

What Does the Bible Say About Predestination vs. Free Will?

In discussing [predestination](#) vs. [free will](#), many people so strongly prefer one side that they virtually reject the possibility of the other's having even a hint of truth. Those who strongly emphasize the sovereignty of God in predestining who will be saved sometimes take a position that resembles hard determinism or fatalism. Those who emphasize the free will of humanity come close to denying the sovereignty of God. However, if the terms are understood biblically, the discussion should not be predestination vs. free will, but rather predestination and not-entirely-free will.

Passages such as [Romans 8:29–30](#) and [Ephesians 1:5–11](#) explicitly teach that God predestines some to salvation. God predestining who will be saved is based on His sovereignty, unchanging character ([Malachi 3:6](#)), foreknowledge ([Romans 8:29](#), [11:2](#)), love ([Ephesians 1:4-5](#)), and plan and pleasure ([Ephesians 1:5](#)). God's desire is that all would be saved and come to repentance ([1 Timothy 2:4](#), [2 Peter 3:9](#)). He offers salvation to everyone ([Titus 2:11](#)), yet we know that not everyone will be saved. How this all works together can be debated, but predestination itself is absolutely a biblical teaching. Numerous other New Testament passages also refer to believers' being chosen or elected to salvation ([Matthew 24:22](#), [31](#); [Mark 13:20](#), [27](#); [Romans 8:33](#); [9:11](#); [11:5–7](#), [28](#); [Ephesians 1:11](#); [Colossians 3:12](#); [1 Thessalonians 1:4](#); [1 Timothy 5:21](#); [2 Timothy 2:10](#); [Titus 1:1](#); [1 Peter 1:1–2](#); [2:9](#); [2 Peter 1:10](#)).

Yet the Bible also teaches that people are accountable for what they choose ([Joshua 24:14-15](#), [Luke 10:42](#), [Hebrews 11:24-25](#)). How does that work with “free” will? The question we must ask is what does it mean to have a “free” will? One difficulty in the discussion of predestination vs. free will is the common understanding of free will being the absolute freedom to do anything we choose. This is not how the Bible presents free will, nor does it match reality. Our freedom is always limited by our circumstances and our nature: e.g., we are limited in our “freedom” to fly because we are not, by nature, birds; and we are subject to physical laws such as gravity and aerodynamics. The Bible teaches that without Christ we are “dead in our trespasses and sins” ([Ephesians 2:1](#)). If we are spiritually dead, surely that impacts our decision-making. [John 6:44](#) says that, unless God draws, no one can come to Christ for salvation. If the decision whether to trust in Christ is impossible without God's “interference,” our will is not totally “free.” Yet God offers salvation to everyone ([Titus 2:11](#)) and has made Himself plain to everyone so that everyone is without excuse ([Romans 1:19-20](#)).

We have a free will in the sense that we are capable of making moral choices. Our decision-making is impacted by numerous factors, though: e.g., our sin nature, our upbringing, our intellect, our training/education, our biology, our psychology, etc. So human beings do not truly have a free will, as popularly defined. We have a will. We can make decisions. Biblically speaking, we have the responsibility to respond to what God has revealed to us, including His call to believe the gospel ([John 1:12](#); [3:16](#); [Acts 16:31](#); [Romans 10:9–10](#); [Revelation 22:17](#)). But, again, our will is not truly “free” because we have constraints that shape our decisions.

Predestination is an explicitly biblical doctrine. God is indeed sovereign over everything, including who is saved. Concurrently, we are genuinely responsible for our decisions related to salvation. These are not mutually exclusive or irreconcilable truths. In the Bible, God repeatedly calls on us to exercise our will and trust in Christ for salvation, and we should pursue obedience to those commands regardless of how well we do or don't understand predestination.

“What Does the Bible Say About Predestination vs. Free Will?” Got Questions website. <https://www.gotquestions.org/predestination-vs-free-will.html>.