

The true definition of Foreknowledge

An honest exegesis of the word demands calvinism

The issue of foreknowledge is misunderstood by many Christians. The cause for this distortion is the denial, by the opposers of the doctrines of grace, of the logical and Biblical conclusions the word forces upon the students of the Scriptures. This study will prove the error of the first point of the Arminians which is:

“God elects or reprobates based on foreseen faith or unbelief.”

Let us define, therefore, the doctrine of Salvation and proceed thereon to define foreknowledge.

Salvation

“In Eden, God hath indued the will of man with that natural liberty and power of acting upon choice, that was neither forced, nor by any necessity of nature determined to do good or evil. Adam and Eve, in their state of innocency, not permanent righteousness, had freedom and power to will and to do that which was good and well-pleasing to God, which is, to obey His word and will, but yet were mutable so that they might fall from it. Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath **wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good unto choosing salvation**; on the contrary, the more he hears it, the more he repudiates it and follow his lusts, so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, totally astray and enemy of God (Rom 3:10-12) and blind, corrupt, and dead in sin (Eph. 2:1), is not able by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto or exercise any will whatsoever for the things of God. When God converts a sinner, and translates (Col. 1:13) him into the state of grace, He freeth him from his natural bondage under sin, and by His grace alone enables him to will and to do that which is spiritually good by His effectual call; yet so as that by reason of his remaining corruptions, he doth not perfectly, This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, for there is nothing in him to be seen, nor from any power or agency in the creature co-working with His

special grace, the creature being wholly passive therein, being dead in sins and trespasses (1Pe. 2:24), until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit; he is thereby enabled to answer this call (Ac. 16:14), and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it, and that by no less power than that which raised up Christ from the dead.”

Three words are used to describe Salvation from God’s standpoint. Let us see, under the light of the Biblical teachings stated above, what foreknowledg is:

Foreknowledge is the **cause**, Election is the **process** and Predestination is the **goal** of salvation.

A well known baptist evangelist, even though desiring to preach the gospel with zeal, and see people saved, mistakenly stated on his radio program:

- #1 “Foreknow is to know before. Foreknowledge is to be omniscient...”
- #2 “Predestinate to be saved ? No! But to be conformed to the image ...”
- #3 “I am elected because I received...”

Statement # 1: “Foreknow is to know before. Foreknowledge is to be omniscient...”

Refutation of statement # 1:

This is a totally wrong statement. **Foreknowledge is not omniscience**. Let us go to the final court of appeal: The Scriptures. The word Foreknowledge (Greek noun prognosin) is used **only two times** in the New Testament: Ac. 2:23 and 1Pe. 1:2. These few occurrences demand a very careful examination:

“Him, being delivered by the **determinate counsel** and **foreknowledge** of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Ac. 2:23 KJV)

τοῦτον τῇ ὠρισμένῃ βουλῇ καὶ προγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ
ἔκδοτον λαβόντες διὰ χειρῶν ἀνόμων προσπήξαντες
ἀνείλετε, (Ac. 2:23 TR)

Let us notice that above, we have 3 words worth of our attention. All three are in bold face both in English and in Greek and the order of the translation in the King James Bible is exact the same as in the Greek original.

The first word is **determinate** (horismenē), the second word is **counsel** (boulē) and the third word is **foreknowledge** (prognōsei). In Greek, when we have the words in that configuration which is: an article, two words in a row, the conjunction “and” (kai) and a third noun, the word after the conjunction is an extended explanation of the word before the conjunction. Being so, foreknowledge is a synonym of counsel. It is an active action of God as result of His **purpose!**

Foreknowledge is a relationship between God and:

1. An event (Ac. 2:23). This event and all its details is the Christ being delivered to be crucified. It says “determinate (ordained – limited – defined: horizo) counsel (will) and (even) foreknowledge”. Foreknowledge is an extended explanation of the will of God thus **causing** events to happen;
2. People (1Pe.1:2) which is the cause of election. Foreknowledge is not linked to foreseen faith for there is no verse whatsoever in the Bible stating that. God foreknows **people** (Rom. 8:29).

The compound word fore (pro) knowledge (gnosei) is not foresight. It is **pre-arrangement** or relationship.

