

Pastor's Papers | Ronald H. Gann
Theology/Doctrine

Unconditional Election: Foreknew Or Forelove?

Understanding Unconditional Election (Part 4)

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For the archaeologist of truth who mines the caverns of Scripture, the doctrine of Unconditional Election is an inescapable find. Yet, for many, the treasure-trove of New Testament teaching on the matter tends to raise more questions than it answers. To be sure, Calvinists and Arminians agree that, although somewhat vague in description, predestination is an undisputable *fact*. But where disagreements emerge is over the *manner* in which God predestinates, and to what extent.

Election, according to Calvinism, rests on the will of God. As already noted, the Calvinist argues that certain sinners are predestined *unto salvation* in eternity past on the basis of God's sovereign choice, in accordance with His grace, and irrespective of man's foreseen actions. Moreover, His decision to save some individuals, while overlooking others, is neither capricious nor arbitrary, but is determined "according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:5) and "according to His own purpose and grace ... from all eternity" (2 Tim. 1:9). Dr. James White summarizes the Reformed view accordingly: "It is God's mercy, not man's will or effort, that determines the outcome of salvation ... God, and God alone, is the determining agent. His choice is not determined by human action. It is therefore unconditional."¹

To the Calvinist way of thinking, election falls squarely in the camp of God's providence. The God-given faith exercised by a believer (in time and space) is the inevitable result, rather than the cause, of his election (in eternity past). The Westminster Confession of Faith bears this point out markedly:

Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, *without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto*; and all to the praise of His glorious grace.

As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, *foreordained all the means thereunto*. Wherefore, they who are elected being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ; are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ,

effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only (emphasis added).²

As it relates to predestination, or Unconditional Election, Arminians object to this historical confession for a number of reasons, but in particular its assertion that “mankind ... [is] predestinated unto life ... *without any* [divine] *foresight of faith or good works* [in man].” To them, such a statement is unbiblical, if not absurd, because it seemingly exonerates man of his responsibility. Furthermore, it outright negates divine foreknowledge, which supposes that God sees in advance a sinner’s future response to the gospel and, on that basis, chooses either to elect him or pass him over.

Not surprisingly, the Westminster Confession of Faith tends to cause tremors among free-will evangelicals. If Calvinists succeed in convincing others that the will of man is *not* the ultimate determinate in his salvation, but rather God’s sovereign choice is to blame, Arminians then fear that humanity will be robbed of its dignity and God will be perceived as totalitarian. To allay their worries, they therefore insist that God’s choice must be predicated on human choice. In this way, God is absolved of any potential injustice and man’s autonomy remains intact.

Moreover, most Arminians argue that God predestines a sinner merely *unto blessing*, not necessarily or inevitably unto salvation, as Calvinists teach.³ And this election is conditional, they further allege, since it is based on God’s *foreknowledge* of a sinner’s response to the gospel. In other words, God’s choice in who He saves is in no way a dictatorial decision but rather is an informed one. Dave Hunt represents the vanguard of Arminian thought on this point. “Election” he writes, “is not unto salvation [as Calvinists believe] but unto blessings, and foreknowledge is the basis. God knew from eternity past who would believe the gospel, and it was for these that God predestined for blessings.”⁴

To paraphrase Hunt, God is said to have looked down the passageway of time and foresaw who, of their own free-will, would believe in Him. Those who were seen to respond positively to the gospel, so the story goes, He therefore chose to shower His blessings upon. In the Arminian panorama, divine election is conveniently democratic; it falls squarely in the camp of man’s foreseen freedom. A believer’s election, as it therefore turns out, is the result, rather than the cause, of foreseen faith, we’re told.

On this point the language barrier between Calvinists and Arminians rears its ugly head once again. In the same way that both groups differ over the meaning of *sovereignty* (imperial versus exhaustive) and the meaning of *dead* (separation versus lifelessness) so they also differ over the meaning of *foreknowledge*. It has been a source of debate and semantic wrangling for centuries.

