

Predestination vs. Free Will

The Disclaimer

- We are not presenting this topic from the point of view that we have a single right answer instead we are going to present the problem at hand and then the predominant theologies that attempt to address it. Hopefully you will come away from this presentation with a better understanding of what people believe and the implications of those beliefs.

The Problem

- If all things are predestined, then God chose if I would be saved and if I would sin, but God punishes and rewards me as if I am responsible. Likewise why should I be obedient in avoiding sin or seeking salvation or evangelizing?
- If I have free will how then is God in control of everything? Does this mean I can make decisions God doesn't want me to make and so my will in a sense "trumps" God's will?

Definitions

- Predestination – God has already determined all events, including salvation.
- Free Will – ability of humans to make choices.

Predestination (Calvinism, Reformed)

Biblical Evidence

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Ps 139:16)

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestine [to be] conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestine, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly [places] in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: *Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,* To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. (Eph 1:3-6)

In Him we were chosen having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, (Eph 1:11)

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. (Act. 4:27-28)

Basic Theology of Predestination

- **Predestination: Concurrence** = "Cooperate with created things in every action directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do". E.g. Water freezes, we can explain this scientifically AND God causes it.
 - Job 38:22-30, Ps 148:8, Proverbs 16:33
 - Like Concurrence of natural events, so are our decisions and actions, they are both caused by God and us. Our words, steps, movements, hearts abilities and gifts are from God, and God can cause us to make willing decisions.
 - The King's heart is in the hand of the Lord; He directs it like a watercourse wherever He pleases (Pr 21:1), Ezr 1:1, 6:22, Acts 17:28, 1 Cor 4:7
 - A man's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way? (Pr 20:24), Pr 16:1,9
 - I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps. (Jer 10:23)

- We pray for our food but provide it ourselves (Matt 6:11), And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:19)
 - For dominion belongs to the Lord and He rules over the nations (Ps 22:28), Job 12:23, Dan 4:34-35, Acts 14:16, 17:26
- **Free Will:** We do have real choices (free will) in that our choices have effects on the present and eternal. We are responsible for our own decisions.
 - **Our choices and actions** change the course of events
 - Prayer: John 16:24, You do not have, because you do not ask God. (James 4:2)
 - Paul does a lot that the elect would be saved, even though they are the elect: 2 Tim 2:10
 - Scripture says all choices are real: John 3:16
 - **Our choices have affects**, we are aware of no restrictions from God when we make decisions (vs fatalisms/determinism which says our decisions do not matter and cannot make willing choices)
 - Paul and the shipwreck: Paul completely trusts God and says no one will die, but realizes He will use ordinary means to accomplish His purpose, and that individuals have choice (like the men leaving the boat and the centurion): Acts 27:22-26,31
- **God's Will:**
 - God has a moral (revealed) will that is the description of how we ought to act (e.g. the 10 commandments)
 - God has a provincial (secret) will, which are events that are ordained by God to come about (e.g. the crucifixion)
- **Evil:**
 - **God does not directly do evil** and is never, in scripture, blamed for evil.
 - God can use evil for good
 - Joseph's brothers: You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Gen 50:20), Gen 45:5, Ps 105:17
 - **God caused evil** events to happen
 - God Hardens Pharaoh's heart: For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (Rom 9:17,18) Ex 4:21, 7:3, 9:12, 10:20, 10:27, 11:10, 14:4, 14:8, 14:17, Ps 105:25
 - Canaanites: For it was the Lord Himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that He might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the Lord had commanded Moses. (Josh 11:20)
 - Samson marries a Philistine woman: His parents did not know that this was from the Lord... (Judg 14:4)
 - Eli's sons: His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the Lord's will to put them to death. (1 Sam 2:25)
 - Evil spirit from the Lord: God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem (Judg 9:23). Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. (1 Sam 16:14)
 - David: 2 Sam 12:11-12, 16:22, 2 Sam 12:15-18, 2 Sam 24:1,10,12-17, 1 Chr 21:1
 - Job sees God doing evil even though Satan is doing it: Job 1:12, 15, 17, 19, 21 But Job did not charge God with wrong Job 1:22
 - Lying and false prophets: So now the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. (1 King 22:23), Ezk 14:9
 - Evil kings and nations God rises up or uses: Judg 3:12, 1 King 11:14, 11:23, Isaiah 10:5, Jer 25:9. But later God punishes these nations: Jer 25:12,
 - God brings evil and destruction to judge sin and people. He uses evil people, demonic force, and nature to bring his judgment (not judgment for Joseph and Job)
 - All have sinned and deserve judgment (Rom 3:23) so when God brings judgment we cannot say He is wrong.
 - God is glorified in demonstrating justice, holiness, and power Ex 9:16, Rom 9:14-24
 - **God created evil:** I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things. (Isaiah 45:7) This is the same word create as in Gen 1:1. Lam 3:38, Isa 63:17