Let us see the exposition of the Wuest's Word Studies on The Greek New Testament about 1Pe 1:2 and Ac. 2:23 (notes: 1. Emphasis added and 2. beware of wrong rendering of election as "selected"):

"The recipients of this letter are called "elect." The word is *eklektois* (ἐκλεκτοῖς), a plural adjective from the verb *eklego* (ἐκλεγο) which means "to pick out" or "to select out of a number." The verb is used in Ephesians 1:4 where it is rendered "chosen," referring to the act of God in sovereign grace choosing out certain from among mankind for Himself, the verb in Ephesians being middle in voice, speaking of the subject acting in his own interest. These to whom Peter is writing are "selected out ones." The words "according to" are the translation of *kata* (κατα) whose root meaning is "down," which gives the idea of domination. This choice out from a number was dominated by the foreknowledge of God the Father. This is the first step in the act of God bringing a sinner into the place of salvation. God the Father chooses him out, this choice **being dominated or controlled** or determined by His foreknowledge. The word "foreknowledge" is the translation of the noun *prognosin* (προγνωσιν) which is found twice in the New Testament, its verb form *proginosko* (προγινοσκο), five times. In Acts 26:5 and II Peter 3:17 we have the purely classical meaning of the verb, namely, "previous knowledge." But in Acts 2:23, and I Peter 1:2, the meaning of the noun form, and in Romans 8:29 and 11:2, and I Peter 1:20, the meaning of the verb form, **goes beyond the purely classical meaning of the possession of previous knowledge**, and refers to that which the A.V. in I Peter 1:20 calls foreordination. The first time the noun form *prognosin* (προγνωσιν) is found is in Acts 2:23, where it is used in the clause, "him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." The words "counsel" and "foreknowledge" are in a Greek construction which **makes both words**

refer here to the same act, presenting that act in its two aspects. The content of meaning in the word “foreknowledge” here is made clear therefore by the words “the determinate counsel.” The meaning of “foreknowledge” here and in the other four places where the words “foreknew” and “foreknowledge” occur, **cannot be merely “previous knowledge.”** The Greek word “counsel,” *boule* (βουλε), refers to **an interchange of opinions, a mutual advising, the exchange of deliberative judgment.** The word “determinate” is the translation of *horismenei* (ὁρισμεναι), a perfect participle which refers to the past act of putting limits upon something with the present result that some certain thing has been appointed or decreed. The word “foreknowledge” therefore refers to that counsel of God in which after deliberative judgment, the Lord Jesus was to be delivered into human hands to be crucified. In I Peter 1:20, He is the One who was foreordained before the foundation of the world to be the Lamb who was to take away the sins of lost humanity. Thus, in I Peter 1:2, the word “foreknowledge” refers to that counsel of God in which after deliberative judgment certain from among mankind were designated to a certain position, that position being defined by the context.”¹

¹Wuest, K. S. (1997, c1984). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English reader* (1 Pe 1:2). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Let us investigate now, the Greek text of the second time the noun foreknowledge occurs. As said before, it is found in 1Pe. 1:2.

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.” (1Pe. 1:1-2 KJV)

Ἦέτρος ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις διασπορᾶς Πόντου, Γαλατίας, Καππαδοκίας, Ἀσίας καὶ Βιθυνίας, κατὰ πρόγνωσιν θεοῦ πατρὸς ἐν ἁγιασμῷ Πνεύματος εἰς ὑπακοὴν καὶ ῥαντισμὸν αἵματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη πληθυνθείη.”
(1Pe. 1:1-2 TR)

As we see, foreknowledge is the basis for election. Election is an act of calling out (eklego) therefore foreknowledge is a pre arrangement or relationship.

It involves an active participation of God preparing circumstances of events or relating Himself to persons even before they are born. Let us consider the 5 passages below, 4 of which are in the Old Testament. In 3 of them the verb yada' is used. This verb is equivalent to the Greek verb ginosko which is the root of the second part of our compound word fore (pro) knowledge (gnosei).

1. God **knew** (yada') David before he was born and chose him without asking him anything (Ps. 139:1);
2. God **knew** (yada') Jeremiah before he was born and chose him without asking him anything (Jer. 1:5);
3. God called (qara') Isaiah from his mother's womb (Is. 49:1). God knew Isaiah;
4. God **knew** (yada') the people of Israel **only** (Am. 3:2), meaning distinctive love and affection not omniscience, which would be ridiculous;
5. God **knew** Paul before he was born and chose him without asking him anything (Gal 1:15). In fact, Paul was not seeking God at all, but blinded by his insane and wicked religion and in that he would remain, had God in His grace not intervened with the effectual or efficacious call.

