

FOREKNOWLEDGE

INTRODUCTION

- We saw last week that, due to the Fall, mankind is unable on his own to believe the gospel
- He is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God...his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt
- Consequently, it takes much more than “prevenient grace” to bring a sinner to Christ...it takes regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature
- Faith is not something man contributes to salvation but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation...it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God

Jeremiah 13:23 ~ Can the Ethiopian change his skin Or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good Who are accustomed to doing evil.

John 3:6 ~ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

- “The total depravity of man demonstrates the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation. Man can do nothing. God must accomplish all as a gift of sovereign grace.”¹
- “In view of all that the Word of God has to say about total depravity and total inability, man's only hope of deliverance is the sovereign grace of a merciful God. In and of himself, man is spiritually hopeless and helpless apart from divine intervention.”²
- “Admitting the Scriptural statements of man's natural condition – ‘dead in trespasses and sins’ – ‘having his understanding darkened’ – his mind the very principle of enmity to the truth even under its most attractive form – and his stony heart insensible to its blessings – how palpable is the need of power from on high! ‘Can a well-composed oration,’ (Charnock asks) ‘setting out all the advantages of life and health, raise a dead man, or cure a diseased body? You may as well exhort a blind man to behold the sun, and prevail as much. No man ever yet imagined, that the strewing a dead body with flowers would raise it to life; no more can the urging a man spiritually dead with eloquent motives ever make him to open his eyes, and to stand upon his feet...Whenever therefore the gospel successfully influences the heart, it is ‘not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.’”³
- Thus, the work of salvation must be a sovereign one, one which begins with foreknowledge

1. Foreknowledge	7. Justification
2. Election	8. Adoption
3. Predestination	9. Sanctification
4. Effectual Call	10. Perseverance
5. Regeneration	11. Glorification
6. Conversion	
- Paul clearly indicates that the *ordo salutis* and the Golden Chain of Redemption begin with foreknowledge

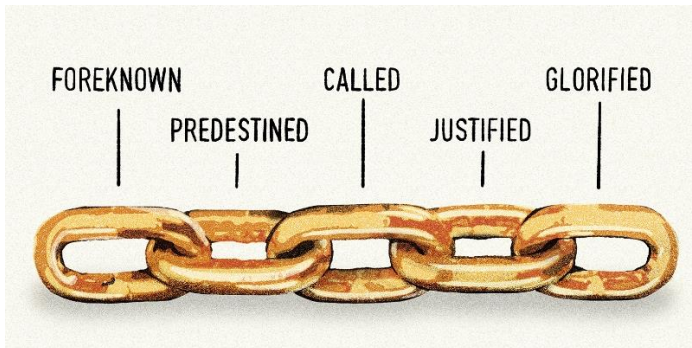
Romans 8:29-30 ~ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

¹ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 468.

² Zemek, *A Biblical Theology of the Doctrines of Sovereign Grace*, 95.

³ Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, 79-80.

- Paul says that God’s redemptive purposes in our life began with his foreknowledge of us
- It all starts with foreknowledge...it’s the first link in the golden chain of redemption



THE CONFUSION SURROUNDING FOREKNOWLEDGE

- “The debate centers around the question of how much relationship exists in the word ‘foreknowledge.’ Does it mean merely that God foreknows in the sense of foreseeing without any relationship? Or, a variation of this, does it mean He foresaw faith and not people? Or...does it mean that he related Himself to people before time in some way so that there is a causative connection which makes foreknow practically equivalent to predestine or foreordain?”⁵
- “The Christian church is divided on the understanding of this doctrine especially as it relates to divine sovereignty and human responsibility coupled with the righteousness and holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. Scripture indicates that election is based on foreknowledge...but the actual meaning of foreknowledge is debated. Is it merely prescience or foresight, or does it relate more closely to actual choice? Does God, in his foreknowledge, perceive what each man will do in response to his call and then elect him to salvation in harmony with this knowledge? Or does foreknowledge mean that God, from eternity past, looked with favor upon some and then elected them to salvation?”⁶
- “The questions raised by the two opposing interpretations are these: Did God look down through time and see that certain individuals would believe and thus predestine them unto salvation on the basis of this foreseen faith? Or did God set His heart on certain individuals and because of His love for them predestine that they should be called and given faith in Christ by the Holy Spirit and thus be saved? In other words, is the individual’s faith the *cause* or the *result* of God’s predestination?”⁷

The Arminian Position

- This position states that God’s foreknowledge is based upon the free choices of those who will believe
- He sees their future faith and belief and, on the basis of their choice, he then foreknows them
- This is the most common understanding of foreknowledge...namely, that God looks down the proverbial corridor/tunnel of time and sees what man does with Christ
- If God foresees that someone will respond to Christ, He chooses them and ordains them for salvation

⁴ Tim Challies, <https://www.challies.com/visual-theology/visual-theology-the-order-of-salvation/>

⁵ Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 313.

