

APPOINTED TO ETERNAL LIFE

“On the next Sabbath, almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: “I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.”’ Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. **And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed**” (Ac.13:44-48).

I want to discuss the meaning of the highlighted phrase above (v.48). First, it should be obvious that some people are “appointed” to eternal life. Second, those who were so appointed “believed.” Notice the order: first “appointed,” then “believed.” The question is, **“Just who are appointed to eternal life?”** Our Calvinist friends say this refers to “Unconditional Election” – the idea that **specific individuals** are predestined to salvation by the mere decree of God, regardless of anything they have ever done or will do. According to this view, man does not have free will; instead, everything that happens has been predetermined by God.

Before I address the meaning of the text, I want to point out some of the consequences of denying free will. If everything is predestined by God, then all religious discussion is pointless. *The whole point of religious discussion is to persuade – which presupposes free will!* But the Calvinist seeks to persuade those who cannot be persuaded; for God has also predetermined that some will oppose. Ironically, the Calvinist cannot help himself; for they, too, have been predestined to oppose those who disagree. And, if all that is true, then life is one big cosmic joke, inflicted by a cruel God for his own entertainment. He allegedly decrees that some hold one view, and that others oppose; yet neither “side” is capable of persuading the other, for they have been locked into their position by the decree of God! If true, then God is the cruelest being who has ever existed! With that said, let us return to reality...

There is no doubt that God has predetermined who will be saved. But He does NOT predetermine specific individuals to be saved! Instead, He predetermined the KIND of individual who will be saved (i.e. those who love God, Rm.8:28-30). And, He predetermined the REALM of salvation (i.e. those who are in Christ, Ep.1:3-5). Now, you and I must also “determine” or “choose” whom we will serve (Josh.24:15). Will we choose to love God (Jn.14:15)? Will we choose to get into Christ (Ga.3:26-27)? Will we choose to abide in Christ (Jn.15:4-5)? This is the only way to harmonize the election of God with the free will of man!

Now, how does all this apply to the text in question (Ac.13:48)? As I’ve said many times, *“Context always determines meaning!”* Acts 13 is no different. Paul was preaching in the synagogue, in an attempt to persuade people to accept Christ (v.44). As noted earlier, this presupposes free will! Why preach, if man is incapable of responding? Now, notice two reactions to his preaching. First, the Jews: “But when **the Jews saw the multitudes**, they were **filled with envy**; and **contradicting and blaspheming**, they **opposed** the things spoken by Paul” (v.45). Second, the Gentiles: “Now when **the Gentiles heard** this, they were **glad** and **glorified the word** of the Lord” (v.48). Now which of the two groups has God “appointed to eternal life” (v.48b)? Did God determine to save those who oppose Him, or those who gladly hear Him? The answer is obvious, is it not? Those who “heard,” and were “glad,” and “glorified the word” are the very ones who “believed.” Incidentally, notice that hearing, gladness, glorifying, and believing are all things that **man must do** to be saved! In other words, man must accept God’s word before he can be saved! I hope this brief study has helped clarify this important matter.

--Lanny Smith