

# INTRODUCTION TO THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION AND FOREKNOWLEDGE

## INTRODUCTION TO SALVATION

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- The doctrine of salvation = *soteriology*
- This area of study is concerned with what God does in rescuing sinners from their sin and drawing them into a relationship with Him
- This is without a doubt one of the grandest themes in Scripture

The question of being saved is the supreme question of the Bible. The subject matter of the sacred Scriptures is the subject of salvation.... *Salvation* means to be rescued from some calamity. However, the Bible also uses the term salvation in a specific sense to refer to our ultimate redemption from sin and reconciliation to God. In this sense, salvation is from the ultimate calamity—the judgment of God.

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- It is a topic that relates in one way or another to all of mankind, without exception
- It embraces all of time as well as eternity past and eternity future...a fact which is underscored by the 3 tenses of salvation:
  1. We were saved
 

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

**1 Corinthians 1:18** ~ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
  3. We will be saved
 

**Romans 5:9-10** ~ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life
- Salvation is not just a single act. It is comprised of a series of distinct acts known as the Order of Salvation (*Ordo Salutis*):
  1. Foreknowledge
  2. Election
  3. Predestination
  4. Effectual Call
  5. Regeneration
  6. Conversion
  7. Justification
  8. Adoption
  9. Sanctification
  10. Perseverance
  11. Glorification

- Notice that #1-3 refer to God’s work prior to salvation, #4-8 and part of 9 refer to what is involved in becoming a Christian, part of #9 and #10 occur in this life, and #11 refers to what happens when believers die or Christ returns
- In discussing salvation, there is always a tension between God’s sovereignty to save and man’s responsibility to believe
- This is called an “antinomy” – an **apparent** contradiction between conclusions which seem equally logical, reasonable or necessary
- How do we handle biblical antinomies?

Note what connections exist between the two truths and their two frames of reference, and teach yourself to think of reality in a way that provides for their peaceful coexistence, remembering that reality itself has proved actually to contain them both. This is how antinomies must be handled, whether in nature or in Scripture.

J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 21.

- We must guard against swinging the pendulum to one extreme or the other:
  1. The danger of emphasizing human responsibility over divine sovereignty
    - We forget that God is the one who saves
    - We forget that man is desperately wicked, dead in sin, and unable to respond
    - In evangelism, this extreme causes us to share the Gospel in such a way that we do anything we can to persuade people to accept
    - Our job then becomes not to just present Gospel, but to produce converts
    - We become Arminian
  2. The danger of emphasizing divine sovereignty over human responsibility
    - We forget that God ordains not only that people be saved but that the means of that salvation is through people sharing the Gospel
    - We forget that people still must hear Gospel to be saved
    - We become hyper-Calvinists
- So we must teach both sides – we must teach that man is responsible to believe the Gospel and repent of sin AND that the only ones who will believe and be saved are the elect

## FOREKNOWLEDGE

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### Definition

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- Definition of God’s Foreknowledge: 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
- The Greek verb (to foreknow) is used 5 times in the NT and 2 times as a noun (foreknowledge)

Verbs:

**Acts 26:5** ~ since **they have known** about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.

**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;

**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?

**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

**2 Peter 3:17** ~You therefore, beloved, **knowing this beforehand**, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness,

#### Nouns:

**Acts 2:23** ~ this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and **foreknowledge** of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

**1 Peter 1:2** ~ 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.

- Thus, “foreknowledge” literally means “to know in advance”...and when it relates to salvation it refers to God’s selective choice of individuals with whom to enter into a loving relationship
- In this sense, foreknowledge is more than simply knowing events in advance of their happening (although this may be included) 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

### Arguments Related to God’s Foreknowledge

#### *Arminian Position*

- How can God foreknow events that haven’t taken place?
- Arminius simply admitted the problem and chose to live with it: “But I do not understand the mode in which He knows future contingencies, and especially those which belong to the free-will of creatures.”
- When man’s autonomy is more important than God’s omniscience, conclusions such as this one abound: “Decisions not yet made do not exist anywhere to be known even by God. They are potential – yet to be realized but yet not actual. God can predict a great deal of what we will choose to do, but not all of it, because some of it remains hidden in the mystery of human freedom.”
- This position states that God’s predestination is based upon the free choices of those who will believe. He sees their choices (foreknowledge) and therefore, predestines them based upon this human choice.

#### *Calvinist Position*

- This position defines “foreknowledge” as much more than mere insight or forethought, but of personal knowledge of the individual.
- The “knower” and the objects of that knowledge clarify the meaning of the word. In this instance, God is the One who knows and His people are the objects of the divine knowledge.
- Thus, 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 seem to 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

### Biblical Arguments for God’s Foreknowledge

#### *General Old Testament Statements*

- The writers of the OT described God’s knowledge as being vast and immeasurable

**Psalms 139:17-18** ~ How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You.

**Psalms 147:5** ~ Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.

- God’s knowledge is also specific, as He knows the thoughts of man as well as the motives of man’s heart

