

# Religion essays - predestination



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## **Predestination**

The arguments and the conflicts between the freedom of will and predestination have been with us for a great part of the monotheistic history. The three great monotheistic religions all talk about it in their respective scriptures. The arguments have crept into the theological and philosophical debates as well. They have been the cause of break away sect in religions as well as atrocities in the name of this argument as we will see later. It is unquestionable, that the argument of free will against Gods command over everything and his right to predetermination has lead to problems in the lives of people who practice this religion. We will discuss the briefly the origin of Islam the factors that led to it becoming involved in this debate. We will also discuss how history argued over this concept.

The Islamic teachings were started by Mohammed who was born in 570 AD in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It faced severe resistance during the initial phase. When Mohammed proposed his teachings of One God to the Arabs of Mecca, they rejected them and tried to assassinate him. By his 6<sup>th</sup> decade of life Islam has spread almost throughout the Arab peninsula. He did not leave any instructions as to who was to follow him and become the next proponent of the religion. This laid the ground work for future conflicts. Abu Bakr who was a close friend of Mohammed became the first Caliph by way of vote. Some people believed Ali, who was Mohammed's cousin to be the rightful caliph. Before his death, Abu Bakr appointed Umer to become the third Caliph. Umer after his tenure, nominated 6 people as potential caliphs, 2 major players were Usman (a wealthy man) and Ali. Usman won the title of caliph and governed the empire. This gave created huge resentment amongst the

supporters of Ali. Ali became the 4<sup>th</sup> and the last caliph but was assassinated later in life. His rule was riddled with disturbances. After his death, even though his grandsons, Hassan and Hussein were expected to take over the caliph, they did not, and Mu'awiya declared himself Caliph and started the Umayyad dynasty. Since the start, the followers of Ali (the Shiites) resented the fact that Abu Bakr was chosen instead of Ali. By Umayyad dynasty they had organized themselves as a schismatic group. The Umayyad dynasty the theology of the Shiite's and Sunni's drifted apart. The Umayyad period gave rise to thinkers with different points of view concerning Islamic theology. After the Umayyad dynasty the Mu'tazilah school of thought arose and debated issues related to theology including Free will and predetermination. There were two groups of Muslim thinkers of the Umayyad period. A *l-qadriyyah* believed in the idea of free will or *qadar* and the A *l-jabriyyah* believed in the doctrine of predetermination.

The debate about the theological validity of free will is very important. To say that man kind possesses no free will is to say that he cannot be liable for his actions as he is doing whatever has been determined for him by God. Hence it is Pre-determined. The confusion became about because the Quran contains verses in support of free will as well as predetermination. Therefore one source of the argument came from the dual traditions of the Quran itself. Another source of the argument is the political scenario of the time of the Umayyad dynasty. During their rule, these debates lead to the formation of two major sects, Qadariyyah and the Jabriyyah (Taib, MIM, 2000). The people following the Qadariyyah teachings believed in the free will aspect of the argument and the Jabriyyah people believed that God had determined their

fate and nothing could be done to alter that fate. Umayyad dynasty supported and gave preference to predetermination side of the argument, which in affect absolved mankind of any wrongdoing as he had no control over his actions. They killed people who were their political rivals or held the beliefs other than their own. They even justified their actions by saying that God had determined these actions beforehand and nothing could be said and done to avert them (Taib, MIM, 2000). The predestination supporters draw no difference between God's determinations of the physical events of the universe and within this world against the actions take mankind undertakes with his own choice. These theologians state everything is determined. A mans actions have been determined by God and not matter what he does, he cannot change the outcome. An evil man is so because God made him to be one. They symbiosis of the belief in God being the controller of al things in this world and this universe with the notion of predetermination is not a difficult feat. Both ideas reinforce each other. The Quran makes a lot of references in support of this theory and the scholars of the Umayyad dynasty used this to their benefit. The debate of free will and predestination also has its roots in the Christian beliefs as well. Saint Augustine is said to have pondered over the same debate.

The same cannot be said when theologians try to emerge the idea of free will with the notion that God is the knower of all things an controller of all actions. Scholars advocated and notion of free will before the formal rise Mu'tazilah school of thought. These scholars and their followers propose that the mere notion that God destines some people to heaven and others to hell

is injustice and since God cannot be unjust, the notion of predestination is false. God is not imperfect and this implies imperfection.

Scholars from the Mu'tazilah school of thought view mankind, as holders of free will. According to them, all of man's actions are self determined and unlike animals and plants, they have control over their actions. They are independent of their instincts and have control of their actions. Therefore, on the basis of their actions in this world, be them good or bad, they will be judged in the hereafter.

Quran also has a role to play in the origination of argument between supporters of free will and those of pre determination. Taib, MIM, (2000) quoted the Quran as saying

“ In Surah al Hud, 11: 34, Prophet Noah addressed his rejecters as such:

“ My counsel will not benefit you, much as I desire to give you good counsel, if Allah has willed to leave you in misguidance.”

“ In Surah al Taw bah, 9: 51 we are told:

“ Say nothing will happen to us except what God has decreed for us. He is our protector and in God the believers hold their trust.” (Taib, MIM, 2000)

These verses Quran the Quran as quoted by Taib illustrate how Quran instructs the believers into believing that the God has predetermined everything and that free will plays no role. The destination to hell or heaven has already been predestined.

On the other hand the Quran in other chapters or Surah, talks about the free will of the humans which God has bestowed upon them so that their actions will be the sole decider whether they are destined for heaven or hell. These statements are a contrast to the ones stated above. For example:

“ Say, that truth has come from your Lord, let him who will, believe, and let him who will reject.”

In another instance Taib (2000) quotes the Quran in saying:

“ We have shown man the path (to truth and deliverance; whether he be grateful or un grateful (rests on his will).” (Taib, MIM, 2000)

Currently the scholars from the Sunni sect of the Islam notably the Ashar’ri and the Maturidi have tried to resolve this issue in taking a central theme.

To conclude we can state that most of the understanding of freewill and predestination comes from the Islamic history. The initiation of the debate began from the Christian orthodox times but was highlighted in the periods of the last caliphs and afterwards due to the political situations of those times. The scholars since then have tried to resolve the issue by giving support to the scholars who support free will and making people responsible for their actions and rejecting the nothing that mankind has no control and authority over his actions and that he is not responsible for his actions.

The debate as it currently stands is no where near comprehensive.

Continued evidence in support of both arguments needs to be laid by both sides to an amalgam solution.

## Bibliography

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