

(2) **It is based on a misreading of the text.** Nowhere does the Scripture say that God foreknew that certain people would *do* certain things, like believe or repent, and therefore He elected them. Rather, it says *Whom he did foreknow* (Rom. 8:29). In other words, He foreknew *them*, not something about them.

(3) **It does not allow for any distinction between the saved and unsaved.** If simple omniscience is in view, the same could be said of the lost (i.e. He foreknew them).

(4) **It is based on a misunderstanding of God's nature.** There was no point in time when God chose the elect, as if He gathered together information and then chose on the basis of that information. Rather, God's elect were chosen in Him from all eternity.

(5) **It is based on a misunderstanding of salvation.** If God chose those He foresaw would choose Him, then salvation is based on the choices (works) of men and not on the grace of God. This is in contradiction to Scripture.

2 Tim. 1:9 – *Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*

So, if God's foreknowledge does not refer merely to His omniscience, to what does it refer? To answer that question we will consider the Greek term and all its uses in the New Testament.

## USE OF THE TERM 'FOREKNOWLEDGE'

### The Biblical Terminology

The Greek verb (προγινωσκω) translated *foreknow* means 'to know beforehand.' The verb appears five times in the NT. The corresponding noun, *foreknowledge* (προγνωσις), appears two times. Two of the combined seven uses have *man* as the subject. Five have *God* as the subject.

### Uses Where the Subject Is Man

Man is the one who foreknows in Acts 26:5 and in 2 Pet. 3:17. In both cases it refers to someone knowing something beforehand. In Acts 26:5 Paul, testifying before Agrippa, observes that the Jews **knew** of him long **before** the current accusation. In 2 Pet. 3:17 Peter advises his readers to be careful not to be deceived since they **know beforehand** about the deceivers who are coming. Extrapolating from these two uses, we might anticipate that when God is the subject of the verb, the reference is to God's perfect knowledge of the future, His omniscience. But this is not the case.

### Uses Where the Subject Is God

When we consider the five uses where God is the one who foreknows, we discover that more than just omniscience is in view. It would appear in every case that God's sovereignty is demanded by the context.

(1) **Christ as the object** - In two of the uses where God is the subject, Christ, or more properly, his vicarious death, is the object. God foreknew the death of Christ.

Acts 2:23 – *Him [Christ], being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God . . .*

Here more than mere knowledge of Christ's death is implied. It doesn't say 'Christ was delivered **according to** the foreknowledge of God' but 'delivered **by** the foreknowledge of God.' His foreknowledge accomplished the deliverance. Foreordination is in view rather than knowledge. This is confirmed by the parallel nature of *determinate counsel* and *foreknowledge*. Both terms refer to God sovereignly planning the death of Christ.

The same truth is spoken of in 1 Pet. 1:20 –

*Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.*

Here the AV actually translates the word *foreordained* (as does Kittel, TDNT) to show that Peter is not saying God 'knew beforehand' of Christ's sacrificial death (vv. 18-19), but rather, He ordained it.

(2) **God's people as the object** – In three uses where God is the subject, God's people is the object. God foreknew His people.

Rom. 8:29 – *For whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate . . .*

Rom. 11:2 – *God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew . . .*

1 Pet. 1:2 – *Elect, according to the foreknowledge of God . . .*

All three uses are in the context of God's election of His people. God's sovereign grace is in view (cf. Rom. 11:4-6). But if the word *foreknow* simply refers to God's knowledge of man's choices, the whole argument in each case is undermined, especially in Romans 8 and 11. The contexts demand a reference to God's sovereign action in the word *foreknow*.

## THE NATURE OF GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE

Having shown that God's foreknowledge is not limited to passive omniscience of future events, but also includes the sovereign will of God, there is one more issue to consider. What is the nature of this foreknowledge? In the three cases where God's people is the object of this foreknowledge, it cannot merely refer to election or there would be an obvious redundancy, as if Scripture said *elect according to the election of God or those whom He elected He elected*. There is a distinction between the terms *foreknow*, *elect*, and *predestinate*. Though all three speak of God's sovereignty in salvation, they are not identical in meaning.

### Foreknow

The word *foreknow* in the Greek is a compound word. It is built on the Greek word 'to know' (γινωσκω), which in turn often translates the Hebrew word 'to know' (יָדַעַ) in the LXX. Both words are sometimes used to denote a knowledge that is not merely rational, but intimate and special.

Jn. 10:14 – *I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep . . .*

2 Tim. 2:19 - . . . *the Lord knows them that are his . . .* (cf. Gen. 4:1; Jer. 1:5; Amos 3:2; Matt. 7:23; 1 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9).

God knows His people not just in the sense that He knows who they are, but in the sense that He has a living, covenant relationship with them, delights in them, and loves them. This is the import of the word *foreknow*. God sovereignly set His love upon His people from all eternity (cf. Deut. 7:7; 1 Jn. 3:1; 4:19).

John Murray wrote:

*'Whom he foreknew' . . . is virtually equivalent to 'whom he foreloved'*

### Predestinate

If foreknowledge speaks of the **root** of God's election as being God's love, predestination speaks of the **fruit** or final purpose of God's election, namely that all those whom God set his love upon should be ultimately made into the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29).

### Elect

Election stands between foreknowledge and predestination, emphasizing that the objects of salvation are a matter of God's sovereign will. Looking backward, His election is based on His love (foreknowledge), and looking forward, His election results in the salvation and perfection of His people (predestination). Indeed, our salvation is perfect and certain because it is the work of God (Eccl. 3:14).

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# GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE

*By Dean Good*

When any man hears the Gospel, believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, and repents of his sin, he is saved, justified, and forgiven. As the new convert studies his Bible, he comes to find that he did not believe on Christ by chance, nor by his own wisdom, but by the grace of God (John 1:12-13). He believed because he was chosen.

Jn. 15:16 - *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you . . .* (cf. Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13)

A natural question arises: On what basis did God choose? The Biblical answer is: God elected those He foreknew.

1 Pet. 1:2 – *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God . . .*

Rom. 8:29 – *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate . . .*

## WHAT IS GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE?

Some have argued that this foreknowledge of God is simply divine omniscience. God knew from the beginning who would believe in Christ and, acting on this information, He chose them. There are several reasons why this cannot be the meaning.

(1) **It makes election meaningless.** If God chose us on the basis of our decision, then God did not choose us in any meaningful way.