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Reformation
& **REVIVAL**
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PREDESTINATION

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1. To encourage *reformation* in local Christian churches worldwide.
2. To promote the cause of *revival* and spiritual awakening through prayer and the provision of resources to aid Christian leaders.

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The views expressed in this publication should be considered as the personal opinions of the authors and are not to be taken as an official editorial perspective.

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John H. Armstrong

Editor:

Stephen Board

Associate Editors:

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T. M. Moore

Thomas N. Smith

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Design and Production:

Ragont Design

Subscriptions Manager

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PREDESTINATION

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INTRODUCTION



John H. Armstrong

No subject is more likely to elicit disagreement, even heated disagreement, than predestination. It is not only a subject hard to discuss, but it is notoriously difficult to define.

The word means "to determine beforehand." The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* adds, after the above definition, that to predestine means, "to appoint as by fate." The problem with this language, at least for a Christian theology, is simple. I do not know a single Christian theologian who accepts this second definition as biblical. Even the highest of the high Calvinists will not use the term "fate" to describe predestination. It is precisely here that a great deal of popular debate needs to begin. Whatever Christians mean when they speak of predestination, they are not speaking of fatalism. Fatalism involves the notion of "an arbitrary decree." It also carries the idea of "submission to all that happens *as inevitable*." Again, the word fate is not consistent with the complete witness of Scripture.

Evangelical Christian explanations are not always helpful either. Millard Erickson defines predestination as "the decision of God in choosing who will be saved and who will be lost" (*Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, 132). *The Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (InterVarsity Press, 1999) is better when it notes that predestination is "the sovereign determination and foreknowledge of God" (94).

No biblically-faithful Reformed theologian would ever agree that there is a *contradiction* between the sovereign predestinating activity of God and the responsibility of human beings. A paradox, or antinomy, yes. But a contradiction, no. Predestination is not a way of escaping the clearest implications of human freedom, though theologians will differ in how they explain that freedom.

Reformed theologian I. John Hesselink sounds the right note:

We get into serious difficulties and cause needless stumbling blocks whenever we try to explain the mystery of God's sovereignty and human freedom in neat, logical terms. This is one of the problems with scholastic approaches where Aristotelian logic seeks to force biblical paradoxes into a philosophical straightjacket (*On Being Reformed*, 39-40).

It is true that John Calvin taught double-predestination, which many do not see as the clear teaching of the Bible. But my friend John Hesselink is right to conclude that Calvin's real goal was "to magnify the sovereign, free grace of God" (*On Being Reformed*, 41). May this goal be ever before you, the reader, as you wrestle with this great theme of predestination.