⁶ Henry Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 258.

⁷ David Steele, Curtis Thomas, and Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 158.

- Since God knows all things, God knows beforehand who will believe on him and who will not
- As a result, he predestines to salvation those whom He foresees will believe on Him (the prescient view)
- In other words, what he foreknows or foresees is their faith...it is really foresight
- So, in this view, the human response of faith is made the object of God's foreknowledge and, thus, predestination is conceived of as being conditioned upon this faith
- God predestines those whom he knew would choose Him in time
- "Quite commonly people will agree that God predestines some to be saved, but they will say that he does this by looking into the future and seeing who will believe in Christ and who will not. If he sees that a person is going to come to saving faith, then he will predestine that person to be saved, *based on foreknowledge of that person's faith*. If he sees that a person will not come to saving faith, then he does not predestine that person to be saved. In this way, it is thought, the ultimate reason why some are saved and some are not lies *within the people themselves*, not within God. All that God does in his predestining work is to give confirmation to the decision he knows people will make on their own."⁸
- An example of this view: "In this position, God in his foreknowledge foresaw those who would respond to his offer of salvation and actively elected them to salvation. That is, election is that sovereign act of God in grace whereby he chose in Christ for salvation all those whom he foreknew would accept him. Though we are nowhere told what it is in the foreknowledge of God that determines his choice, the repeated teachings of Scripture that man is responsible for accepting or rejecting salvation suggest that it is man's response to the revelation which God made of himself that is the basis of his election. The elect are those whom God foresees will respond personally to the gospel."⁹
- It is easy to understand why foreknowledge is defined this way because it resolves the tension between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility
- It is easy to square the tension in our mind by thinking that God must look ahead and see who will believe in him and then he chooses them
- In a sense, this seems to get God off the hook for choosing some and not others
- However, there are reasons to reject this understanding of foreknowledge

1. God has never looked into the future and learned anything

- God is omniscient and knows all things...he never looks into the future to learn something that he hasn't already foreordained
- God is infinite in knowledge...he knows himself and all other things, both actual and possible, perfectly from all eternity in one simple eternal act
- There is no deficiency in his knowledge or understanding of anything...he doesn't even need to remember things because they fully known by Him
- God never learns or forgets anything and his knowledge never changes or grows

Isaiah 40:28 ~ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.

2. No one naturally chooses God

- The Bible teaches the total depravity or total inability of the human heart

⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 676.

⁹ Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 259.

- No one can understand spiritual things apart from the work of the Holy Spirit and no one makes a move toward God without him first doing a work in their heart
- Our wills are in bondage to sin and they are not free to choose God...thus, the only thing God foresees in any human heart is unbelief

John 6:44 ~ No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

John 6:65 ~ And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

Romans 3:10-12 ~ as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; 11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; 12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

1 Corinthians 2:14 ~ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

- No one can believe on their own which is why faith is spoken of as a gift

Ephesians 2:8 ~ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God

Philippians 1:29 ~ For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake

- Repentance is also spoken of as a gift

Acts 11:18 ~ When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

2 Timothy 2:24-25 ~ The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth

- Since we can only operate according to our nature, our will as an unbeliever will never choose God
- "The Fall left the human will intact insofar as we still have the faculty of choosing. Our minds have been darkened by sin and our desires bound by wicked impulses. But we can still think, choose, and act. Yet something terrible has happened to us. We have lost all desire for God. The thoughts and desires of our heart are only evil continuously. The freedom of our will is a curse. Because we can still choose according to our desires, we choose to sin and thus we become accountable to the judgment of God...until our heart is changed by the Holy Spirit, we have no desire for Christ. Without that desire we never will choose Him. God must awaken our soul and give us a desire for Christ before we will ever be inclined to choose Him."¹⁰

3. It is not faith God foreknows, but people

- Romans 8:29 does not say WHAT God FORESAW...rather it says WHOM God FOREKNEW
- "whom" is a personal pronoun which places the object of God's knowledge upon the people he knew beforehand, not upon their faith
- The object of divine foreknowledge is not the actions of certain people (although he does certainly know what all people will do)
- Rather, the object of divine foreknowledge is the people themselves...God foreknew certain people
- God's foreknowledge was not based upon the faith of men, but upon his gracious commitment to certain ones before they were ever born

¹⁰ R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, 180.