In Rom 8:29 we learn that **God foreknows only the elect**. Nowhere in the Bible we read that God foreknows the non-elect. In Mat. 7:23 Jesus Christ, who is Omniscient, never knew (egnon) the lost ones. This is another powerful refutation of the error of equating foreknowledge with omniscience, otherwise we would deny the omniscience of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Am. 3:2 The Omniscient Lord Jehovah knew only Israel among all other nations. If foreknowledge were synonym with omniscience we would create two big problems:

Problem number 1: Since God foreknows only the elect (Rom. 8:29, 33), then His omniscience also would be limited to the elect only. The non-elect, the ones who will never get saved, would not be subject to God's omniscience. God's omniscience (omni = total) in his case, would not be total, which is a contradiction of terms. That would reduce one of the major attributes of God to a mere caricature, depriving Him of His divinity. That's heresy and absurd number one.

Problem number 2: Since the ones who He foreknows are the ones who are predestinated (Rom. 8:29), if foreknowledge is equal to omniscience which is total

and absolute knowledge of all people and all things real and possible, everybody, everywhere, in all human history eventually would be predestinated and consequently saved. That is also another heresy of universalism making the Bible a book full of lies.

If you say foreknowledge is equal to omniscience you either:

1. Limit God's omniscience which denies the Bible or;
2. You don't limit salvation to a few as Jesus said about the narrow way. You have to believe in universalism – everybody would be saved which also denies the Bible.

Both beliefs are total heresies.

Let us examine this same mistake defended by a popular Systematic Theology authored by Dr. Thiessen:

"...election is that sovereign act of God in grace whereby he chose in Christ for salvation all those whom he **foreknew would accept him.**"

(Dr. Thiessen , Henry C., Lectures in Systematic Theology, p. 258)

This position held by Thiessen **is wrong**. No exegesis was done to prove his point. Foreknowledge is not merely a previous knowledge like watching a TV set that God had in the past, to passively see in advance the corridors of time and realise what would happen! Who is choosing who? In this case, man would have chosen God first, and then He would have chosen man. This is the exact contrary of what the Bible teaches. If Thiessen were right, to prove his point, he would need verses like:

"There are **some** that seek after God...";

"He loves us because **we loved Him first**...";

"I have not chosen you, but **ye have chosen me**..";

To evade these obvious absurdities, somebody could argue that foreknowledge is **part** of the omniscience, for it is the foresight only of positive aspect of salvation: the knowledge of the faith of only those who will choose to be saved. But this escape does not solve the Arminian problem either, for it still has two errors:

1. It continues to attempt equating foreknowledge with omniscience in the first place which is an error and ;

2. It also denies the aspect of active participation of God in the foreknowledge as demonstrated. The question, therefore, stands: If foreknowledge is merely foresight, or previous knowledge, total or partial, why don't we find that God foreknows the non-elect unbelievers also? Because He does not as proved in Mt. 7:23. Again, there is not a single verse for that in the whole Bible.

The teaching that foreknowledge is equal to omniscience **fails** in all tests. Foreknowledge is not omniscience or part of omniscience. The favorite argument of those who deny election is totally defeated and does not stand.

Conclusion of statement # 1: Foreknowledge is not omniscience but a peculiar affection, a loving relationship God decided to have with His own, according to His own purpose (2Ti 1:9). Foreknowledge is not God's prescience or previous knowledge of all future things by which He knows in advance and foretells all things to come, for in this sense He obviously has knowledge of all people in all ages everywhere, but do not save them all. Foreknowledge rather, is a pre-arrangement, a fore-ordination (verb *proginosko* in 1Pe 1:20) and a relationship of God with certain people whom He chose with no condition whatsoever. It was only because of His grace and according to the good pleasure of His will (Eph. 1:5).

God's knowledge, then, **is not** like man's knowledge. Contrary to the false and distorted view of the Arminians, God's foreknowledge is not like a person passively watching a "TV of the future" showing in advance all the events and actions of people which will take place, while he is surprised by what is going on. This is a ridiculous caricature and heretical view demeaning the sovereignty of God.

