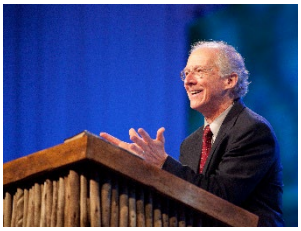
The Doctrine of Election

Does God Predestine People to Hell?

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Ask Pastor John: Episode 450



A podcast listener named Steve writes in to ask this very pointed question: "Pastor John, are some people predestined for hell?"

Before I give my clear and definite answer, it really is crucial that a few preliminary things be said that are always lurking right there below the surface, ready to turn the answer into something it is not. So here are some preliminary points, then a few Bible verses, and then an answer.

PRELIMINARY CLARIFICATIONS

There are many people for whom a "yes" answer to this question — yes, he predestines people to hell — would have to mean God is unjust and he is not good. So a positive answer to that question is simply not possible for them. In fact, I would say if that is who you are, if God's predestining who he saved and who perishes can only mean that he is unrighteous or unjust or not good, you shouldn't believe, even if it is true. I know that sounds strange. Only believe it if you see it taught in the Bible and if it does not undermine other true and important things taught about God in the Bible. And I know that sounds almost outrageous to people to say, don't believe it even if it is true. But I am not eager to undermine anyone's confidence in the goodness and the justice of God. And I know what it is like to see these things at first and not see how they fit with his justice and goodness. And I have wept. I mean, my early twenties was a season of great torment mentally and emotionally over theological issues like this. I have tasted what it means to put my hands on my desk, face in my hands and cry out to God: I don't get this.

So I want to be patient with people. I don't want to undermine anyone's confidence in the righteousness and the goodness of God. That is my first preliminary.

A second preliminary thing would be that God never, never sends, never will send anyone to hell unjustly. No one will ever be in hell who does not deserve to be there. And this fact that they deserve to be there will be open and plain in all the universe in that day.

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"Everyone who perishes has chosen sin in such a way as to be truly responsible for his choice and truly deserving of judgment."

Third preliminary. This means that if God ordains ahead of time that anyone will perish he does it in a way which is probably inscrutable to us and beyond our understanding. He does it in a way that the person is really responsible, really accountable for his choices, really guilty, really deserving of punishment. That is the hardest thing to grasp. But it is essential if we are going to believe all of Scripture, I believe. Everyone who perishes has chosen sin in such a way as to be truly responsible for his choice and truly guilty and truly deserving of judgment. That is preliminary point number three.

And here is the last preliminary. We live in a time where it is very difficult for people to let God be God. Even to conceive of a God with this much authority, this much complexity, this much power is almost impossible for many modern people. Beware of being stopped from believing the Bible by being a child of your time.

GOD ANSWERS "YES"

Now let me just give you some texts and draw a conclusion:

- Ephesians 1:11: "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will." All things. Now the question is, does all things work according to the counsel of his will include the final destiny of individuals? I think so.

- Proverbs 16:4: "The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble." God has made the wicked for the day of trouble.

- 1 Peter 2:7-8: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.' They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do." They disobey the word as they were destined to do.

- Jude 4: "Certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God."

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- 2 Peter 2:3: "And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep."

- Romans 9:11: Jacob and Esau "were not yet born and had done nothing good or bad — in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works, but because of him who calls — she was told" — this is before they were born or had done anything good or evil — "'the older will serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'" That is a quote from Malachi 1:2–3, which ought to be read in context where the text makes clear that God is sovereignly before they were born choosing Jacob over Esau, but showing that Esau's wickedness was real and blameworthy and he was responsible for it.

- Romans 9:22: "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory."

So I am leaving those texts pretty much uncommented on. Just holding them out there. My answer is yes. God does determine from eternity who will be saved, who will be lost. But he does it in ways that are mysterious to us so that on that day no one will find any legitimate fault with God. No. The redeemed will know we are saved utterly by grace while deserving hell and the rest will know that they suppressed much knowledge of God's grace and they deserve to perish.

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