Arminians define God’s *foreknowledge* as His ability to read or predict the future actions of men, which effectively determines who He will and will not choose for salvation. And to be fair, their understanding of the term jives reasonably with today’s English definition, which defines it as “knowledge or awareness of something before its existence or occurrence.”⁵ Most Arminians apply this modern definition to God’s foreknowledge, as Hunt obviously does, and insist that it is on this basis alone that God predestinates. The entire skeleton of Arminian theology therefore hangs on the assertion that God’s choice is predicated upon man’s foreseen choice. Arminius wrote:

From this follows the fourth decree to save certain particular persons and to damn others, which decree rests upon the foreknowledge of God, *but which he has known from eternity which persons should believe according to such an administration ... and also who should not believe and persevere* (emphasis added).⁶

Arminius was not alone in his position, as the Remonstrance of 1618 clearly demonstrated. Today entire denominations have been built on this view. Perhaps the most well-known and oft-quoted Arminian, second only to Arminius himself, is John Wesley (1703-1791), founder of Methodism. In his sermon entitled *On Predestination*, Wesley implied that predestination begins and ends with God's foreknowledge. He argued, "God foreknew those in every nation who would believe,"⁷ and that, "In a word, God, looking on all ages, from the creation to the consummation, as a moment, and seeing at once whatever is in the hearts of all children of men, knows every one that does or does not believe, in every age or nation."⁸

Wesley saw no conflict between human freedom and divine sovereignty. Following Arminius' lead, he simply redefined the biblical concept of foreknowledge to alleviate a potential headache. He affirmed that although God knows an individual's future, He does not determine it. In league with Arminius, he believed that it is man—not God—who ultimately determines his spiritual destiny, and this he does by exercising his free-will. To that end, Wesley believed that we must not think that all things are, or come to pass, simply because God knows them (that is, decrees them). Rather, God simply knows *about* them because He foresees that they are natural happenstances committed voluntarily by men. Thus, because God has advanced awareness of man's future actions and decisions, He therefore can make an informed assessment in choosing those whom He will save.

Arminius and Wesley were in lockstep with one another. Both theologians saw God's divine foreknowledge—His ability to know in advance who would believe in Him—as the sole condition for His predetermination to elect individuals. God's sovereign decree, while important to His eternal majesty, is beside the point.

Armed with the bullhorn of Scripture, Reformed Theology objects to Arminius' and Wesley's interpolation of foreknowledge on the grounds that it overrules the sovereignty of God. To suggest, as these men did, that the basis for election rests on man's foreseen response to the gospel (in time and space) rather than on God's sovereign choice (in eternity past) is to idolize the self-will of reprobate man. It ascribes spiritual muscles to sinners that the Bible insists are atrophied from birth. What is more, by putting the "option" for election in the court of human autonomy, sinners are afforded a generous opportunity to boast, which the Bible strictly forbids (Eph. 2:9; 2 Cor. 10:17 cf. Jer. 9:24). A sinner can lay claim to the notion that, by virtue of his own free-will decision (not God's sovereign choice), he was *smart enough* on his own, or *lucky enough* through happenstance, or *favored enough* by God, to come to saving faith in Christ independently.

The train wreck of free-will theology is clearly identifiable. When God's sovereignty is dethroned from the pedestal of salvation we are left with the autonomy of man wearing the crown. Arminianism ultimately credits man with saving himself which, according to Scripture, entitles him to the praise that comes with it. In other words, it is

not God who is glorified in the Arminian process of redemption but the sinner's volitional response to God's offer. God makes salvation possible, to be sure, but sinners make it actual. And just as unsettling, if we compromise with the Arminian on this point and concede that God's sovereignty works *in conjunction* with man's freedom to bring about his salvation, we are then forced to conclude that God is willing to *share* His glory with man, a concept that is also foreign in Scripture (Isa. 42:8).

As is already evident by now, Calvinists uphold that God is utterly sovereign. He will not share His glory with, nor surrender His sovereignty to, the reprobate. It is the will of God, not the decisions of men, that is the final determinate in the redemptive process. God elects and saves only those whom He has predetermined to save in the counsel of His will, independent of foreseen faith or perceived merit in the objects of His mercy. John 1:13 is clear: "[We have] become children of God ... not of ... *human decision ... or will, but born of God*" (emphasis added). Romans 9:16 adds: "[Salvation] does not, therefore, depend on *human desire or effort*, but on God's mercy" (emphasis added). Clearly, the element of human free-will is removed from the plan of salvation.