- “[Romans 8:29] can hardly be used to demonstrate that God based his predestination on foreknowledge of *the fact that a person would believe*. The passage speaks rather of the fact that God knew *persons* (“those whom he foreknew”), not that he knew some *fact about them*, such as the fact that they would believe. It is a personal, relational knowledge that is spoken of here: God, looking into the future, thought of certain people in saving relationship with him, and in that sense he ‘knew them’ long ago... When people *know* God in Scripture, or when God *knows* them, it is personal knowledge that involves a saving relationship.”¹¹
- “Notice that the text does *not* say that God *knew something about* particular individuals (that they would do this or that), but that God *knew the individuals themselves*.”¹²
- Furthermore, Romans 8:29 is not addressing human actions at all but rather the actions of God: God foreknew...God predestined...God called...God justified...God glorified
- So, the object of divine foreknowledge is not our faith but rather specific people
- If God did look down the corridor of time and chose those who chose Him, that would put the emphasis of salvation on man, not God...the ground of salvation would be themselves instead of God

The Calvinist Position

- This position defines “foreknowledge” as much more than mere insight or forethought, but of personal knowledge of the individual
- God sovereignly chooses individuals with whom to enter into a loving relationship
- In this sense, foreknowledge is more than simply knowing events in advance of their happening because the Scriptures use the term in a more relational than chronological sense
- Thus, the foreknowledge of God involves God’s favorable disposition to certain people, even before they existed
- “Arminians are forced to add some qualifying notion. They read into the passage some idea not contained in the language itself, such as that those whom He foreknew *would believe, etc.*, He predestined, called, and justified. But according to the biblical usage of the words ‘know,’ ‘knew,’ and ‘foreknew,’ there is not the least need to make such an addition, and since it is unnecessary, it is improper. When the Bible speaks of God knowing particular individuals, it often means that He has special regard for them, that they are the objects of His affection and concern.”¹³

THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF FOREKNOWLEDGE

- Definition: “Foreknowledge is God’s prior knowledge of people and events that is not affected by independent human choices, but by His sovereign choice”
- The word “foreknowledge” (*proginosko*) means literally “to know beforehand”...it comes from the preposition “before” (*pro*) and the verb “to know” (*ginosko*)
- It is not head knowledge but relational knowledge emphasizing personal relationship
- When Paul says God foreknew us, he is speaking of God’s knowledge of us as persons
- He is speaking of His decision to enter into a relationship with us, to set His love on us

¹¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 676.

¹² Steele, Thomas, Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 158.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 159.

- Paul is telling us that God has fixed a special attention upon certain people and has loved them savingly
- Only those whom God chooses to love in this special way can be saved...and all those whom he has chosen to love in this way will be saved
- We could translate v. 29 ~ Those whom He foreloved [i.e. those whom He knew in a personal, intimate, redemptive sense from all eternity], He predestined...
- Thus, foreknowledge has to do with the Father's decision to set His affection upon His elect
- While it includes his knowledge of how a person will act, it means primarily to be loved by God in a special way
- A future decision of ours is not the basis upon which our Creator loves and foreknows us
- It involves God's favorable disposition to certain people even before they exist
- "Foreknowledge means that salvation has its origin in the mind or eternal counsels of God, not in man. It focuses our attention on the distinguishing love of God, according to which some persons are elected to be conformed to the character of Jesus Christ."¹⁴
- How do we know that? → because the meaning of the Greek word (*proginosko*) and its Hebrew counterpart (*yada*) both emphasize a relational, personal love
- It has the idea of being "foreloved" or loved in a very intimate way
- Many times in Scripture the word "know" has a meaning which goes beyond that of mere cognition
- To "know" is often used in the context of a loving, intimate, personal relationship...one of care and affection
- The word "know" in the OT is rooted, not just in the idea of knowing ABOUT someone mentally, but actually knowing them intimately
- The OT sense of the word has this idea of "setting affection on....covenantal faithful love that will not fail"
- The understanding of "know" in the OT is critical because the meaning of "know" in the NT is similar
- In fact, the NT writers didn't explain the meaning of "know/foreknowledge" because it was understood

Genesis 4:1 ~ Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD."

- "had relations with" is literally "knew" (*yada*)...literally, "now the man *knew* his wife Eve and she conceived and gave birth"
- This is a discreet, modest way of talking about the intimate, physical union that occurs between a husband and a wife
- In this sense, to "know" means to "love in the most intimate relationship...a close bond"
- It refers to a distinguishing love, an intimate love, an affectionate love

Genesis 4:25 ~ Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, she said, "God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel, for Cain killed him."

