Question 5

What do we do with fears, worries or doubts about Predestination or Determinism?

† Some Definitions:

Predestination and determinism are not the same thing, but they do overlap. Predestination emphasizes God's purpose when it comes to salvation—who is saved and who isn't and why? Determinism emphasizes how every detail and circumstance of our lives unfold—is everything predetermined by God a head of time? But both can raise unsettling questions: Is my future already decided? Do my choices really matter? What does this mean for my salvation?

- Read Romans 8:28-30 – Predestination is a very biblical word.

- PREDESTINATION raises a difficult question: If God desires everyone's salvation, and salvation is entirely His work, why isn't everyone saved? We may wonder: Does salvation finally depend on my choice? Or does God choose some for salvation and others for condemnation? The dilemma quickly becomes personal: **How can I be sure His promises are for me and that I belong to Him?**

  Different Christian traditions explain this tension differently. Some describe salvation in terms of *synergism*—human cooperation with God's grace. Catholic theology and some evangelical traditions give a grace-enabled human response a role, though they understand that role differently. Neither teaches that people can save themselves apart from God's grace, yet human effort is still emphasized.

  Reformed theology emphasizes *monergism*: salvation is God's work alone. Classical Reformed teaching places both election and the passing over of others within God's sovereign decree, while maintaining that those condemned are judged for their sins. Many Reformed Christians also affirm God's desire for everyone's salvation, distinguishing that desire from His decree.

  Lutherans likewise confess that salvation is entirely God's work—monergistic. However, we teach election to salvation but reject election to damnation. We hold together these biblical truths: **God desires all people to be saved; salvation is entirely His gift through Jesus Christ; and those who are lost bear responsibility for their sin and rejection of His grace.**

  The question remains: Why does one person resist God's grace while another is brought to faith? Lutheran teaching does not resolve this mystery by crediting the believer's better choice or by saying God never desired the unbeliever's salvation. Instead, it directs us away from speculation about God's hidden purposes and toward His heart revealed in Jesus Christ.

- DETERMINISM, though not a biblical word, is the view that every event—including every human decision—is determined by prior causes or conditions. When we picture this as God deciding every detail beforehand, troubling questions arise: Are our choices meaningful? Is God responsible for evil? When tragedy strikes, must we simply say, "It's God's will"? These questions show why we must distinguish biblical teaching about election to salvation from the idea that God scripts everything we do.

  Yet meaningful choices do not mean that God is absent from our lives. Scripture does not ordinarily name the spouse we should marry, the home we should buy, or the career we should pursue, but it gives us wisdom for those decisions and assures us of God's continuing care. **Choosing in everyday life, however, is different from choosing to believe in Christ.** This is where the question of "free will" becomes crucial. Scripture describes us in our sin as spiritually blind, dead, and enemies of God. We cannot bring ourselves to faith; our wills are bound by sin. Through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit opens our blind eyes, brings our dead hearts to life, and turns our rebellious minds toward Christ. By His Word, He creates the very faith we cannot produce ourselves. We may choose what to do each day—even what color socks to wear—but our salvation rests not on our decision, but on God's grace in Christ.

What does Scripture say?

➢ **1 John 5:11-12**
And this is the testimony: that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

➢ Read also **Ephesians 1:3-14**.

† **What threads connect these passages to our discussion of God's choice, our response, and our assurance of salvation? Notice who is doing the saving, the repeated phrase "in Christ" or "in Him," and the role of hearing and believing the Gospel. How do both John and Paul direct us toward confidence in God's promises rather than speculation about His hidden plans or some emphasis on human effort?**

➢ See **John 3:16-21**.

Jesus says that people loved darkness rather than light. Big surprise. Not! But we shouldn't picture only "those people" out there. Apart from God's grace, darkness is the instinctive home for all of us. We are sinners who would rather keep our sin hidden than have it exposed. Yet God loved the world and sent His Son—not to condemn the world, but to save it.

Coming into the light means giving up our hiding places and admitting, "Here is my sin. I need a Savior." That's not really a noble work on our part so much as it is just acknowledging the truth—a truth about as obvious as the sun in the sky on a hot Texas day in the middle of August. Living in this truth means agreeing with what God says about our sin and trusting His promise of forgiveness in Christ. **But, again, we cannot take credit for coming into the light.** Verse 21 says that the works of the person who comes into the light have been "carried out in God." The emphasis is not on what we accomplish, but on what God works in us and for us.

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus describes this as being **born of the Spirit** (vv. 5–8). We don't give ourselves spiritual life any more than we give birth to ourselves. Through His Word, the Holy Spirit opens our eyes, brings us to repentance, and creates faith in Christ. We really do confess and believe, but not because we have made ourselves less sinful or more willing than someone else. **Salvation is God's work for us and in us—not something we achieve, but a gift we receive.**

SOME REAL WORLD SENARIOS

① In the world today, people seem to struggle more than ever feeling like the future is already written in stone and unavoidable—that their worth is based on social media likes or follower counts. They might think: I am destined to be alone, dismissed or rejected. Or they might think their genes or background decide if they're going to struggle with depression or addiction. They might think: *"It's in my DNA. I am predestined to ruin my relationships and be unhappy, so why even try?"* **How does our discussion today help answer these questions and doubts?**

② Many young people today feel overwhelmed by a sense of despair, believing that they're caught in an unavoidable, apocalyptic timeline. Concerns about environmental issues, the economy, overpopulation, and pollution fuel the idea that the future is already doomed—damaged beyond repair by previous generations. This leads to the belief that their own choices, goals, and moral efforts are ultimately meaningless in the face of such inevitable disaster. **Based on our discussion today, how can we give them hope?**

③ Then there is the "am-I-actually-a-Christian" OCD that many religious people suffer from. This anxiety often manifests as the need to be constantly checking their internal feelings to see if they "sincerely" believe enough or if they have the "signs" of being one of the elect. They become trapped in a loop of trying to peer into their own hearts to find assurances, rather than looking outward. **How can looking to Jesus help us find our assurance for the future, freedom for the present moment, and joy even in broken situations?**

④ Luther warned that trying to "peek" behind God's curtain—wondering why certain people are saved or lost—creates spiritual anxiety and despair because we're trying to understand divine sovereignty with our limited brains. Instead, he teaches us to look at Jesus—the visible, loving face of God—and trust the promises we can hold onto, like grace, forgiveness, and baptism. **Why is obsessing over God's "secret plans" harmful to our peace?**

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