So how do Calvinists answer Arminius and Wesley concerning God's foreknowledge in salvation? The answer is that Scripture, not philosophy, is our final say. Calvinists contend that God's foreknowledge is best understood in Scripture as *fore-love* or *foreordination*; that is to say, Calvinists believe that when the Bible speaks of foreknowledge in relationship to salvation, it is speaking of God *fore-loving*, or loving in advance, His foreordained elect. Beyond mere awareness of what will happen in the future, it is the divine *predetermination* of what *will* happen. It speaks of planning, not simply observing (cf. Jer. 1:5; Acts 2:23). In this context, it indicates that God pre-thought and predetermined each relationship He enjoys with His elect people. Dr. R.C. Sproul explains:

From all eternity God foreknew his elect. He had an idea of their identity in his mind before he created them. He foreknew them not only in the sense of having a prior idea of their personal identities, but also in a sense of foreloving them. When the Bible speaks of "knowing," it often distinguishes between a simple mental awareness of a person and a deep intimate love of a person. The Reformed view teaches that all whom God has foreknown, he has also predestined to be inwardly called, justified, and glorified. God sovereignly brings to pass the salvation of his elect and only his elect.⁹

Taking a slight detour for just a moment, a word must also be interjected in refutation to the Arminian belief that predestination is unto blessings *only* and not salvation. Dave Hunt packages the Arminian argument this way:

[Calvinism] assures us that Ephesians 1 and Romans 8 and 9 present God's "predestination of a particular people to salvation." Yet salvation isn't the subject ... Election is not unto salvation but unto blessings, and foreknowledge is the basis. God knew from eternity past who would believe the gospel, and it was for these that God predestined special blessings...¹⁰

Hunt's logic is myopic, to say the least. It is true that, according to the Bible, believers have been predestined to be "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29) and to be *adopted* as children of God (Eph. 1:5). These are breathtaking blessings, indeed. But to suggest that such things equate *only* to "blessings" is to stop short of what it really means to become like Christ or to be adopted as a child of God. Are not those who are made Christ-like those who have been redeemed? Are not those who have been adopted into God's family as sons and daughters the recipients of salvation? To be a child of God is to have been adopted through saving faith in Christ. Therefore, it logically follows that to be predestined to adoption and Christ-likeness is equivalent to being predestined to salvation. We do not receive one without the other. They are paired together in matrimony just as faith and repentance are inseparable. What Hunt fails to realize is that *salvation* is the ultimate *blessing* for which the Elect have been predestined.

It is a hermeneutical fallacy of Arminianism to dismiss salvation in the predestination process. The apostle Paul was unequivocally clear on this point: "God has chosen you from the beginning *for salvation*" (2 Thess. 2:13, emphasis added). We can safely conclude, therefore, that God predetermined both the blessings and benefits of salvation for a believer in Jesus Christ.

Returning to God's foreknowledge, it is evident that the gulf between Calvinism and Arminianism is vast. To recap, the Calvinist suggests that God's foreknowledge is tantamount to God "*loving* in advance" those whom He foreordained to believe in His Son. The Arminian, however, responds that God's foreknowledge merely means He "*knows* in advance" who will freely believe in His Son thereby affecting His decision who to predestinate. In the final analysis, one side holds to a view that puts the onus of election on the sovereign will of God (Calvinism), whereas the other places the onus on the foreseen actions of man (Arminianism). One side argues that predestination relates to salvation (Calvinism), whereas the other maintains it pertains only to blessings (Arminianism). So which side is correct?

It can be rightly said that finding a common bridge between the two positions hinges on a proper understanding of what God's foreknowledge is and does. This is the perennial point of contention in the doctrine of Unconditional Election. So we must ask: Do contemporary English definitions of foreknowledge ("to know in advance"), which Arminians liberally apply, mesh with the contextual analysis of Scripture?

