

THE FOREORDINATION OF GOD

by John T. Lewis

The foreordination of God was simply God's eternal purpose, out of which was evolved the great scheme of man's redemption in Christ. Before the foundation of the world God Almighty, the great Architect, worked out, in his own mind, the plans and specifications by which the church of God should be built. God foreordained, predestinated, or predetermined from the beginning that certain characters should be put into the church; but not that certain individuals should be saved and certain others should be lost, as the God-dishonoring Calvinistic theory puts it.

Although the plans and specifications of the church were completed, and set before God before man was, they remained a mystery hid in God, till He "revealed them unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (Eph. 3: 5). To illustrate, an architect conceives, in his own mind, a magnificent building, he works out, and completes the plans and specifications, decreeing not that certain stones, or certain pieces of timber should go into the building; but rather that certain grades or kinds of material should go into the building. The plans and specifications are perfected and set before the architect's mind as a complete building before the ground is ever broken for the erection of the real building. The architect's drawing of the building would be as much like the building as a picture made of it after it was completed. However, the plans and specifications are always a mystery hid in the mind of the architect till he sees fit to reveal them. Now, if the creature can do this, what is it that the omnipotent and omniscient Creator can not do?

Let us now study God's plans. "And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8: 28). In the study of this subject we must keep in mind God's purpose and his call, for it was according to God's eternal purpose that only the called should go into the church. "For whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren; and whom He foreordained, them, He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified" (Rom. 8: 29, 30). Here we have the scheme of man's redemption, as it was perfected in God's mind, and set before him as completed, before the foundation of the world. From this plan we learn that man's eternal destiny depends upon God doing three things for him. God must call him, justify him, and finally glorify him. But God will do neither one of these things unless man looks to Him for salvation.

"To the end that ye should walk worthily of God, who calleth you into his own kingdom and glory" (I Thes. 2:12). This shows that God call! people "into his own kingdom and glory." But do not jump to the conclusion that His call is something mysterious, "better felt than told." Let us learn from God's plan how he calls. "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, for that God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; whereunto he called you through our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thes. 2: 13, 14). From this we learn that we were "chosen from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." We, who? Every responsible being on God's earth, that will accept the Gospel call.

Because God has foreordained, or decreed beforehand, that man should obtain the "glory of our Lord Jesus Christ," only through the Gospel call. And thus, according to God's eternal purpose, it must be. We can not change His decrees.

Therefore Jesus Christ said: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16: 15, 16). That is, give every responsible being a chance to hear and accept the Gospel call. According to the foreordination of God, man is a free moral agent, and must accept, or reject the Gospel call for himself. "And to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus; who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (II Thes.. 1: 7-9). Therefore God has predetermined that every accountable being must obey the Gospel, or "suffer eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might." This destruction is not annihilation; but an eternal separation from the "face of the Lord and from the glory of His might." Like the rich man, if we are lost, our plaintive whines, although many and pathetic, will never draw "God's face and the glory of his might" toward us.

Therefore God has foreordained that all preparations to meet Him must be made in this life, and in obedience to the Gospel plan. "Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, He became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation" (Heb. 5: 8, 9). Remember that God has foreordained that you should obey His Son. Have you obeyed Him? "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (I John 2: 4). Of course, this does not mean that you can not tell the truth about anything; but it means that God's truth is not in you. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16: 16). If you have believed and been baptized according to the specifications of the great Architect, you have the right to claim that you have been pardoned, and therefore know your Saviour; but if you have not believed and been baptized in obedience to His command, and claim that you know Him, He says you are a liar and the truth is not in you. Going into an "inquiry room" at a union meeting, or "hitting the sawdust trail," or "joining the church of your choice" is not obeying Him. These things are not in the blue print, the New Testament, and therefore were not ordained by the great Architect, God Almighty. When we change the plans in any way they cease to be God's plans, become man's plans, and must be rejected.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ; even as he chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love: having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved: in whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, making known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ,

the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth; in him, I say, in whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will; to the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ: in whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the Gospel of your salvation-in whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God's own possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1: 3-114).

