

Romans Series

Predestination: Questions & Answers

Romans 8:30b

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Brother was sharing the question last Sunday, how does prayer enter into predestination? I think it's important, loved ones, to see that God foreknows, and it's very tricky for our finite minds to get around this, but God foreknows everything that will happen in the light of the obedience and the prayers of those whom he knows will receive his Spirit. And in the light of the disobedience and rebellion of those who he knows will reject and resist his Spirit.

So that God's foreknowledge of what is happening in the world, takes into consideration the prayers that will be offered by those of us who respond and submit to his Spirit. This allows prayer, rather than being something that changes perhaps something that God has not foreseen, it is part of the activity that God foresees and will be used by his Holy Spirit to bring about his will.

So in a way, brother, prayer is part of what God foresees and yet it is our free action. If we didn't pray, then, in fact, that would prevent him doing certain things in people's lives that he also would have foreseen and would have had to endure even though he didn't want it. So, there are many loved ones who are sick in our families and our circles of friends whom God wants to touch into life but he cannot because we don't pray. In fact he has had to foreknow that. He knew we wouldn't pray but the one activity he refuses to engage in is changing our free wills.

Even though he sees that it results in an evil, the greater good of preserving the free will is more precious to him than preventing any temporary evil, even if that evil is the death of a person. Do push me loved ones, you know you push me to a point and then I have to express the finiteness of my miserable little mind.

Question: In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed "If it be thy will." Does that mean Jesus had hesitation to do God's will?

Response from Pastor O'Neill:

If Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, "If it be thy will, then I will drink of the cup, but if possible, let this cup pass from me" [Matthew 26:39], how could Jesus, knowing that this was the only way, how could he experience any hesitation? Loved ones, I think first of all there's an absolute difference between a rebellious, "I don't want your will. I want my will." There's an absolute contrast between that and the attitude of a person saying, "I want to do what you want, Lord. If there's any other way, then do it but if this is the only way, then I am glad to do it." I think it's important to make that distinction between the prayer of Jesus and the prayer that we so often pray, "I am not going to do it."

But I think, Jim, it's important to see that that is part of the expression of the humanity of Jesus himself. In some way, loved ones, Jesus, when he came from the Father in heaven, either laid aside or -- those of you theologians who know the kenosis theory and maybe hate it -- laid aside something

of his divine qualities or at least refused temporarily to use them.

For instance, with the Father in heaven, he had absolute omniscience. Now he shows by questions that he puts at times, here on earth, that he did not have that omniscience -- that divine omniscience. He showed often that he had the same gift of the Holy Spirit as we have, when you remember he discerned there were murmurings in their hearts. He often shows that he had that kind of discernment of the Holy Spirit, but repeatedly he asks questions that reveal that he had restrained himself from using the omniscience -- that is, knowledge of all things that he had with his Father in heaven.

So, that is part of it: that Jesus, in a real way, became a human being, in a real way put himself under the same limitations as we. And it seems to me that's part of also what comes out in the cry, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?", and then followed by the declaration of faith, "Into thy hands, I commend my Spirit", that Jesus, in a real way, loved ones, suffered and endured the infirmities that we have and was a human being and yet completely divine also.

Question: Are there some theologians who don't believe in free will, but believe we are programmed, so to speak?

Response from Pastor O'Neill:

Sure, loved ones, there are some theologians who believe that we do not have free will but because of the fall, we are in something of the same situation as B. F. Skinner [psychologist-1904-1990], would say. The determinist psychologist would say that we are not free. We are pre-programmed. We are pre-determined.

Loved ones, God is so good, he is so good in just blasting us again and again with words like Deuteronomy 30:19 and gets old Moses to say this. "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day that I have set before you, life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life that you and your descendants may live." It is so good to answer Skinner and everybody else and say, "Why would God tell us to choose, if he knows we cannot choose, if he knows we are not free to choose?" It comes out again and again in Jesus' statements, "If any man wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his Cross." [Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23]

Even John 3:16 says, "For God, so loved the world that whosoever believeth in him" -- any of you can who wants -- and you can do it if you want to. I just think that's it. I think the theologians or the psychologists get themselves into the midst of determinism or over-emphasis on the sovereignty of God by taking only parts of scripture and that's always the difficulty we get ourselves into. That in a real sense, the sovereignty of God is taught but you cannot get away from free will. Oh, it just comes out again and again, loved ones.

Question: How can we change the path for our futures, including our educational or vocational decisions?