- God sustains all things including evil: For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. (Rom 11:36), Col 1:17, Heb 1:3
 - **Scripture never blames God for evil** or shows Him taking pleasure in Evil
 - Dan 4:35 “All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back His hand or say to Him: “What have you done?”
 - **We are responsible** for the evil we do. God blames moral creatures for their evil
 - Isaiah 66:3-4, Ecc 7:29, Rom 9:19-20, James 5:19-20, I Peter 2:11, Rom 3:8, 2 Peter 3:7, Ezk 14:10.
 - God uses and allows evil but is not blameworthy.
 - Luke 22:22, Matt 26:24, Mark 14:21, Acts 2:23, 4:27-28, Matt 18:7, James 1:13-14, Isaiah 45:7
 - Ultimately all works for the good of those who love God (Rom 8:28), showing God is in control of even evil.
 - God brings about his purposes via the decisions of evil people, for his Glory and our good Acts 2:23, 2 Thess 2:11-12, 1 Peter 2:8, Rom 8:28
 - There are things that it is right for God to do but not for us. Requiring worship, seeking to glorify Himself, executing judgment, use evil to bring about good.
 - E.g. a parent not allowing a child to use a sharp knife.
 - Nothing in scripture indicates that some things are outside God’s control (e.g. evil) but some scripture indicates that all things are within His control Heb 1:3, Col 1:17, Acts 17:28, Eph 1:11, Phil 4:19, Prov20:24, Phil 2:13, Rom 11:36, I Cor 15:27
- This theology is **hard to believe and understand fully**
 - Scripture never says we are outside God’s control, nor of being able to make decisions not caused by anything, nor able to do right apart from God’s power. But our decisions do have effects both in the present and eternally and we are held responsible for them. Just because we cannot reconcile this apparent contradiction does not mean it is not the view of scripture or that it is not true.
 - Pros (arguments for)
 - Emphasizes God’s **sovereignty**
 - **Agrees with the Bible.** Accepts that both can be true at the same time in the sovereignty of God.
 - All things are done according to God’s will (even evil), Rom 8:28
 - Do not be afraid but trust God Matt6:26,31,10:29-31, Ps4:8, I Peter 1:6-7
 - Be thankful for the good Ps 103:2, I Thes 5:18, Matt 6:11, I Tim 4:4-5
 - The only **unanswered questions** in this theology are: How can God cause us to do things willingly and also how He is not responsible for those willing actions? But this unknown causes us to trust in God’s infinite abilities.
 - Cons (arguments against) and their rebuttals
 - If our choices are real they **cannot be caused by God**. Choices are only real if we can choose to do what God didn’t want us to do.
 - This argument is based more on feeling than scripture, Scripture seems to say our choices are real and God makes them, see Concurrency above.
 - Just because **we cannot understand** it does not mean we should reject it. There is much about God we don’t understand, for example that He is eternal and omnipresent, why is this different? Job 37:23
 - This theology refuses to deny that God can make a world where He causes us to make willing choices.
 - Are you saying we aren’t saved by grace/faith unless God has chosen us? Why should I **evangelize** if God already picked who would be saved?
 - Scripture seems to say our choices are real and God makes them, see Concurrency above.
 - There is no other reality besides what God brings about; choices are real because God brings about real choices.
 - Scripture still says we should evangelize even though God has already ordained who will be saved.
 - God chose when we sin and who will go to **Hell**?

- Same response as to are our choices real. We can both choose to sin and reject God for our whole lives willingly and have God ordain it and He is not to blame.
- Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Ex 8:15, 32, 9:34) maybe God just continued what Pharaoh started?
 - God started hardening Pharaoh's heart before Pharaoh did, but both can happen at the same time, see Concurrence above.

Free Will (Arminianism)

Biblical Evidence

- **Choose for yourselves** this day whom you will serve. (Josh. 24:15)
- **Come** to me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. (Matt. 11:28)
- If anyone **wills** to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God. (John 7:17)
- For God so loved that world that He gave his only begotten Son, so that whosoever **believeth** shall not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)
- If anyone thirsts, let him **come** to me and drink. (John 7:37)
- For whosoever shall **call upon** the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Rom. 10:13)
- **Repent** and let everyone of you be baptized. (Acts 2:38)
- **Repent** therefore and be converted. (Acts 3:19)
- You always **resist** the Holy Spirit. (Acts 7:51)
- **Believe** in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. (Acts 16:31)
- ...but now commands all men everywhere to **repent**. (Acts 17:30)
- Whoever **wills**, let him **take** the water of life **freely**. (Rev 22:17)

Basic Theology of Free Will (Arminianism)