The above is the longest sentence in the Bible, so far as I know, and it is full of the foreordination of God. From it we learn that all spiritual blessings are in Christ, that is, in his spiritual body or church. So when you are thinking about spiritual blessings you may eliminate from your mind every other institution on the face of God's earth - "every spiritual blessing is in Him." There are other institutions that can give socials, render programs of different kinds, to entertain you; but when they offer spiritual blessings they offer something they do not have, and therefore can not give. We also learn that God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." This choice, of course, was simply in God's purpose or plan. We learn, too, that we are to be "holy and without blemish before him in love." This is the kind of material that God decreed or foreordained should go into the church. From verse 7 we learn that "in him we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses. according to the riches of his grace." Outside of Him there is no blood, and therefore no forgiveness or redemption. Remember, now, that so far as responsible beings are concerned, being in Christ, and being in His church is one and the same thing. We can not be in His church and not be in Him.

Now, since "every spiritual blessing is in Christ," and "our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses," certainly we want to learn how God has foreordained that responsible beings must enter Christ. "In whom ye also having heard the word of the truth, the Gospel of our salvation." Therefore we must learn from "the truth, the Gospel of our salvation," how to enter Christ. Of course, you might say we enter Christ one way, and I might say we enter Him another way, and both of us might be wrong, so we will say nothing; but let Paul tell us how he, and the Romans got into Christ. "Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried, therefore, with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father ' so we also might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6: 3, 4). Therefore if Paul and the Romans were "baptized into Christ Jesus" by being "buried with him through baptism into death," we conclude that that is God's ordained way of entering His kingdom. That there may be no doubt left in your mind as to this fact, I quote Gal. 3: 26, :27, "For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ." God foreordained that all spiritual blessings should be in Christ, and he also foreordained that we should be "baptized into Christ." Who will change his decrees?

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any Gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema. As we have said before, so say I now again, If any man preacheth unto you any gospel other than that which ye received, let him be anathema" (Gal. 1: 8, 9). Therefore men or angels can only incur the wrath of God Almighty by changing His plans or decrees, and can save nobody.

"For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you Gentiles-if so be that ye have heard of the dispensation of that grace of God which was given me to you-ward; how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote before in few words, whereby, when ye read ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ; which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to-wit: that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow~partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel, whereof I was made a minister. according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of his power" Eph. 3: 1-7). Here we learn again that God's perfect plan or scheme of redemption, which was complete in His own mind "before the foundation of the world," was a "mystery not made known unto the sons of man," until it was revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." A mystery once revealed can no longer be called a mystery. Therefore it would be ridiculous to speak of the plan of salvation as a mystery, since it has "been announced unto us through them that preached the Gospel by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven" (Read I Peter 1: 9-12).

"The mystery which for ages hath been hid in God who created all things" was simply the Gospel, which is God's power "unto salvation to every one that believeth." In obedience to the Gospel we become "fellow-heirs, fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus." "For I make known to you, brethren, as touching the Gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1: 11, 12). Paul received his ministry, and the Gospel which he preached, from Jesus Christ, not from man. Paul was sent "by Jesus Christ "to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God who created all things" (Eph. 3: 9). Therefore Paul's teaching was plain and simple enough for "all men to see," or his ministry was a failure. Which do you believe?

I believe every responsible being, that is honest with himself, and with his God can not only see, but will see, and obey the Gospel of God. God foreordained that man should see, believe and obey the Gospel, and I had just as soon question the existence of the eternal God Himself as to doubt His foreordination. My fellow-traveler to eternity, you now have before you God's eternal purpose and His decrees. Will you obey the Gospel and be saved? or will you reject it and be damned?

—*Living Sermons: A Book of Sermons by Representative Evangelists of the Church of Christ*, Vol. II, pp. 121-129.