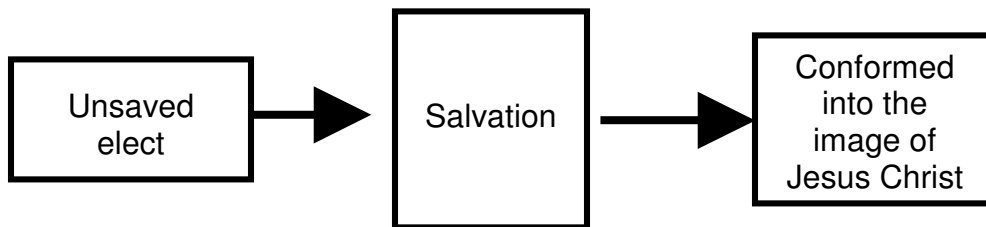
Statement # 2: “Predestinate to be saved ? No! But to be conformed to the image...”

Refutation of statement # 2:

How an unbeliever can be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ without getting saved? There is an order in Rom. 8:29 explained ahead.

This is what God did in eternity:

<u>Foreknows</u> (cause)	<u>Elects</u> (process)	<u>Predestinate</u> (goal)
Love and relationship pleasure of His good will	Chooses	Marks, limits, ordains destiny before salvation



Oliver B Greene said

“ I am called...He called me...In Isaiah 1:8, (Jer. 6:16) the Israelites said: ‘we will not come’, God called, but they did not come”

Note: all statements are correct. They did not come, however, because **that call was not the effectual call**. Because the terms were not differentiated we have confusion and people think all calls from God are the same. They are not. Jesus preached the Gospel to many reprobates including Judas Iscariot. They had a call but it was not effective call. Rom. 8:29-30 is a clear proof of that only those whom He did predestinate are called.

“And ye will not come unto me...” you refused

Right statements:

“He that cometh unto me...”

“We are one of the elect... I am one of the elected...”

“Because I heard the gospel... I received Jesus, I am elected...” (better I was elected)

Wrong statements:

“I am elected because I received...”

“Since you are elected (because you believed) you are predestinated...”

Refutation of the two statements above:

Notice the use of the word “because” (by the cause): The cause of salvation is not “because” somebody merely heard the gospel. Millions equally blind and dead sinners hear the gospel and don’t get saved and go to hell. They were never effectually called.

The cause of salvation is **the grace of God** applied individually.

Statement:

“God called and I am predestinated... Called ... I heard the call... Why I am the chosen? **Because** I heard the call, not because I am elected...”

Notice the expression “Because I heard...”. The emphasis is on the action of man to hear, but God puts the emphasis on His action of **calling**. The error of the statement above is **because** Exegesis was not made. If it were, this preacher would have to concede to his hearers that the word eklektos occurs 23 times in the New Testament and the words elect and chosen are used interchangeably to translate it: Sixteen times as chosen and 7 times as elect. The word eklektos (elect) is also a compound word: ek – lektos. Ek: preposition meaning “out of”. Lektos: from the verb lego, meaning to call or in this case, **called**.

Another error is that the text was not regarded properly and accurately. The theology has to come from the text. Let us see the correct order of the five verbs in Rom. 8:29-30. God:

First: Foreknew (v. 29)

Second: Predestinated (v. 30)

Third: Called (v. 30)

Fourth: Justified (v. 30)

Fifth: Glorified (v.30)

We can clearly see that Predestination precedes calling. Only the predestinated will be effectually called. That's the clear teaching of the verse. If the person is not yet called that elect person is not yet saved even though he will get saved. So it is wrong to state that only believers are predestinated. Before the call of a person (obviously also before his salvation), **he is not a believer yet, but he is predestinated – he will be called and nothing in the world will change that.** So, **unbelievers** are predestinated. To state that believers only are predestinated is an error from the ones who deny the right teaching of predestination. In their haste to get rid of unconditional election they run over the order of events.

Conclusion of statement # 2:

The unbeliever is predestinated. When the time appointed by the Father comes, the effectual call of the Holy Spirit will happen and the elect will be regenerated.

Statement # 3: "I am elected because I received..."

Refutation of statement # 3 :

"No! You received because you were elected.

The order is wrong. The problem is that people change the order of the events and get the cause – consequence relationship the opposite to fit their "philosophy" of arminianism.

Foreknowledge is the cause of election and this is a loving relationship according to the good pleasure of God's will

Conclusion:

As stated earlier: Foreknowledge is the **cause**, Election is the **process** and Predestination is the **goal** of salvation. Man has no part in those three events. Being saved is the result of the pure grace of God as John Newton stated:

“Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see

T’was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed

Thro’ many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come
‘Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home

When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise Than when we first begun.”

By José Pedro M. de Almeida Sep., 2007