Any linguist or scholar will attest that presupposing word meanings in ancient texts based upon modern-day lexicons is a clear and present danger to interpretation. Notwithstanding this warning, this is precisely the violation that Arminian theology makes concerning God's foreknowledge in election. We need look no further than the King James Bible (KJV) to see the danger this type of hermeneutic poses.

When the KJV refers to "amazement" in 1 Peter 3:6, for example, it does not mean "wonder" or "astonishment," as the word means today. Instead, the KJV has in mind the idea of being *frightened*. Furthermore, the KJV translators used the Elizabethan expression "by and by" four times in the gospels. While today this expression carries with it the idea that something will happen "eventually or occasionally," the contextual sense in the KJV actually means *immediacy* (cf. Matt 13:21; Mark 6:25; Luke 17:7; 21:9, NIV). In the same way, the word "careful" in the KJV

does not denote “cautiousness” or “wariness” as we understand the term; rather, to the medieval translators it meant *anxious* (Luke 10:41; Phil 4:6).

The list of confused terminology is seemingly unending. The word “conversations” in the KJV refers to “way of life;”¹¹ the “bowels” actually has in view the “heart,”¹² and “accursed” really means “devoted.”¹³ Each of these terms—“conversations,” “bowels,” and “accursed”—defy our modern dictionary in their Elizabethan usage.

Arminians stand accused by Calvinists for winking at this variance in language. They apply the modern definition of *foreknowledge* to each and every verse in which the word is found in the New Testament while flagrantly ignoring both context and subtext. And by doing so, they unleash mayhem on a good chunk of Scripture.

As a final example, the KJV renders James 2:3 as follows: “And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing.” The problem becomes immediately apparent to the reader. If we default to modern definitions when interpreting the King’s English, we have no choice but to conclude that James is exhorting his readers to beware showing partiality to those who dress like homosexuals. But any sober-minded Christian understands that this explanation is far from what James’s had in mind. Obviously the word *gay* has a different connotation today than it did when the KJV was translated. We therefore should take caution not to impose upon classical words their contemporary meanings without first paying our respects to context.

If Arminians like Hunt persist in their argument that the Bible’s use of the word *foreknowledge* only means how we define it today, then they betray their poor scholarship. They have no choice but to overturn the meaning of 1 Peter 1:20, which says: “[Christ] was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (KJV). More succinctly, the NIV renders it: “For [Christ] was *foreknown* before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you” (emphasis added). Are we really supposed to default to the Arminian understanding that Peter is simply saying that God only had advanced information about Jesus before his incarnation and nothing more?

In speaking of Christ as foreknown to the Father, Peter has in mind the Calvinist concept of fore-love. More than just passing awareness, the Father *loved* his Son with deep affection that spanned the eons of eternity. Jesus attested to this special relationship when he prayed in his *High Priestly Prayer*: “Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory *I had with you before the world began*” (John 17:5, emphasis added). In other words, the two Persons in the triune Godhead enjoyed a mutual love with one another from all eternity; a love equally shared by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we understand Peter to be saying in 1 Peter 1:20 that, as the second Person of the Trinity, Christ was fore-loved by the first Person of the Trinity. Yet, if we apply the Arminian definition of God’s foreknowledge to this text—that is, “advanced knowledge”—the meaning is lost. In its place we are left with the unconvincing argument that God simply had preliminary awareness of His Son to be.

All things being equal, it is true that Arminians are not necessarily wrong in their limited explanation of the word *foreknowledge*. But my point is that they’re not entirely right either. The word can, and sometimes does in a couple of passages, mean *foresight* (e.g. Acts 26:5; 2 Pet. 3:17). However, their overall conclusions prove shortsighted and irresponsible when they impose the modern English definition *uniformly* on Scripture.

By ignoring context and Greek tenses, as noted in 1 Peter 1:20, they fall short of sensible interpretation in most of the passages in which the word *foreknowledge* is found. By dismissing the fact that it is always *persons* God is said to foreknow in Scripture, *not the actions of those persons*, Arminians frustrate the intent of the writers (cf. (Matt. 7:23; John 10:14; 1 Cor. 8:3; 2 Tim. 2:19).

