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Sunday morning, I thought, 'I haven't got anything specific to study this morning!' (I'm not very good at working through Bible study notes, sorry.) In the end, I decided to start reading Ephesians. What an amazing first chapter! As with Romans 1,^[337] Paul pours out his appreciation for God and all that God has done.

I then went to church, only to find that the reading was... Eph 1³⁻¹⁴ (as set by the CofE lectionary), so immediately my spiritual antennae were raised.

Earlier, I had thought just how many different issues Eph 1 could raise (predestination and freewill, anyone?), but over coffee after the service, a few of us got chatting – about God. (That's another thing I appreciate about my new church: people seem to want to talk about their faith.) The lightbulb moment for me was that while we may not fully *understand* the passage, we can certainly *appreciate* how much God had done for us. That then warms us towards God and fills us with praise. Maybe that was what Paul was doing when he wrote those words, rather than concentrating on accurate theology?

At home, I had read Wright's translation, and was struck by v. 18, 'Then you will *know exactly* what the hope is that goes with God's call.' Was Paul really saying we'd know *exactly*?! So I went to Bible Gateway and there were a number of slightly different interpretations... which I won't pursue – that's not my point.

At college (which is where I came to faith) that we had interminable discussions about predestination and freewill. (The word 'predestined' only appears here, and in two verses in Romans 8.) The thing is that, by pursuing the idea of predestination, some strands of the church have ended up pushing it to say that God predestines some people to go to hell.

I think the problem comes when people interpret Scripture in order to know things *exactly*. Anyway, predestination and freewill are logically contradictory – 'they can't both be true'. And yet this is God we're talking about: of course we can't totally 'understand' the God who created the universe. So maybe there are times when we need to stress predestination. But I see the overriding teaching of Scripture as that we're free to respond.

So I'm here to urge caution (again, sorry!) if there's an issue where you feel that 'the plain teaching of Scripture' shows us something definite, and there are various other verses that support this view.

I've illustrated this before by quoting Mt 25³¹⁻⁴⁶ – the very words of Jesus, without any variations in translation: God decides our fate (heaven or hell, sheep or goats) based on whether we care for the sick, the poor, strangers, prisoners! It couldn't be clearer: salvation by works. But, yes, I see the overriding teaching of Scripture as that we're saved by faith, not works – despite what Jesus actually said!

We need to *appreciate* God more – and develop fewer dogmatic biblical interpretations.

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