

# The Predestined Life

by: Ronald L. Dart

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Are all the events of your life already written down somewhere? Does an inexorable fate drive you onwards to some destiny that you can't foresee or know? If something really terrible happens to you, was it written that it had to be that way? According to *The Living Bible*, the Psalmist writes, "You saw me before I was born, and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in your book."

Now, that's a profound thought. That before I was ever born, every day of my life was scheduled for me. According to a popular book that's out now on Christian living, that applies to you. The author said (the author is Rick Warren), "God made you for a reason. He also decided when you would be born, and how long you would live. He planned the days of your life in advance, choosing the exact time of your birth and your death. The Bible says, 'You saw me before I was born, and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in your book.'"

That's in Rick Warren's rather famous book now, *The Purpose-Driven Life*. Actually, that's what *The Living Bible* says. *The Living Bible* is a paraphrase for easy reading. And it's also an interpretation of the Scriptures. Here is how the King James version renders the verse. It's Psalm 139, verse 16. "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." Marginal reading says, "And in your book all my members were written which in what days they should be fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."

So we have a substantive difference in what two different sources think the Psalmist is trying to tell us. I think that difference arises out of the theological assumptions of the translators. I believe translators try hard for objectivity. But sometimes they take us down the wrong path because they believe that's what the Psalmist was trying to say.

Now, what's the ordinary reader to make of all this? Well, let's consider the implications of Rick Warren's thesis regarding this passage. The passage starts off by saying, "God made you for a reason." That's the first premise. Now, forgive me for a small quibble. Actually, God didn't *make* you. He *made* Adam and Eve. Everyone else has been *born*. It's a small quibble, but it's very relevant to the discussion.

Continuing, "He also decided when you would be born, how long you would live. He planned the days of your life in advance, choosing the exact time of your birth and your death." Now, implicit in this is the suggestion that your mother and your father had nothing

to do with that decision. Notice I didn't say they had little to do with it. They had *nothing* to say about it. Now, here's my problem. Here's a single mother. She got pregnant as a young teen and had a baby. God chose the exact time of this child's birth, and therefore the circumstances, as well. So God chose an illegitimate birth for this child.

Now, one might argue that it is God's will that some children be born out of wedlock, but you're going to have a real interesting job trying to explain why God would ever want to do that, or why a good God would do that. And that raises another question of at least passing interest. Why would God will to have three times as many illegitimate children born now than he wanted to have 50 years ago? How on earth would that fit into some divine plan?

Then, Rick Warren cites *The Living Bible*. "You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in your book." Now, that sounds wonderful. It sounds incredibly wonderful that God would care enough about us that he would do all that for us. But it raises some terrible questions. If you had been a Jew, born in Germany, in, say, 1920, would God have recorded every day of your life up to the time you went up in the smoke of an incinerator in Auschwitz? That's what we're dealing with here. If God, from the very beginning, scheduled every day of your life, then that means he scheduled a lot of poor, Jewish children, mothers, infants, dads, old men, old women. He scheduled them to go to Auschwitz, to be humiliated, and to go up in smoke in an incinerator.

If you were to die in terrible pain from breast cancer at age 30, did God write that it must be so? It's an interesting question, isn't it? If God is making these decisions, then you raise the problem of *theodicy*. That is, how can a good God allow the presence of evil in the world? More to the point, how can a good God write that a little 12 year old girl be kidnapped under the cameras of a car wash, and then be brutally murdered a few hours later? Why would God write that into her life and the lives of her parents?

Now, this leads me to think maybe the King James boys got it right, after all. They said, "Your eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect, and in your book all my members were written, which in the days were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." What the Psalmist is saying is that when you were just an embryo, all your members were written. We already know that this is true, because everything you are going to be is contained in the DNA in a new embryo. You have identity from the get-go. God knows who you are. He wrote into your genetic code what you can and will be. All your members, that is, your legs, your arms, your hair color, your eye color, your fingernails, the hair on your arm, were all written in data, before any of them existed in fact. We know this, and the Psalmist has just said exactly the same thing in poetry. Now, if instead of saying God made you for a reason, we say, God has a purpose in your life, we would say something just as useful, and considerably more accurate.