The Greek words translated “foreknow” and “foreknowledge” are the verb *proginosko* and the noun *prognosis*. The verb has the basic meaning of “to know beforehand,” or “to know in advance,” but the noun, according to Strong, means “previous determination.”¹⁴ The verb *proginosko* is used five times in the New Testament (Rom. 8:29, 11:2; Acts 26:5; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:17), while the noun *prognosis* is attested twice (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2). At first glance, Arminian theology seems to have a friend in the original language. But when performing contextual analysis on the Bible, many scholars insist otherwise. Additionally, we must keep in the forefront of our minds a cardinal rule of biblical interpretation: “If the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense, otherwise it is nonsense.”

Dr. Louis Berkhof (1873–1957), a systematic theologian who taught for nearly four decades at Calvin Theological Seminary and whose written works have been influential in colleges and seminaries throughout North America, deduced the following:

Proginoskein and *prognosis* in the New Testament ... do not denote simple intellectual foresight or prescience, the mere taking knowledge of something beforehand, but rather *a selective knowledge which regards one with favor and makes one an object of love* ... these words [in the aforementioned passages where foreknowledge occurs] simply lose their meaning, if the words be taken in the sense of simply taking knowledge of one in advance, for God foreknows all men in that sense (emphasis added).¹⁵

According to Berkhof’s scholarship, foreknowledge means far more than knowing beforehand what will happen (or who will exercise faith). It implies an intimate relationship with someone who is the object of God’s redemptive love. Yet to the protesting Arminian, explanations like Berkhof’s are dismissed as Calvinistic sleight of hand. Therefore, in order to determine which school of thought is correct, we must provide an overview of the hotly-contested Bible passages where the verb *proginosko* and the noun *prognosis* occur.

By way of example, if we apply the Arminian definition of foreknowledge to Acts 2:23 we are left with a diluted text. Luke cites the apostle Peter as saying, “...this Man [Jesus Christ], delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge [*prognosis*] of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.”

In effect, Arminians would have us believe that the apostle is telling his audience that God only “knew in advance” that Jesus would be delivered into godless hands. Certainly all Bible-believing Christians agree that God foresees all things, including the crucifixion, but to suggest that *only* His omniscience is in view here is to restrict the meaning of foreknowledge and to distill the text of its import.

Here, as in other passages, Arminians pay no attention to the importance of Greek syntax. Significantly, the word *foreknowledge* in Acts 2:23 is in the *instrumental*

dative case (that is, it shows the “means” or the “instrument” by which something is accomplished). In other words, God’s foreknowledge in Acts 2:23 is the very means, or instrument, by which Christ’s atonement was made. It does not simply speak to God’s passive awareness of what will transpire but to His foreordination of the actual event itself, a point which Peter plainly emphasizes. “This man was handed over to you by God’s ... foreknowledge,” the apostle said, “... to conspire against ... Jesus” (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). Jesus did not die *in accord* with the foresight of God but rather *because* or by means of God’s foreknowledge.

Calvinists understand this passage to mean far more than what initially meets the reader’s eye. God foreordained, as satisfaction for His people’s sins, the atoning sacrifice of Christ. This foreordination was based on God’s fore-love for those whom Christ died, and in accord with His predetermined decree. It cannot be stressed enough: Foreknowledge, in this passage, is determinative (causative) and not merely predictive. Divine foreknowledge as it relates to any element of God’s predetermined purpose must pertain to God’s active involvement in bringing the event to come to pass. The *instrumental dative case* in the Greek demands this. Dr. Edgar C. James commented:

Now the question is: Was it possible for Christ to be delivered over to His enemies “by the foreknowledge [prescience] of God?” Certainly foreknowledge knows, but it does not perform an act like the delivering of Jesus to His enemies. Are not those who contend otherwise reading something more than the English meaning of foreknowledge into this passage? However, if we translate that Christ was delivered over by the determinate counsel and forethought of God, that is, by His decision reached in eternity, then we have a thought which is both intelligible and satisfying. Thus it is that “determinate counsel and forethought” are synonymous expressions, both describing one and the same act, one stressing the element of will, and the other of knowledge.¹⁶

