

Does Foreknowledge Explain Election?

by
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All Christians hold to a doctrine of election. The term *election* occurs frequently in the New Testament, referring to God's choice of some for salvation. Election is a biblical word. The notion of God choosing some for salvation and not others is seen throughout the Bible. No serious student of Scripture denies it. Debate occurs, however, over what may be the basis of God's choice.

Two views

The first view holds that election has no basis whatsoever in man. It is a mystery, hidden in God's sovereign will. Though God is not arbitrary in his decrees, nevertheless the decree of election is a righteous one, since no one deserves salvation anyway.

This view is frequently referred to as *reformed*, because it was prominent during the Reformation period. It is held today by churches who identify their theology as *Reformed*.

The second view sees divine foreknowledge as the basis for election. God peers into the future and sees who will accept Christ, then elects those.

This view is usually referred to as *Arminian*, after the 16th century Dutch pastor, Arminius who formed the doctrine toward the end of the Reformation period.

Foreknowledge determined the coming of Christ, not merely foresaw it

The meaning of *foreknowledge*, when used of divine decisions, refers to *appointed*. It is similar to *foreordained* in connection with election. It is the *person* who is foreknown, or *appointed* to salvation, not some quality in that person.

Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, ... Acts 2:23¹

Peter declares the coming of Christ was both arranged and appointed by God.

*He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world...
1Peter 1:20*

The word *foreordained* here is PROGINOSKO - *foreknow*. In the case of Christ, God's foreknowledge was more than merely predictive. It would be absurd to say the Father merely foreknew the coming of Christ. Jesus was appointed to the office of Christ. All circumstances relating to His coming were arranged in advance. History was made for Christ, not Christ for history.

For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. Acts 4:27-28

The same pattern applies to the election of each believer. Those who oppose this principle tend to use 1Peter 1:2.

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...

Foreknowledge in verse 3 and *foreordained* in verse 20 are the same Greek word, and mean the same. In verse 20, it refers to Jesus himself in his appointment as Redeemer. In verse 2, it refers again to an appointment, in this case of believers appointed to obedience.

Notice Peter says *for* obedience, not *because of* obedience. He wishes all to understand that God appointed the elect for obedience just as he appointed Jesus as Redeemer. The intent is to emphasize our security in Christ. Any other interpretation fails to explain the use of the same word in the context, and would create an absurdity with regard to Christ.

Foreknowledge means foreordained with regard to Israel, because God chose to overlook Israel's persistent rebellion

God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Romans 11:2

What was it that God *foreknew* about the Jews? That they would respond favorably to Him through their free will? Hardly! Notice the context:

But to Israel he says: All day long I have stretched out My Hands to a disobedient and contrary people. Romans 10:21

If the foreknowledge view were correct, then God should have rejected the Jews as candidates for election. Foreseen obedience had no play in God's election of Israel.

Lexicon evidence

Foreknowledge: The Greek terms are PROGINOSKO (verb, *to know or ordain before hand*) and PROGINOSIS (noun, *foreknowledge or foreordination*). It is common in any language for words to have two or more meanings, usually a primary meaning and then a secondary one.

Such is the case with PROGINOSIS. The primary meaning is *foreknowledge*, the secondary, *foreordination*. How do we distinguish the difference? It is *foreordained* when divine appointments and activity are in view, as in the above verses. This holds true also with regard to God's decree of election.

Gingrich's Shorter Lexicon: PROGINOSKO: Know beforehand or choose beforehand.

Newman's Greek-English Dictionary: PROGINOSKO: *Know already; choose from the beginning, choose beforehand.*

Louw & Nida: PROGINOSKO: *Know beforehand or chose beforehand.*

There exists no good quality in man to foresee. The foreknowledge view normally asserts that God foresees one of several qualities in man that attracts His grace.

Was it faith He foresaw? No. Faith itself is a work of grace, based on election.

And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. Acts 13:47

those who had believed through grace; Acts 18:27

Jesus Christ himself is the source of our faith.

And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 1Tim. 1:14

Was it perhaps our sanctification that God foresaw? It depends on who does the sanctifying. According to Jude 1, God the Father does it.

To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ.

Circular reasoning would come into play if sanctification brought about our election. What about a willing heart? Paul explicitly denies this possibility.

So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. Romans 9:16.

Could some goodness or righteousness in man be the quality God foresaw? Paul goes to great lengths in Romans 3 to extinguish such a notion.

There is none who does good, no, not one. There is none righteous, no, not one; V.10 There is none who does good, no, not one. V.12

Was it because God foresaw some would seek him and others not?