Rick Warren also said, "God planned where you'd be born and where you'd live for his purpose. Your race and nationality are no accident. God left no detail to chance. He planned it all for his purpose." Now, you could be excused for asking, okay, here's a baby born in west Africa to a mother who has AIDS. The child will die at age four. How, pray tell, was God's purpose advanced by this birth and short life? How is God's purpose in a child's life advanced when a child is born with Spinabifida and dies within a matter of hours? God planned this birth, and this death for his purpose?

Perhaps the answer to this question might be that this is only true for a select few. It was true for the man who wrote the Psalms, we would say, but not necessarily for others. But that hardly makes us feel any better. How can we know whether that's true of us, or if we're just an accident of nature? But I don't think that's what the author is trying to say. It isn't my purpose to run down Rick Warren's book. By all account, it seems to be touching many lives, and changing many lives, and perhaps helping many people. But I can't help asking about some of the basic theology of the book. I haven't read Rick Warren extensively, so I'm not sure where he is on this question, but for generations, a lot of Christians have believed in a kind of predestination that is based on certain Scriptures.

As I said, I haven't read Rick Warren's book extensively, so I'm not sure where he is on this question. A lot of Christians have believed in a kind of predestination that is based on certain Scriptures like Ephesians, chapter one, verse three. Here's what Paul said. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." Now, there those who take this passage to mean this: that there are some people as named individuals, were chosen by God before the foundation of the world. That these individuals were predestined to become children of God. Now, the corollary of this is, that there are some people, then, who are predestined to *not* become the children of God.

Is it reasonable to think that before the world was made, God predestined the *whole thing*, with some to be saved, some to be lost, some to go to heaven, and some, God forbid, to go to hell? Consider the implications of this. This means that an elaborate script was written before there was a plant in the Garden of Eden. And the script included every man, every woman, and child who would ever live. That means that your mother and your father had to meet, get married, or not, have sex at just the right moment in time, so that you would be born according to the Scripture. And not only they, but every person between your parents and Adam were scripted to meet, fall in love or lust, and have sex at a predetermined time, all so that you could be born.

Now, don't imagine for a moment that I don't think God could have done that. One who could say the word and create the universe can do whatever he pleases. But honestly, I do

have my doubts that God did it that way. It isn't that just a few proof texts deny it. It's that the whole Bible, from start to finish, is inconsistent with it. Take the Apostle Paul as just one example. Writing to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians, chapter nine, verses 19 through 22: "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

Paul was profoundly impressed with a simple idea. That the sacrifices he made would make a difference in the lives of real people. Now I ask, does this sound like these peoples' lives were written in advance? If all their lives, if every day of their life was written down by God beforehand, why in the world was it necessary for Paul to go through everything he went through in order to save some? It would even make a difference in the salvation of real people if Paul did or if he didn't. So what could he possibly have meant by what he said to the Ephesians? He has chosen us, he said, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will.

What does he mean? Well, Paul couldn't possibly have meant that each person was chosen before the foundation of the world, or what he said to the Corinthians makes no sense—that by his work and his sacrifice he might save people who otherwise might have been lost. Perhaps what he is saying is this. That before the foundation of the world, God chose that there would be a body of believers in Paul's day who would be holy and without blame. That having made that choice, God would bring it about. That we are predestined in the sense that some would be here, and we are those people. But we might not have been, had different choices been made. Others would hold these places, not us.

Then there's another passage from Paul that raises this question again. It's Romans eight, verse 28. He said, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Now, you should really think about that, because it doesn't mean that everything that happens to us is going to be good. What he says is that everything that happens to us can be worked for good, if we know God and are called according to his purpose. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might 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."

Now, what are we supposed to make of this? There are two problems to consider here. One is the question of time. When does God foreknow the individual, and when does he predestine that individual? Some say, from the foundation of the world, but that's inconsistent with the rest of the Bible. It's fair to say that God knows who we are from the

womb. It makes no sense to say that he knows us before that. Why? Because we weren't there to be known.

The second question is, what is meant by "predestinate?" If you buy a train ticket from Toronto to Vancouver (I used to say from Chicago to Los Angeles, but I don't think you can get that train ride anymore.), your destination is predetermined. That is, you are predestined to go to Vancouver. But if you get off the train in Calgary, and don't get back on, you're not going to make it to the destination. Now, superficially, this passage sounds like once you are on the train, you can't get off, but in context, what it is really saying is, that God will infallibly take the train to its destination, he will infallibly do his part, but it doesn't mean you have to stay on the train. You can get off.