- "had relations with" = literally "knew" (*yada*)
- Again, this speaks of an intimate, close, personal love...a love that characterizes the closest of relationships

Genesis 18:19 ~ For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.

¹⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans*

- “have chosen him” = literally “known” (*yada*)...not mere intellectual cognition, but a personal intimate relationship...God chose Abraham to bless him

Exodus 33:17 ~ The LORD said to Moses, “I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.”

- God chose Moses to have a close intimate relationship with

Jeremiah 1:5 ~ Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.

- “knew” = *yada*...there is a subtle development here:
 - “before I formed you in the womb I knew you” – speaks of God’s knowledge of Jeremiah before his conception in the womb
 - “before you were born I consecrated you” – he was consecrated as a prophet as a preborn infant
 - “I have appointed you a prophet to the nations” – as a young man he was given as a prophet
- God didn’t just know about Jeremiah or have foresight about what Jeremiah would be like...he foreknew him in the sense that he foreloved him

Amos 3:2 ~ You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

- “chosen” is the word “know” (*yada*)...the word “know” is so closely associated with the idea of “chosen” that the translators of the NASB used “chosen”
- God didn’t love all the nations of the earth like he loved Israel...only Israel has He loved with such close, intimate, personal, relational knowledge that he chose them to receive his promises and his Messiah
- When the OT speaks about “knowing” someone, it is not referring to mere mental, cognitive knowledge
- Rather, it is talking about an intimate relationship...and when it refers to God knowing someone, it refers to an intimate relationship which he initiates

Matthew 1:24-25 ~ And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, 25 but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

- “kept her a virgin” is literally “was not knowing her” (*ginosko*)...the word “virgin” is not even in the text
- Joseph refrained from an intimate, special, distinguishing, connecting love with Mary until after Jesus was born

Matthew 7:21-23 ~ Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’

- “I never knew you” = *ginosko*...this doesn’t mean that Jesus does not know about them
- Rather, it means that they never had a true, intimate, relationship with Christ...on judgment day it will be revealed that they never had a loving relationship with Christ

John 10:14 ~ I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me

John 10:27 ~ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me

- “know” in those texts is *ginosko*...Jesus knows his own because he has a loving relationship with them

Romans 11:2 ~ God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?

- It's not just that God knew about his people Israel...he knew them in a personal, intimate, loving way
- The objects of foreknowledge in this verse are people themselves, not their faith ("whom")
- "foreknew" is the opposite of "rejected" – he loved them before hand
- By the way, this means God still has a future for Israel...He hasn't forsaken them...they are still His people

2 Timothy 2:19 ~ The Lord knows those who are His

- The knows about all men...but he only "knows" (*ginosko*) those who are his!

1 Peter 1:1-2 ~ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

- "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God" – means "chosen because of an intimate relationship"
- How do we know that's what it means?...

1 Peter 1:20 ~ For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you

- Christ Himself was foreknown by God the Father beforehand in eternity past
- That doesn't mean that God knew about Christ before the foundation of the world...it means God knew him intimately, closely...there was a loving, personal relationship between Father and Son before time began
- So, if the "foreknowledge" in v. 20 means that, the foreknowledge in v. 2 must mean the same thing
- In the same way, the Father foreknew Christ in an intimate, personal, loving way, he also foreknew believers in a personal, relational sense
- Thus, those who are foreknown are foreloved...foreknowledge then is God's knowing prior to salvation those who would be saved based upon his active choice to forelove them
- "foreknowledge" then refers to loving selection before the foundation of the world whereby God ahead of time enters into a relationship with a people upon whom he set his love upon
- It emphasizes the divine initiative in the outworking of God's purpose
- It is this that begins Paul's *ordo salutis* in Romans 8:29

Romans 8:29 ~ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

- This means that before the foundation of the world, before anything existed, God chose to enter into a love relationship with you
- He drew a circle around your name and singled you out...he chose to love you...he set his heart and affections on you with intimate love
- He said "You are mine!"...he has chosen to love you with an everlasting love
- He wrote your name in his lamb's book of life...he chose you by sovereign grace
- That's where your journey to salvation began...it didn't begin the moment you trusted Christ as Lord and Savior
- Rather, God set his affection on you in order that you might believe
- Foreknowledge is foreordination...we believed the Gospel, not because we were wiser or more righteous than anyone else but because God graciously set his affections on us in eternity past

