

BIBLICAL RECORDER.

THE ORGAN OF THE NORTH CAROLINA BAPTISTS—DEVOTED TO BIBLE RELIGION, EDUCATION, LITERATURE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

Volume 58.

RALEIGH, N. C., WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14, 1893.

Number 50.

The Biblical Recorder.

PUBLISHED EVERY WEDNESDAY.

OFFICE:

13 (up stairs) Fayetteville Street, Raleigh, N. C.

TERMS OF SUBSCRIPTION:

One copy, one year.....\$ 3.00
One copy, six months..... 1.00
Clubs of ten (copy extra to sender)..... 20.00

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Predestination.

BY REV. ARCHIBALD CREE.

Preached by request in Sandy Run church in Bertie county, May 28th, 1893.

Text, Rom. 8: 28-30—"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

The doctrine of predestination has been the occasion of much difficulty and perplexity to many sincere and humble believers. These difficulties, I believe, have been intensified by some men's crude, contradictory and mistaken conceptions of the subject, as it is presented in the Word of God.

Having been requested by some of my brethren here to preach to you on these verses, I will endeavor, as far as I am able, to expound the Apostle's words, though I am far from arrogating to myself the ability to do full justice to the subject. I doubt not the Apostle Peter had special reference to this, its kindred group of doctrines, when he tells in his second epistle how his beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given unto him, had written in his epistles of these things, "in which are some things hard to

be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction."

The subject of the divine predestination of souls is no subject for ignorant and unlearned handling. It is pre-eminently a subject for the religious thinker and scholar; but as the Apostle Peter in the same epistle says "no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation," we are not forbidden to enter this sphere of the great realm of divine truth with our feeble ranslight to scan what portion of it may be available to us. There is abundance of truth in the Word of God suited to all minds and to every degree of intelligence. As Roland Hill said long ago, "There are shallows for the lambs to wade in, as well as great deeps for the strong and the learned to swim in."

There is perhaps no portion of Scripture more full of theological importance than the three verses before us, and none therefore which demands a more careful exposition at our hands. The grand question, around which so many controversies have gathered throughout the history of the church of Christ, but to which all sections of the church are ever more nearly approximating agreement, is here presented.

Do these passages teach unconditional predestination? Do they teach the predestination by God of certain souls to eternal life and the consequent passing by of others, without the least reference to the State, or character, or actions of those so ordained, and those passed by? or do they teach conditional predestination—the predestination of certain souls to a certain glorious destiny, because of certain foreknown conditions, upon which salvation is granted, having been supplied by them, and thus implying the free will co-operation of these souls in the attainment of that state of salvation and of glory. That is no question of barren controversy, but one of the most momentous importance to men as moral and immortal beings. Eternal issues hang upon the question, and the entire procedure and plan of God in the scheme of redemption are involved in it also. To the greatest and deepest nature such questions have ever had a profound attraction. Not only their sympathy with human beings in their wondrous immortal nature and destiny have drawn them to such questions, but the deeper interest still which Milton expresses in his Paradise Lost, of "justifying the ways of God to men," has filled them with the intense desire to feel into the depths of such subjects and scan their limits if possible. The very border-land of mystery, to which some, after all their investigations, have been led, has only increased the attraction. So far all was made plain to them: they felt themselves on firm ground, but beyond they gazed into the limitless, and while it heightened their awe, it did not diminish their interest.

It would be easy to dispose of the question presented in this place by appealing only to the plainer declarations and commands of Scripture, and passing by the more difficult texts; but that would be a cowardly process, manifesting fear of such passages as that before us. It would be a cutting the gordian knot, not an untying of it. The general who should beat the armies of an enemy in the field and overrun his country, but who left, here and there in his progress, great menacing fortresses behind him, which he did not attempt to reduce, or was not able to reduce, would not likely prove a successful conqueror in the end. While the more difficult texts of Scripture have to be interpreted in accordance with the plainer declarations, as the Word of God cannot contradict itself, and the Divine Spirit, who inspired it, is the Spirit of Truth, and was given to lead us into all truth, and therefore each part must harmonize with the other, though some parts may reach away into the regions of the mysterious and the illimitable where our poor vision cannot penetrate, yet to dispose of all difficulties and answer all objections by appealing only to the plainer declarations is no true solution of those difficulties, and is not allowable, except in any doubtful cases, and after all other means of interpretation have been exhausted.