There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. Ro.3:11

Ironically, the doctrine that makes us think God is acting unfairly, is the correct one. Paul underlines this in Romans 9:19-20.

But who are you, Oh man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, Why did you make me like this?

If Paul felt foreknowledge were a factor, why didn't he say so instead of concluding it is none of man's business to ask the question?

Foreknowledge as described by the Arminian does not have this element of seeming injustice that Paul predicted would be a struggle in our thinking.

The Arminian view of foreknowledge distorts the biblical meaning of election

Election means chosen of God, not chosen of self

And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elects sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days. Mark 13:20

...knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. 1Thessalonians 1:4

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, Colossians 3:12

...according to the faith of God's elect... Titus 1:1

The foreknowledge view ignores scriptural texts on election that Apostles gave to prove God's sovereign choice.

Examples:

The 7000 who did not bow the knee to Baal

But what does the divine response say to him? I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. Romans 11: 4-5

Notice God did not merely *find* 7000. He *reserved* them. It was He who was in charge of their decision, not they themselves. Paul uses this incident to describe election by grace.

Jacob and Esau

...for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls. Romans 9:11

Foreknowledge assumes people have an innate ability to accept Christ and submit to God's law. The Bible denies this.

Man's will is bound in sin and cannot submit to God without His grace intervening.

There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. Romans 3:11

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Romans 9:16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. Romans 8:7

Coming to Christ is a gift of the Father

John 6:37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me,... John 6:44

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; John 17:9

I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.

Faith is a gift from God, not something generated by the believers own will

...as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. Romans 12:3

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, Philippians 1:29

...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith... Hebrews 12:2

Repentance is a gift, not something man is able to initiate without grace

Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life. Acts 11:18

...if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,... 2Timothy 2:25

Foreknowledge renders the term "predestination" meaningless

It makes it passive rather than the active verb that it is. *Predestination* is the Greek word PROORIZO. PRO means *before* and ORIZO means to *establish boundaries*. Thus it means to *establish boundaries beforehand*.

God set up the circumstances surrounding our lives to ensure the fulfillment of our foreordination as the Elect. If God merely *foresaw* who would accept Him, why would He set up boundaries beforehand?

This proves the choice was His, not ours. *Foreordain* refers to our appointment as His elect, whereas *predestinate* refers to the outworking of God's electing decree. Note the passive tense in these verses.

...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, Ephesians 1:5

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Romans 8:29

Romans 8:29 merits special comment. The term *foreknew* here carries the meaning *foreordain* because of the context.

In verse 28 Paul has just explained all things work together for good to those who love God, and *who have been called according to his purpose*.

What are the grounds for believing this? God has already done His appointing and preparing before the world began, to ensure the accomplishment of our salvation. That's why we can believe everything works together for our good.

The Lexicon Louw & Nida translates this verse as: *Those whom he had chosen beforehand, he had already decided should become like his Son.*
Rom. 8:29.

Foreknowledge assumes God is unwilling or unable to encroach on the limits of man's will

To the contrary:

Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 4:28-35

As a result of this Babylonian king's pride, God removed his sanity for seven years; his reason, free will and all. Did God ask permission to do this? Nebuchadnezzar learned, *...He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, What have You done?*

The Antichrist and the Ten Nations

For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. Rev.17:17

The Egyptians

And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Exodus 14:17

The kings of the Earth

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes. Proverbs 21:1

Foreknowledge puts the ultimate choice on man rather than God, which the scriptures categorically deny

So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. Romans 9:16

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you... John 15:16

Foreknowledge implies God's control is merely passive rather than active

*My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure, Isaiah 46:10
...according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. Philippians 3:21*

...upholding all things by the word of His power. Hebrews 1:3

Foreknowledge assumes faith precedes election

This is an error. We believe because we are His sheep. It is not our faith that makes us sheep.

But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep... John 10:26

Appointing those for eternal life comes before faith, not vice verse

And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. Acts 13:48

The promise of salvation is available only to those the Lord calls

For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. Acts 2:39

Jesus reveals the Father to whom He wills

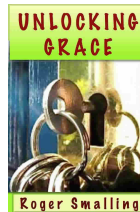
...and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Matthew 12:27

See John 5:21, 6:37, 44, 45, 65; 17:6, 9, 11, 20.

Conclusion

The term foreknowledge supports the doctrine of sovereign election, rather than explains it away. When used regarding divine activity, especially in connection with election, it refers to the appointment of a person rather than the result of a divine attraction to a positive quality in the person. The Bible teaches election by the sovereign grace of God, without regard to any foreseen condition in man.

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¹ All scripture quotes are from the New King James Version.