



Conducted by
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“Would you please comment on the ‘once saved always saved’ belief, held by the ‘Brethren’, or perhaps the ‘falling away’ belief, held by the Church of Christ?”

I am not normally given to commenting on other religious groups but I feel that in this case some background information is desirable so that we can understand the problem posed by the questioner, and perhaps say something meaningful relative to the question.

The “Brethren” originated in Dublin in 1825; the first congregation was established in England in Plymouth in 1831, hence the name ‘Plymouth Brethren.’ Religious history records that Edward Cronin and A. N. Groves in Dublin, and Benjamin Wills Newton and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles in Plymouth, were the founders. Later they were joined by John Nelson Darby (a former clergyman in the Church of Ireland).

Unfortunately, it appears that there was some sort of conflict between Darby and Newton, partly on doctrine, and partly on ecclesiastical policy, and the outcome was that the followers of Darby became known as the ‘Exclusive Brethren’ with a close central authority, and the followers of Newton became known as the ‘Open Brethren’ who were basically congregational.

The very laudable aim at the beginning was to recapture the simplicity of the apostolic church, consequently most Brethren practice believers baptism, although it is stated that some Exclusive Brethren favour Household Baptism. The doctrines are generally evangelical and more Calvinistic than Arminian.

The Calvinistic doctrine gives us a clue to the question because it states that a believer has assurance of salvation through the operation of the Holy Spirit, but this again rests on the divine choice of the person to salvation in God’s eternal free

purpose, whereby He was predestined some to eternal life and some to eternal death. The former He effectually calls to salvation, and they are kept by Him in progressive faith and holiness unto the end. This is the implied meaning of grace and faith. (Book 3. "On the manner of Receiving the Grace of Christ").

The Church is presented as made up of "all the elect from the beginning of the world," fully known only to God, who "knows and has marked those who neither know Him nor themselves." The believer sets out on his course of the Christian life, a pilgrimage of faith, repentance, self-denial and prayer, the end of which is his reception into the heavenly glory. But this is a course on which he has not embarked arbitrarily. He has been called to it by God, yet before he was called it had been God's determination from all eternity that he should be His child in Christ Jesus. (Book iv).

The Arminian doctrine is embraced by the followers of Arminius, a 16th century Dutch theologian who, denying the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, asserted the free-will of man in the matter of personal salvation.

In view of the foregoing, it would seem that some would conclude that if God had predestined some to salvation then there would be no possibility of their falling away. We now have to ask ourselves the question, "is this, in fact, what the Bible teaches?"

Foreknowledge

There is no doubt that the foreknowledge of God is complete; He knows the end from the beginning. It is equally clear that with His absolute power He can foreordain what He wants to bring into being at any given time. Foreknowledge is one aspect of God's omniscience, and throughout the Bible we see this implicated in His warnings, promises, and predictions.

Paul, in his Roman letters, takes us a stage further; "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" (Rom. 8:29, 30). This statement teaches us that the fore-knowledge of God is the basis for His fore-ordaining counsels and, these fore-ordaining counsels obviously include God's grace, call, election, justification, and ultimate glorification. We now need to examine these in order to understand how God has arranged His counsels consistent with His foreknowledge.

To Foreordain

To foreordain has the general meaning of determining beforehand what should be done. There are two Greek verbs which should be considered. One is the word **HORIZO** (from which we get our word 'horizon') which denotes 'to bound, to set a boundary, to mark out definitely.' It is used in Luke 22:22, "And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined." It is also used in Acts 2:23 concerning Christ, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." The other word is **PROORIZO** (PRO-beforehand, and **ORIZO**-to mark out) hence to determine beforehand, to foreordain, to predestinate. The uses of this word are to be found in Romans 8:29, 30; and Eph. 1: 5, 11.

What are we now in a position to say? Well, we have said that God has a complete foreknowledge, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. (Acts 15:18). We have also said that He has the power to foreordain what He decreed should be done, and what He has foreordained He has revealed according to His pre-determined counsels. We now need to consider what God, according to His forek-

knowledge and predetermined will, has purposed to reveal to man, what that purpose is, and how it affects our salvation.

His Purposes

In writing to Ephesus Paul says, "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself; That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him" (Eph. 1:9, 10). So God decided that His predetermined counsels should be realised in Christ.

Similarly, Peter after Pentecost, "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3: 22, 23). That prophet, of course, was Christ, and He said to His disciples, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16: 15, 16).

The foregoing teaches us that the electing grace of God was revealed in Christ Jesus, but we also see that this *does not* preclude human will. Anyone has the right to choose to accept the gospel or to refuse it. God also purposed that the free exercise of faith and obedience should bring salvation. Now if God allows us free choice in the *acceptance* of the gospel, then we can only conclude that He allows us free choice as to whether we *continue* in that state of grace to which the gospel has called us. If we choose *not* to continue, in obedience to God, then I can find no place in the Bible which teaches me that God has purposed to save us in spite of our disobedience, on the contrary, over in the Old Testament we find Azariah, speaking with the Spirit of God, saying, "The Lord is with you, while you be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:1,2). And wasn't it Jesus who said, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

Furthermore, God purposed that Paul should preach the gospel to the heathen (Read Gal. 1: 15-17), but that same apostle had to write in his first letter to Corinth, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9: 27). Now Paul is speaking here about his personal *rejection* for salvation at the end of the race. He does not claim absolute perfection (Read Phil. 3: 7-21) nor is he afraid to say that some who have begun the walk have become the enemies of the cross of Christ because of their infidelity, and their end will consequently be destruction. He realises that so long as the race is being run that there is the possibility of falling away, because as Peter says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith" (1 Pet. 5: 8, 9).

The same Peter exhorts Christians in his second letter, "wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Pet. 1:10,11). Now why would Peter exhort us to make our calling and election sure if these were already fixed *in spite of* our Christian walk? There would be no reason at all unless he knew, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that it was *possible* to fall away. As a matter of fact, he makes a stinging attack on those who having once escaped the corruption that is in the world, have again succumbed to Satan, "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the begin-

ing. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

Therefore, I think we must conclude that the Bible does not teach ‘once saved, always saved’, but rather that we should bend all of our energies, and with the help of the Holy Spirit try to realise in our lives what God has really purposed for us in Christ Jesus His Son. There are many other points which can be raised relative to this question but space does not permit in this issue. Perhaps we shall in the future be able to examine more facets of this important subject if any reader so desires.