It is well, therefore, for the minister of the gospel who aims to be a workman who "rightly divides the word of truth," to vary the ordinary and simpler ministrations of the Word by an occasional exposition of one or other of the deeper and more difficult texts.

Let us follow these verses clause by clause, and see what light we may extract from them on the important subject of which they treat.

The Apostle says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God," &c. The very first word, the Greek particle which is translated "And," is not without special significance in the connection in which it stands. In the thirtieth verse the same particle is translated "Moreover." Either translation is quite correct; but as the twenty-eighth verse is like the thirtieth, the beginning of a paragraph, or the statement of an additional truth in advance of those laid down in the preceding verses, there is great propriety in translating it by the word "Moreover." The Apostle has been dwelling on the fact that the sufferings which believers endure in "this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in them." He describes the whole creation along with believers groaning and sighing for the fulness of redemption, and the glorious liberty of the children of God. Advancing in the same consoling strain, the Apostle adds, "Moreover, we know that all things work together for good to them that

love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."

"Moreover, we know," says the Apostle. He speaks of that which was no mere matter of conjecture, but of certain knowledge to himself and his fellow Christians. Because they were Christians, and therefore taught of God, the thing of which the Apostle speaks was an accepted matter with them. Hence Paul, as the mouthpiece of his brethren, give utterance to this common assurance "that all things work together for good." But to whom? "To those who love God, and who are called according to his purpose." Mark these two distinguishing characteristics. The first describes their relation to God—they "love God"; the second describes God's relation to them—they "are called according to his purpose." These favored persons, then, are not here regarded merely as human creatures, which they of course are in common with other human creatures, nor as sinners, which they are in common with others. It is not in any aspect of their being or their state, which they have in common with others, that they are regarded and described by the Apostle; but by something distinguishing them from others—they love God. Now in that description we find certain conditions of salvation supplied by those who are spoken of. They "love God," that itself is a condition, and it is backed by others; for in order to love God, they must first have believed in God's love to them, as revealed in the gospel of his grace. "We love him, because he first loved us." Therefore behind their love there was faith, and all those other aspects of that state which consists in the penitent and sincere return of the soul to God. Here, then, to begin with, we have certain conditions on the part of man co-operating with the attitude and the action of God towards them in securing their eternal good. Thus far, then, we have got so much that is plain and evident from the light of the passage. Let us plant our feet firmly on what we have gained, it may be helpful in what is to follow.

Not only do these persons "love God," they are also as regards God's relation to them, "the called according to his purpose." It is by God they are called. The thirtieth verse explicitly says so. "Moreover, whom he did predestinate them he also called." Now let us enquire what is the nature of this calling, which is applicable only to believers. This is a crucial point. Doubtless it is the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. It is evident that it is not the universal call given to sinners to come to the Saviour and believe the gospel. That call is issued indiscriminately to all sinners, to every son of Adam. They are all summoned to repent and believe to the saving of the soul. It is with respect to that universal call it is said, "Many are called, but few are chosen." Now it cannot be that call to the beginning of the Christian life that is referred to here, because there is nothing distinguishing or peculiar to Christians in that call. It is a gracious invitation to every one as well as to them. But the Apostle is here speaking of something peculiar to Christians. "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called," "justified," "glorified." The call is as peculiar as the other distinguishing characteristics predestinated, justified, glorified. Moreover, the expression "the called" is exclusively applied to Christians wherever it occurs in the epistles of the New Testament. It is not applied to any others. Besides, seeing that believers have already responded to the gospel call, we would naturally expect that this distinguishing call will be something different from that to which unbelievers are called. Some would indolently say to us, at this point, that the call is the same as that given to unbelievers, but that believers are more effectually called than others, an irresistible influence is brought to bear upon them so as to make them obedient to the call. But this is simple necessitation, and such invincible swaying of the will has in it nothing of the nature of a call. The call, I should say, must be a real appeal to the intelligence, and through the intelligence to the heart and the will.