If we were to paraphrase Acts 2:23 according to the Reformed view, and in conjunction with the original language, we understand Peter to be saying the following: “Jesus was the Son of God, and he proved it by many signs and miracles, but in spite of this wicked and sinful men nailed him to the cross. *This was no accident, for long ago God not only knew about it but foreordained that this should happen.* Sinful men did not know it but even in their wickedness they fulfilled *the predetermined purpose of God for His Son to die*, bearing the sins of men and women He long ago fore-loved.”

The Greek word *gnosis* (and its cognates *prognosis* and *proginosko*, from which we get the term *foreknowledge*) finds its linguistic counterpart in the Hebrew word *yada*. Among several other meanings, depending on context, this Hebrew word often refers to knowing with experience or intimacy, not just foresight or awareness. For example, it is used of sexual union (Gen. 4:1, 19:8), personal acquaintance (Gen. 29:5; Exod. 1:8), knowing good from evil (Gen. 3:5, 22), and knowing the true God (1 Sam. 2:12-3:7; Jer. 3:22). The noun and verb *prognosis* and *proginosko* in the Greek are derivative of the Hebrew word *yada*. And it is this experiential intimacy that Calvinists apply to God’s foreknowledge.

We see this concept of fore-loving in God's intimate "knowledge" of Moses. Exodus 33:17 reads, "And the Lord said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know [*yada*] you by name" (emphasis added). Here God's personal affection for Moses is captured in the Hebrew word *yada* ("to know, be acquainted with") which goes far beyond mere foresight or awareness of Moses as a person. That God "knew" Moses was to imply that he had found favor with the Lord and was specifically chosen to be a recipient of God's tender mercy. A unique and special relationship is in view in Exodus 33, not just head-knowledge. This truth is borne out six verses earlier: "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Exod. 33:11).

Again, we see this same thought in view in Amos 3:2. In speaking of Israel, God declared, "You only have I known [*yada*] of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (KJV, emphasis added). If we apply the Arminian argument for *prognosis* and *proginosko* ("to know in advance"), keeping in mind that both cognates are derived from the Hebrew *yada* ("to know, be acquainted with"), we must therefore ask the following: Are we really expected to believe that God was unaware of any other nations in existence besides Israel? If Amos' words are true, and Arminians are right that foreknowledge (*prognosis* and *proginosko*, as derived from *yada*) simply means advance awareness, then how do we interpret God's quotation, "You only have I *known*"?

It's obvious that God didn't merely know about Israel, and possessed no such knowledge of other nations, nor does this passage suggest that God merely knew the future actions of Israel, but didn't know the future actions of other nations. This "knowing" of Israel is deeply personal and intimate and speaks of God's grace in choosing Israel as the object of His loving concern.

The word *yada* is used also in Genesis 4:1 in relationship to Adam and Eve. In this passage we are told that Adam *knew* his wife, Eve. In what manner, we may ask, did Adam know Eve? Was he simply aware of her and have insight about her? The answer is evident. That "Adam knew [*yada*] Eve his wife" (Gen. 4:1, ESV) meant he had a conjugal relationship with her, which resulted in Eve's pregnancy. As with Exodus 33:17 and Amos 3:2, to "know" means more than perception or acuity. It entails a personal relationship.

We learn that God also had a predetermined relationship with the prophet Jeremiah. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew [*yada*] you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). More than just mere foresight of the prophet's ministry, God enjoyed an intimate relationship with Jeremiah before he ever came to be. He was fore-loved by God and therefore foreordained to prophetic ministry.

Finally, to the Galatians, the apostle Paul wrote in manner reminiscent of Jeremiah: "But now that you know God—or rather are known [*proginosko*] by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles?" (Gal. 4:9, emphasis added). Even though the Galatians had come to know God, Paul hints at a much deeper meaning. The Galatians knew God only because God first knew them and set His affection upon them in eternity past! More than mere omniscience, a predetermined relationship is in view.