**Psalms 139:2** ~ You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar.

**Proverbs 16:2** ~ All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the LORD weighs the motives.

**Isaiah 66:18** ~ For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory.

- The OT grounded the biblical truth of God’s foreknowledge as the foundation for the NT understanding of it
- Therefore, the NT writers did not need to defend it, but to simply build upon it
- Regarding God’s “knowledge” of Israel in the OT, it is referred to as a personal, intimate knowledge reflected in a special relationship

**Amos 3:2** ~ You only have I known among the families of the earth.

**Hosea 13:4-5** ~ I knew you in the wilderness. You were not to know any gods beside me.

- In the Scriptures God’s ‘knowledge’ is not always what He knows, but often refers to whom He knows. God knows a people

### *Isaiah*

- In the book of Isaiah, God argues that His foreknowledge of human events is what separates Him as God and the rest as mere idols

**Isaiah 41:23** ~ God says to the idols, “Declare the things that are going to come afterward, that we may know that you are gods.”

- Man’s plans and choices are ultimately subjugated to God’s sovereignty

**Isaiah 45:9** ~ Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’ Or the thing you are making say, ‘He has no hands’?

- God can direct the “free” choices of Cyrus for His own good purposes

**Isaiah 46:9-10** ~ Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’

### *Jeremiah*

- God knew Jeremiah before he was even conceived in his mother’s womb and was consecrated as a prophet prior to his birth.

**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.

- God knew him because He made him and knew how He would shape his existence and future.

- The clear implication of this verse is that God knows the future because He shapes and designs it, even before men are born
- God created time, and therefore all events in time, when He created the world, so that He does not look down through history but looks at history as a complete whole

### ***General New Testament Statements***

**Acts 2:23** ~ this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.

- The object of God’s foreknowledge was His own actions of delivering over His Son to the godless men.
- God therefore, had an active role in the delivering over and death of His Son...He clearly knew ahead of time that His Son would be killed
- The word “predetermined” means “to be designated; to mark out the boundaries or limits; to ordain or appoint.”
- That Christ’s death was according to the “predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God” emphasizes God’s determination to accomplish His plan... thereby it was certain to happen.

**Acts 4:27-28** ~ For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

- God’s foreknowledge of Christ’s death was not based upon the contingencies of human decisions, but upon His own determination to accomplish His purposes!
- God knows the events of the future because He determined them beforehand.
- Yet, man is morally responsible for his own choices (“you nailed to a cross”)...Although God ordained that Christ should suffer at the hands of wicked men, God did not nail His Son to the Cross
- Therefore, the sinful choices of Christ’s captors fell within the perfect purposes of the Father...This is the mystery between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility.

### ***Specific New Testament Statements Related to the Doctrine of Salvation***

**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 verse takes the theological implications of Acts 2:23 one step further in that it teaches that God not only knows future events, but He also knows people who were yet to be born
- It does not say that God foreknew certain decisions on our part...It does not say that God foresees our faith, and on that basis predestines us (this view confuses foresight with foreknowledge)
- The problem with this view is that it assumes that God looks down the corridor of time but ignores the fact that God is outside of time
- Furthermore, another problem with this view is that it puts the emphasis of salvation on man, not God
- In such a scheme, God’s initiative would be eliminated and His grace would be spoiled
- No, Paul does not say “whose faith He foreknew,” but “whom He foreknew” - It places the object of His knowledge upon the people He knew beforehand, not upon their faith...God foreknew certain people
- God’s predestination was not based upon the faith of men, but upon His gracious commitment to us before we were ever born
- Therefore, God’s foreknowledge is not mere insight, but a personal knowledge of us that led to His gracious predestination
- God made a conscious decision as to whom He would foreknow...He “fore-loved” certain people, and predestined...He chose them...they did not choose Him

- Thus, in Romans 8:29 the word “foreknowledge” does not indicate the God simply saw ahead of time that some would exercise faith
- It is actually the initial, determining, selecting step in God’s arranging for some to be His own
- It leads to blessing for the elect, essentially because it does not leave their relationship to God to chance

The passage speaks...of the fact that God knew *persons*...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.  
Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 676.

- So God’s foreknowledge is not a reference to His omniscient foresight but to His foreordination
- He not only sees faith in advance but ordains it in advance

**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.

- The same arguments found in Romans 8:29 are found here in this verse
- The Arminian view argues that God’s choosing was based upon His foreknowledge of the independent faith of those who would believe, not upon His prior relationship with these people
- In verse 20 of the same chapter, it is made clear what Peter had in mind when using the word *foreknowledge*

**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
- In a similar way, God foreknows believers in a personal, relational sense that is the basis of His choice of them unto salvation

## Summary

- God’s foreknowledge may be a way of expressing His eternal commitment to individuals as part of His determination to bring them to faith and to all the glories and benefits of Christ’s work
- God does foresee our faith, but this is not the point of these biblical passages
- What God does know about future events is due to the fact that God willed, planned, and predestined them to occur, including all the free human decisions that contributed to their occurrence
- God knew persons not just some fact about them (i.e. whether they would believe or not)
- God, looking into the future, thought of certain people in saving relationship to Him and in that sense He knew them long ago
- God had an intimate relationship with INDIVIDUALS before the foundation of world
- “Foreknowledge” then refers to loving selection before the foundation of the world whereby God ahead of time enters into a relationship with a people whom He set His love upon and thus foreknew