Let it be observed that there are other calls besides the call to repentance and faith. We find Christians spoken of in the Word as "called to liberty," "called to holiness," "called to suffering,"—to peace also, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called." Some, too, we find called to preach the gospel, and to undertake certain missions amongst men. But the highest calling of all, sometimes called the "heavenly calling," is the call to glory, the call to the other end of the Christian life. Paul says to Timothy, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called." Here is a call to eternal life. Peter says, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that you have suffered awhile, make you perfect." Here is a call to eternal glory. How beautifully this highest call is put in the hieroglyphical languages of the book of Revelation, "Blessed are they who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." Peter exhorts his fellow believers to "make their calling and election sure." How were they to do it? Evidently it is a very distinguishing call, this, a call to something higher than the beginning of the Christian life, to which all are called, to which all are urged. We are here in a more chosen region, where spiritual qualities are the passport. So it is intimated by our Apostle elsewhere, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many

mighty, not many noble are called." Jude speaks of them that are "sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called." Strange that the calling should be mentioned after the sanctification by God the Father, and the preservation by Jesus Christ. It is explainable only by understanding the call as that of the higher character I have been quoting—the call to glory, to eternal life, to the marriage supper of the Lamb. The expression "the called" applied to believers can in many places mean only this. And it is evident from the context that this part of our text furnishes us with an instance in the clause "to those who are called according to his purpose." Has the Apostle been pointing forward to "the glory that shall be revealed" in believers, to the full redemption, the future manifestation of the sons of God? And in the verses succeeding our text he goes on to point to the transformation of believers into the image of God's Son, to their final justification and glorification, and at length in the same strain, and pointing still to the glorious end, or prize of the high calling, he bursts into that glowing peroration, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in the thought of the Apostle, every hindrance is swept aside, and glory and victory are pronounced for the believer in Christ. It would appear very plain from all these considerations that the expression "the called of God" refers to the call to the higher end of the Christian life, the call to glory, the call to the marriage supper of the Lamb, a call which, while it is related to the universal call of the gospel, is yet in very many places in Scripture revealed as distinct from it, a higher and more distinguishing call, applicable only to those who have obeyed the first.

And further, let us beware lest we stray into any mere imaginations respecting the essence of this calling; let us beware of being misled by phrases of men, such as *effectual calling*, phrases which, in this connection, find no place in the Word of God. The word *calling* or *called* has its own meaning, and does not need to have one invented for it. To be called is to be summoned, to be invited. All those ideas of welcome, invitation, desire that we should avail ourselves of the blessing offered, are contained in the Word. Even urgent pleading and authoritative command, and every helpful influence to enable us to avail ourselves of the blessing offered, are found in the Word; but such ideas as necessitation or irresistible influence to compel our obedience are as wide apart from the native import of the Word as the poles are asunder from each other. On the contrary, we are reminded that the deepest responsibility rests upon us as to whether we shall yield to the divine moral influence, whether we shall become obedient to the heavenly summons, and press on toward the mark for the prize of our high calling.

It is further stated that believers are the called "according to his purpose." According to God's holy purpose, or resolution, or plan in a remote eternity, believers are now called to this glory. It was God's fixed purpose or plan from the beginning that all who believe in his Son, and by him in advance in the love of God, should be called to everlasting life and glory—to the incorruptible inheritance that fadeth not away. This is God's fixed plan, his changeless decree, his immutable purpose. It cannot be altered to suit any one, however great or exalted. Men must conform to it if they would be saved. All who have faith in the Redeemer, all those who love God, are the called to the heavenly inheritance: they shall be the ultimately glorified; these, and none others. Such is God's purpose, his plan from all eternity.

In the case of those who love God, we have God's calling of them and God's purpose to save all such, and we have further this in addition, that he causeth all things to work together for good to them. No doubt the "all things" contemplated by the Apostle are all things that happen to believers. The universality of things he has in view embraces whatever events and circumstances in this life touch any point of their being. They are all made subservient and contributory to the lasting good of those that love God. Nay more, it would appear from the context that the Apostle has specially and prominently in view all the afflictive events and trying dispensations which happen to them. He speaks much throughout of the sufferings to which his fellow believers were subject, and even goes so far as to summon up and anticipate all the most trying circumstances, and the most formidable forces which could afflict and oppress them. And withal, he proclaims them more than conquerors through him that loved them. How often do the Scriptures teach us that the greater the sufferings of believers on earth for righteousness' sake, the higher will be their exaltation in glory. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." We know not the unseen good which the sufferings of life may be working out for those who love God. God only knows. The Apostle's words may have a wider compass still, and may include in their range the universal order of things, which is all under the management and control of God. Could we survey all the bearings of things upon each other in this universe, all the interrelated laws and ramifying influences, we might be astonished to find how slight a touch will move the whole network to given ends and uses. And it is no incred-