Response from Pastor O'Neill:

I'd press you dear ones who have been brought up in our educational system in the past 10 or 20 years. Loved ones, there's been a general, subtle tendency in our system to indicate this: what you were yesterday is what you're going to be today. You remember Peter has a good piece that exposes the evolutionary philosophy that has come among us in these days. People will say, "All things shall

continue as they have been from the beginning." That's what has got hold in so many of us. S.A.T. tests [vocational aptitude tests] in high school are good, great, as long as you see that God is able to work beyond and above the S.A.T. tests. It is not the absolute truth that because you were able to repair your bicycle when you were five-year-old, you absolutely ought to build a dam across the Mississippi river when you're 27 because you are a born engineer. It's just not true nor does it give some indication, but we are free agents and we need to see that in our educational system.

God is the god of the new beginning, each time the sun rises. That's why you never look at the sun and think, "What an old sun." It just looks as new each day. You never look each spring and say, "What old, miserable green shoots are coming up in my garden." No! They're so new and fresh that you know they've come just dead new, brand new from the Maker's hand that morning and that's the Father's message to us.

It is Satan's message. It is an old message, "You cannot change. You cannot be different." Loved ones, you can. Jesus' word is always, "You can be born anew. You can start all over again, this moment if you choose."

Question: If God calls us before we choose, how does he foreknow?

Response from Pastor O'Neill:

It seems, Dave that (I think I am right but I might be missing your old computer mind) that God calls everybody. He calls everybody, so he calls everybody. He doesn't say, "Judy is going, I foresee that she's going to receive my Spirit. I foresee that her husband, Dan, is not, so I call to Judy loudly but I call to Dan just quietly." No. God gives the same call to all of us. He gives the same call as strongly and as loudly to all of us but he does foreknow how we will respond, but he still does not change the call.

Question: So then, he does foreknow who will receive his Spirit?

Response from Pastor O'Neill:

That's right. He chooses those who are willing to receive his Spirit.

Question: Then, there is a difference between foreknowledge and foreordination (life path that cannot change), isn't there?

Response from Pastor O'Neill:

Loved ones, you cannot, by all kinds of perversion of logic, you cannot make foreknowledge into foreordination. You cannot. It just appears very like it because it's perfect foreknowledge but it is still foreknowledge. It is God reading what the person would do.

Question: Acknowledging our free will, what does Jesus mean when he says, "Those who commit sin are a slave to sin and only the Son can make them free."?

Response from Pastor O'Neill:

Good. Acknowledging that we are free, what does Jesus mean when he says, "Those who commit sin are a

slave to sin and only the Son can make them free." If we have not yielded to Jesus and we have given ourselves over to life that is independent of God, we get into certain habits: drugs, sex, self-deification.

These enslave our souls -- that is, our mind and emotions -- and the scientists can prove even that there are almost ruts in the cortex of our brains because of things that we do and do again and again and again. Jesus is saying that no person can free themselves from that by their own activity. If I had not allowed their whole self to be crucified with Me on Calvary, they would be able to do nothing. But because I have done that, they are able to turn to Me and ask my Holy Spirit to make that real in them and therefore they can be free.

So, brother, it's the same situation with putting these lights on here in this auditorium. To get light in this auditorium, I go over and I just switch actually one of the circuit breakers and the lights come on, but I am in no doubt that I have not generated the power that has caused these lights to light. I know that some fellow back in the generating station has actually got the generators moving. I know nevertheless that the light will not come in unless I do switch that circuit breaker.

Now, it's the same with the Father. He has replaced in Jesus a limitless source of power that has already destroyed our old self -- and the moment with our little wills we say yes to Him, he is able to release all the power of the Holy Spirit into us and to make us free.

Question: How would you sense what God wants you to say to a person, in the light of the fact that God is calling that person in certain ways?

Response from Pastor O'Neill:

I see. The Holy Spirit, who is impressing a certain kind of calling upon that person, either through the order and design of the universe or through their own guilt, can let you know which he is laying emphasis on and can guide you to come along the same wavelength.

That's it, loved ones, I'll try to take from there next day. It's 12:02, so I'll try to take from that point next day. Just relating the call of God to our response to it. Let us pray.

Father, thank you. Thank you that you are so new. Thank you that joy is the center of your heart. Thank you Lord that you're not calling us to some miserable funeral but to a marriage feast. You are saying to us, "Come and join me and my Son in the beautiful family of love that we have together." Thank you, Lord.

Now we pray Father that you will make that so real to all of us that we will see that we alone can say yes or no to it. Lord, we pray for those whom we love that they too will say yes for your glory. Amen.