God “knew” Moses from all eternity and raised him up to be His mouthpiece to the house of Israel and before the seat of Pharaoh (Exod. 33:17). He “knew” Israel and chose them as His bride out of all the people groups on the earth (Amos 3:2). He “knew” Jeremiah before he was born and appointed him to be a prophet (Jer. 1:5). So too, the Galatians had come to know God because He first knew them, having loved them in advance.

Romans 8:29, which reads “For *those* God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son,” is often cited by Arminians as the basis for *conditional* election—that God knew in advance who would believe in Him and, on that basis, predestined them for blessing. But the Calvinist is quick to point out that Paul does not say “*that*” which God foreknew (namely, the actions of these men, such as their faith and belief). Rather, the apostle emphasizes “*those*” who God foreknew. In using the pronoun “those” instead of “that” it is clear that individual people are in view here not merely their future actions. The point of God’s foreknowledge is not that He simply had future information *about something*, but that He had an intimate relationship *with someone*. Moreover, it’s causative, and not merely predictive. It’s instrumental not passive.

I take the time to hash over some of these Old Testament passages concerning *yada* (“to know, be acquainted with”) because this Hebrew verb sets the stage for its Greek counterparts *prognosis* and *proginosko* in the New Testament. It elucidates for the student of Scripture what the words “foreknow,” “foreknew,” and “foreknowledge” actually mean in passages germane to salvation. Furthermore, for the Calvinist who stands in awe of the unbending grace of God, it offers new insight into the beautiful refrain, “God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew” (Rom. 11:2, NASB).

The foreknowledge of God carries with it a much broader meaning than mere omniscience. In the contexts which speak to God’s electing or predestinating, the idea of instrumental causation is always present, borne out of God’s personal affection for the object elected and predestined. Thus, in the various passages related to salvation where the word is found, we conclude that to foreknow on God’s part means He *fore-loved*. And that God foreknew His elect is another way of saying that He set His gracious and merciful regard upon us; that He knew us from eternity past with a sovereign and distinguishing delight. Like the Galatians, we have come to know God only because He first knew us. In the words of John, “We love [Him] because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

—Ronald H. Gann

¹ Dave Hunt & James White, *Debating Calvinism*; (Multnomah Publishers, 2004); pp. 98-99

² The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646); 3:5-6

³ It should be noted that some Arminians suggest that predestination is corporate—that it is the Church as a whole who has been predestined—not individuals.

⁴ Dave Hunt & James White, *Debating Calvinism*; (Multnomah Publishers, 2004); p. 103

⁵ www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/foreknowledge

⁶ James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825-1828); pp. 247-48

⁷ Andy Heer, "Does God Know the Future?" *The Arminian Magazine*. Issue 1. Spring 2010. Volume 28

⁸ John Wesley, *On Predestination*, Sermon 58; (cited from the 1872 edition—Thomas Jackson, editor).

⁹ R.C. Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?* (Baker Books, 1997); p. 145

¹⁰ Dave Hunt & James White, *Debating Calvinism*; (Multnomah Publishers, 2004); pp. 101, 103

¹¹ 2 Cor. 1:12; Gal 1:13; Eph 2:3; 4:22; Phil 1:27; 1 Tim 4:12; Heb 13:5, 7; James 3:13; 1 Pet. 1:8; 2:12; 3:1, 2, 16; 2 Pet. 2:7; 3:11

¹² Gen. 43:30; 1 Kings 3:26; Psa. 109:18; Isa. 16:11; 63:15; Jer. 31:20; Lam. 1:20; 2:11; Phlm. 7, 12, 20

¹³ Josh. 6:17, 18; 7:1, 11-13, 15; 22:20; 1 Chron. 2:7

¹⁴ strongnumbers.com/greek/4268.htm cf. Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, *A Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*.

¹⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*; (Eerdmans, 1976); p. 112

¹⁶ Edgar C. James, "Is Foreknowledge Equivalent to Foreordination?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122, No. 487 (July 1965): p. 218