ible doctrine even in these scientific days, but a truth quite apparent to whoever will try to discern in the matter, that God is managing this universe, to the extent that is visible to us at least, in the interest of those who love him, who serve him, who are his loyal and dutiful children. To others there may be temporary benefit; but lasting and everlasting good to these only. Thus far then we seem to apprehend the teaching of the Apostle, that to those who love, and whom he has called to glory, in accordance with his purpose or plan, in a past eternity, all things work together for good.

Let us advance to further proof of this truth given in the following verse: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." The Apostle's words are a further development in the revelation of the divine intention and plan. It is worthy of observation, however, that the verbs in these two verses *did foreknow*, *did predestinate*, *called*, *justified*, *glorified*, are in the indefinite tense, i. e., they express the thing abstractly, without any strict reference to time, whether past, present, or future. The tense that was used in Greek for the indefinite tense was the aorist tense. In our language, it is the present tense that is used for the indefinite tense. Therefore those passages might with great propriety have been put in the present tense in our translation. Moreover, whom he predestinates, them he also calls; and whom he calls, them he also justifies; and whom he justifies, them he also glorifies.

Some brethren here may not understand the process, but you may see at least from the last of these verbs that the Apostle means to express indefiniteness as to time. "And whom he justified them he also glorified." Now it is not true that all whom God hath foreknown and called, he hath already glorified. Nay, it is not true of any of them, if the glorification referred to is the final glorification of body and soul, which seems evident. But the Apostle means to express himself indefinitely, stating the fact without reference to time. The same tense which the Apostle here employs is in many other parts of Scripture translated by our present tense. To take only one example, Jesus says, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered." Instead of the expression, "he was cast forth as a branch and was withered," we have here our present tense to translate what Jesus meant to express as an abstract truth without reference to time. It is well to remember that the verbs in our text are in the original. Of course, as to the divine acts themselves, it was in the past God foreknew, and did predestinate, it is in the present he calls, and it is in the future he will justify and glorify. They are put in the one unvarying tense by the Apostle because it is the action of God Paul means to assert, not the time.

But let us proceed to the clause, "For whom he did foreknow." You see how this verse hangs on to the preceding by the word "for," which introduces a reason for what has been stated. The word "whom," then, "whom he did foreknow," evidently refers back to those the Apostle has been speaking of, those who love God, and are the called according to his purpose. It is the lovers of God whom God "foreknew" and whom he predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son. There is nothing unequal in that doctrine after all, is there? Nothing to deter us, nothing to darken the character of our God. Besides, do not mistake the import of the word *foreknow*. Some would almost confound it in meaning with the word *predestinate* which follows, and say that it is the foreknowledge of God which makes everything necessary, and brings everything to pass. Now, the foreknowledge of God does not *make* or *cause*; it is perceptive; it apprehends. God's foreknowledge is his all-apprehending, and all-comprehending intelligence of everything past, present and to come, directed to the future. God foreknew the sins men would commit; does his foreknowledge therefore bring these sins about? Is he the author of sin? God forbid. It is man in the free-agency with which God endowed him who is their author. If we might argue from the finite up to the infinite, as we sometimes do, if it were possible for you to foresee with absolute certainty any event which would transpire in the political future of your country, or of any other nation, would there be any sense in saying that your foreknowledge brought it about? If I throw a ball up into the air I may be said at the moment to foreknow that it will come down again. But does my foreknowledge bring it down. No, sir, it is brought down by a force outside of myself—by the law of gravitation. So, though God foreknew every sin and every transgression of my life, his foreknowledge did not bring them to pass. I, in the voluntary misuse of my God-given powers—freedom and responsibility—which brought them about—I am the guilty party. It would be to introduce the deepest error into our thinking out of this subject, and vitiate our entire mental processes if we confused things that differ so widely as God's foreknowledge and his acts of predestination. In the exercise of his absolute prescience, his infinite omniscience, God foreknew those favored persons referred to in our text. But what did he foreknow about them?—for it is the simple sense of the passage that there was something peculiar about them that distinguished them in his foreknowledge from others. God foreknew all others as well as them; but about them he foreknew some-

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