- Free Will: God allows man to accept grace by faith or reject it
- Predestination: God does not predetermine WHO will believe, but rather the outcomes of those who believe or choose not to
- Arminianism
 - Form of theology founded by Jacobus Arminius
 - Widely adopted among protestant churches
 - Methodist, Free Will Baptists, General Baptists, Churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Church of the Nazarene, Seventh-day Adventists, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and most Southern Baptists.
 - Also adopted by Roman Catholics
 - Tenets (Core Beliefs)
 - **Depravity is total** – the free will of man is debilitated and useless without the assistance of divine grace
 - **Atonement is intended for all** – all people have the opportunity of salvation by faith
 - **Jesus' death satisfies God's justice** – only 2 ways for justification of the sinner: (1) absolute and perfect adherence to the law (2) God's imputation by Christ's righteousness
 - **Grace is resistible** – prevenient (of God's initiative) grace acts on all people and may be freely accepted or freely denied
 - **Man has free will to respond or resist** – God sovereignly allows all men to accept the Gospel by faith, which also allow for resistance
 - **Election is conditional** - God alone determines who will be saved and his determination is that all who believe Jesus through faith will be justified
 - **God predestines the elect** – not a predetermination of who will believe, but that believers will receive glorification and eternal life
 - **Eternal security is conditional** - Salvation can be lost (continued salvation is contingent on continued faith)
- Pros (arguments for)
 - We have choice in deciding our outcome
 - We choose by faith the acceptance of God's grace
 - Promotes responsibility and obedience
 - Supports need for laws and judgment
 - Supports need for evangelism/missions
- Cons (arguments against) and Rebuttals
 - Are you saying human will can override that the sovereignty/omnipotence of God? That God is not in complete control (things happen against His will e.g. evil)?

- Free will does not supersede God's sovereignty, but is an allowance by God in his sovereignty.
- Things do not happen against the will of God, because free will is an allowance within His sovereign control.
- How does evil exist if God does not want it?
If free will means we have the choice to do evil are God's choices real? Can He choose to do evil? This seems contrary to scripture.
Are you saying that not all good is from God and people choose good without Him? (seems to contradict Rom 8:28 "and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him")
 - God cannot sin even once, but some verses would indicate that God uses Evil spirits or deception without the allowance for free will. Evil and deception are a product of free will.
 - God allows the evil of human free will and often uses it to accomplish a greater good.
 - Sale of Joseph into slavery in Egypt – provided place for Jacob's family to multiply into a nation (Gen. 37-50)
 - Rahab's lie – saved the lives of Israel's spies (Josh. 2:
 - Wicked rejection and crucifixion of Christ – atonement for all sin
 - Israel's unbelief in Christ – opened the door for the salvation of Gentiles (Rom. 11:11)
- How can we be certain God will triumph over evil just because He says He will?
If he didn't want evil but it's here anyways, what guarantee is there that it will be destroyed?
 - This is a question of faith. True faith is an acceptance of grace, granted through the triumph of the cross of Jesus over sin and death.
 - The substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus is the guarantee.
- Are you saying we have a choice about original sin?
 - Man's basic condition is a lack of righteousness and understanding of God. It is by prevenient grace that causes man to seek righteousness through God.
- Are you supporting the benefit of "works" or "works-based salvation?" That's a contradiction to the Bible.
 - Eternal security is through continued faith, not by works
 - Continued faith promotes works as a product, but works themselves can not deliver salvation
- Are you denying Jesus' substitutionary payment for sins?
 - Atonement for sins is only through the cross, but acceptance of God's grace requires faith
 - 1 John 2:2 states "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (believers choose to accept this gift, others reject it)
 - John 3:16 promised eternal life for those that believe (requires choice), not those predestined to believe
- Arminians place limitations on God from finite human understandings not from scripture
 - This is an opinion and difficult to rebut without argumentative opinion
 - There are scripture references that support the need of humans to make a choice of free will (see above).
- Does God know the future? If He does then He knows what sins we are going to do or whether or not we will be saved. Those decisions must happen (if God truly knows what's going to happen) so then they are predestined by something. If not by God then what? Fate? The universe?
 - This is where the difference between foreknowledge and predestination definition of Arminianism come in. God has foreknowledge of all things, but predestines only the ultimate outcome of free will choices (salvation or not)

Conclusions

- Both theologies believe
 - Our actions have real results and are eternally significant
 - We are responsible for our actions that we make voluntarily
 - God answers prayer
 - Proclaiming the gospel results in people being saved
 - Obeying God results in blessing but disobedience the lack thereof

