation of the world, the language is accommodated to our limited knowledge.

As an illustration, consider how we talk about *where* God is. In heaven, right? In our minds, we almost immediately think of something that occupies space. But God is pure spirit; He is not subject to the natural laws of space and distance. But how else can we distinguish

heaven from earth and this life from the next? We are forced to talk about “where” heaven is.

In the same way, whether we say God *chose*, *chooses*, or will *choose* does not change the idea. These are terms that express how we see from a human perspective, but God sees all things from a much higher viewpoint.

The word predestination is no different. The “pre” part of the word is accommodative for the same reason.

But the idea of determining or ordaining is accommodative as well. God “*predestines*” or “*predestinates*” Christians. In other words, the time element is not the central idea of the word since God is outside of time. He *determines* or *ordains* that the elect are His children, but He does so in conjunction with their free choice.

Even on a human level, when we *ordain* someone, it means that we appoint that person to a role and that we both authorize and obligate this individual with certain duties. But that person makes the choice to accept or reject that responsibility.

God never intended for the word *predestinate* to be understood as a complete and total decision on His part without any choice on the part of the beings He made in His image. And a very important part of that image is the ability to choose our spiritual destiny here and in eternity.