Let me review it again. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." There are some people whom God knows ahead of time, and determines ahead of time that he wants to be conformed to the image of this Son. How many? God only knows. He does intend that Jesus be the firstborn among many brethren. And once he has made that decision, to predestine these people, he will call them, and when he calls them, he will justify them, and when he justifies them, he will also glorify them.

But I think you have to understand, that whatever else happens, God will not let us down. Everything happens in our lives, whether it be good or bad, he will work out for your good in the end. He will do whatever it takes to bring you to the destination, unless you push him away. Unless you get off the train and refuse to get back on. You do have the freedom to do that. Why would you? God only knows.

Here is the problem with the idea of predestination as it is commonly believed. It relieves you of all responsibility for what you do. It takes all choice away from you. In the extreme position, it means that some people are born for heaven, and some people are born for hell. It leaves a lot of people wondering, what in the world is the point? If God knew before I was born what I was going to do, if every day of my life was written down, if it was written down in the book that I would turn to the left or turn to the right before I ever got into the car, and if by turning to the right I got into a terrible accident and was killed, that God wrote all that down, and I had no choice whatsoever, in any of these things. It opens the door, too, for people to accuse God of the Holocaust.

Sure. It was all God's fault. God wrote it down. How could a good God allow something like that to happen in his world, people want to know. How could a good God allow something terrible to happen to a little girl who gets kidnapped out of a car wash on her way home from a sleepover? God wrote it, they think. God did it. It's all God's fault.

It kind of relieves us of the responsibility, I guess, of saying, maybe we should have taught our children better. Maybe we should have resisted Hitler earlier. Maybe we should

have stood up for the Jews long before we did. One night, not so long ago, two couples from my neighborhood were out at the Senior Prom. They were drinking for the evening, and as they headed home, the driver ran off the road. A girl and a boy were killed. For a long time, I drove by that every day because it was on my way to the office. And I saw two little, white crosses on the fence line along that road. Can you perhaps understand why the parents might blame God for that accident? But can you see that the real blame lies with the boy who chose to drive while he was drinking, and with the kids who were with him who allowed him to do it, and who were willing to ride with him? Can you see the real blame lies somewhere besides God. God's only responsibility in that accident was in leaving the kids free to have it. There's an answer buried deeply in all this.

How can a God who is all good allow evil in a world he created? Theologians call this the question of *theodicy*. Don't ask me why. But the answer to it lies in two simple propositions that anyone can understand. One, God is good. Two, God made man free. Unless you understand the last half of that equation, nothing in the world makes any sense. You know, when I read people who tell me God wrote down every day of my life in advance, I can begin to understand why the question of *theodicy* gets raised. Why people start arguing, "Oh, well, if God was good, he wouldn't have allowed this to happen." Because they think that God is responsible for everything that happens in the world. In one sense, he is. He is responsible because he made man free. But the things that are done are wholly man's to do.

Now, why would God make man free in that way? I'll go back to the Apostle Paul again. Writing in Romans, the same chapter, chapter eight, he said, "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed" (Romans 8:19, NIV). Everything, the whole world and everything in it, is waiting for the sons of God! "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope" (Romans 8:20, NIV). Now, what he's saying here is that God didn't cause it to be this way. God didn't want man to do the things that hurt him. He said the creation was *subjected* to frustration. This choice was not made by the creation, but by the will of God. "That the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Romans 8:20-21, NIV).

It sounds strange in a way. But what he is saying is this. God made man free. Man blew it. He created a world of decay and corruption. But, in the process of time, God is going to turn it around. "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:22-23, NIV). God subjected the creation to frustration in hope. He had a hope for things that would come out of all this.

And that brings me back to what I said just a short time before. God will not let you down. Paul said, "All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose." Everything that happens in your life, whether it be good or bad, he

will work it out for your good in the end. It may not be fun. It may be very unpleasant. It may be very painful. But God will do whatever it takes from his side to bring you to the destination unless you push him away.

But there's one thing you must never forget. What you do makes a difference.

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