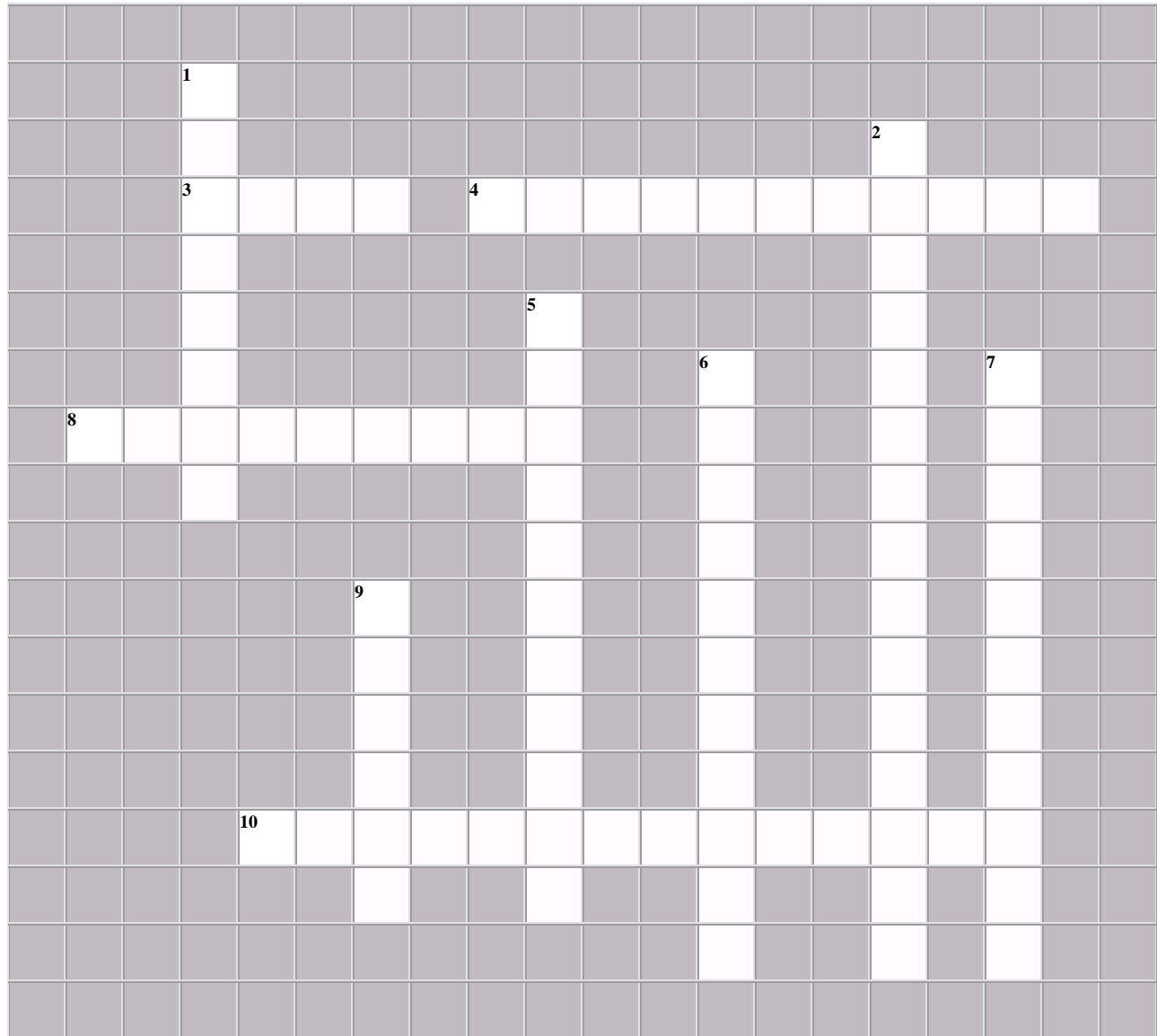
Discussion

1. Why do people who believe in free will often act like there is determinism (God has picked out the person I'm going to marry, God has the right job for me)?
2. Why do people who believe in determinism often act like there is free will (voting, punishing/rewarding children)?
3. Are the 2 sides mutually exclusive or can they be reconciled?
4. Why would a Calvinist pray or believe prayer can change God's will?

Further Study

- Denominations that tend to be Calvinist
 - Presbyterians, Christian Reformed
- Denominations that tend to be Arminianism
 - Catholic Church, contemporary evangelicalism, Methodists, Nazarenes, Assemblies of God
- Denominations where you will find both views
 - Baptists, Episcopalians, Dispensationalists, Evangelical Free Churches, Lutherans, Churches of Christ, most charismatic and Pentecostal groups
- Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem

Free Will vs Predestination Crossword Puzzle



Down

1. Ability of humans to make choices. (2 words)
2. Founder of Arminianism (2 words)
5. The theology that tends to lean more towards free will
6. Calvinism emphasizes God's
7. Cooperate with created things in every action directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do.
9. Both theologies believe God answers

Across

3. According to Calvinism God causes but scripture never blames Him for
4. According to Arminianism man's free will is
8. The theology that tends to lean more towards predestination.
10. God has already determined all events, including salvation.