Grace to You :: Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

## The Doctrine of Election

Scripture: Romans 8

Code: BQ32111

## For whom He foreknew, He also predestined .... (Romans 8:29)

Redemption began with God's foreknowledge. A believer is first of all someone **whom He** [God] **foreknew**. Salvation is not initiated by a person's decision to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Scripture is clear that repentant faith is essential to salvation and is the first step that we take in response to God, but repentant faith does not initiate salvation. Because Paul is here depicting the plan of salvation from God's perspective, faith is not even mentioned in these two verses.

In His omniscience God is certainly able to look to the end of history and beyond and to know in advance the minutest detail of the most insignificant occurrences. But it is both unbiblical and illogical to argue from that truth that the Lord simply looked ahead to see who would believe and then chose those particular individuals for salvation. If that were true, salvation not only would begin with man's faith but would make God obligated to grant it. In such a scheme, God's initiative would be eliminated and His grace would be vitiated.

That idea also prompts such questions as, "Why then does God create unbelievers if He knows in advance they are going to reject Him?" and "Why doesn't He create only believers?" Another unanswerable question would be, "If God based salvation on His advance knowledge of those who would believe, where did their saving faith come from?" It could not arise from their fallen natures, because the natural, sinful person is at enmity with God (Rom. 5:10; 8:7; Eph. 2:3; Col. 1:21). There is absolutely nothing in man's carnal nature to prompt him to trust in the God against whom he is rebelling. The unsaved person is blind and dead to the things of God. He has absolutely no source of saving faith within himself. "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God," Paul declares; "for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor. 2:14). "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4).

The full truth about God's omniscience cannot be comprehended even by believers. No matter how much we may love God and study His Word, we cannot fathom such mysteries. We can only believe what the Bible clearly says-that God does indeed foresee the faith of every person who is saved. We also believe God's revelation that, although men cannot be saved apart from the faithful action of their wills, saving faith, just as every other part of salvation, originates with and is empowered by God

alone.

While He was preaching in Galilee early in His ministry, Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37). But lest that statement be interpreted as leaving open the possibility of coming to Him apart from the Father's sending, Jesus later declared categorically that "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (v. 44). New life through the blood of Christ does not come from "the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13).

Paul also explains that even faith does not originate with the believer but with God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9).

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. Peter had the same reality in mind when he wrote of Christians as those "who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Pet. 1:1–2). Peter used the same word "foreknowledge" when he wrote that Christ "was foreknown before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:20). The term means the same thing in both places. Believers were foreknown in the same way Christ was foreknown. That cannot mean foreseen, but must refer to a predetermined choice by God. It is the knowing of predetermined intimate relationship, as when God said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (Jer. 1:5). Jesus spoke of the same kind of knowing when He said, "I am the good shepherd; and I know My own" (John 10:14).

Because saving faith is foreordained by God, it would have to be that the way of salvation was foreordained, as indeed it was. During his sermon at Pentecost, Peter declared of Christ: "This Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of God-less men and put Him to death" (Acts 2:23). "Predetermined" is from *horizo*, from which we get the English *horizon*, which designates the outer limits of the earth that we can see from a given vantage point. The basic idea of the Greek term refers to the setting of any boundaries or limits. "Plan" is from *boule*, a term used in classical Greek to designate an officially convened, decision-making counsel. Both words include the idea of willful intention. "Foreknowledge" is from the noun form of the verb translated **foreknew** in our text.

In addition to the idea of foreordination, the term *foreknowledge* also connotes forelove. God has a predetermined divine love for those He plans to save.

**Foreknew** is from *proginosko*, a compound word with meaning beyond that of simply knowing beforehand. In Scripture, "to know" often carries the idea of special intimacy and is frequently used of a love relationship. In the statement "Cain had relations with his wife and she conceived" (Gen. 4:17),

the word behind "had relations with" is the normal Hebrew verb for knowing. It is the same word translated "chosen" in Amos 3:2, where the Lord says to Israel, "You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth." God "knew" Israel in the unique sense of having predetermined that she would be His chosen people. In Matthew's account of Jesus' birth, "kept her a virgin" (nasb) translates a Greek phrase meaning literally, "did not know her" (Matt. 1:25). Jesus used the same word when He warned, "Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Matt.7:23). He was not saying that He had never heard of those unbelievers but that He had no intimate relationship with them as their Savior and Lord. But of believers, Paul says, "The Lord knows those who are His" (2 Tim. 2:19).

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