

GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE

*Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, **Declaring the end from the beginning**, and from ancient times **the things that are not yet done**, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:*

Isaiah 46:9-10

Calvin's view of God was that He must be *totally* sovereign over His creation or else He cannot be God. Logically then, it follows that if God is totally sovereign, man doesn't have *any* sovereignty (i.e.; free will). Calvin's theology was that because God is totally sovereign, He *predestines* who will be saved and who will be lost. Those He pre-determines to save, He draws, convicts them of sin, and grants them repentance. On the other hand, He *withholds* these things from those He has pre-determined *not* to save.

This such a wicked view of God's justice and character—as well as a denial of many verses of Scripture which state the opposite—some people go bonkers when they finally see the truth. They end up going to the other extreme and teach that God isn't really sovereign because of man's free will. In other words, God doesn't really know what we will do *until* we actually do it. Neither of these two extremes are correct. First of all, the Scripture makes it clear that it is *not* God's will (*or desire*) that any one should perish eternally.

*Look unto me, and **be ye saved, all the ends of the earth**: for I am God, and there is none else.*

Isaiah 45:22

*Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, **I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked**; but that the wicked turn from his way **and live**: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*

Ezekiel 33:11

*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; **Who will have all men to be saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*

I. Timothy 2:3-4

*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation **hath appeared to all men**,*

Titus 2:11

*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, **not willing that any should perish**, but that **all should come to repentance**.*

II. Peter 3:9

Secondly, the Scripture is also clear that God seeks to draw all men to Himself, and that He gives everyone a chance to come to the Light.

Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

John 12:31-32

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that **all men** through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, **which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.***

John 1:6-9

God offers salvation to *every* person who comes into the world. This is what the Scripture means when it talks about salvation being by *grace*. No one deserves an opportunity to be saved, and there is nothing any of us can do to earn such an offer. It is God's grace and mercy *alone* that causes Him to offer salvation to any one.

We don't know exactly *how* God has made salvation available to everyone down through the ages, but the Scripture says He has, so we must accept what it says. Also, Jesus said He would draw *all men* to Himself—which means He would draw all men to God. So everyone who comes into this world has an opportunity to be saved from eternal destruction. Everyone has an opportunity to accept and/or follow whatever "light" God has provided for them. That choice is the *free will* of man in operation.

At the same time, because God declares "the end from the beginning", He knew before the foundation of the world exactly who would respond to the Light they were offered. He knew before the foundation of the world exactly who would respond to the drawing power of the Holy Spirit—and He laid out His eternal plan of redemption based upon *that* foreknowledge. This is the *sovereignty of God* in operation.

This is why the Scripture talks about *both* the free will of man and the sovereignty of God. They both operate full-bore, side by side, at the same time—and the only way to understand how this is possible is if you understand the *power* of God's foreknowledge. Whenever I start reading or listening to someone's view on this issue, the *first thing* I look for is an understanding of God's foreknowledge. If *that key* is missing, then I know that whatever I am about to read or hear is going to be off in some way. So let's look carefully at what the apostles taught regarding this issue.

*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For **whom he did foreknow**, he also **did predestinate** to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

Romans 8:28-29

The term "foreknow" means very simply, "to know beforehand". Paul tells us clearly that God elects and predestines people, not arbitrarily, but *according to foreknowledge*. He knows before hand who will respond to His call, and who will not. He knows before hand just how far those who have responded to His call will go in the process of transformation into the image of Jesus. He knows before hand exactly what decisions every person who ever lives will make and where those decisions will lead them in the end.

*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.***

I. Peter 1:1-2

Again, the apostle Peter says the same thing—God elects (or predestines) people “according to foreknowledge”. He goes on to say that this election (by foreknowledge) is “though sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience”. In other words, Peter is telling us *exactly what it was* that God foreknew when He elected us. He foreknew that the ones He elected would allow the Holy Spirit to sanctify them and bring them to a place of obedience. Again, God knows the end from the beginning, but we do not. He knows whether or not we will endure to the end, but we do not. Since we cannot see our end, Peter tells us to make our calling and election *sure*.

*Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling **and election** sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:*

II. Peter 1:10

Peter is telling us that we not only carry a certain amount of responsibility in our own personal salvation, but in our own *election* as well! There is no other way to interpret this passage. Once we have accepted God's offer of salvation, once we realize we have been elected, *it's up to us* to make that election sure. How do we make it sure? By yielding to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, as He sanctifies us and brings us to a place of obedience. If we do this we are making our election sure.

Coming to a place of perfect obedience is what sanctification is all about, for you see, the thing that has brought death and destruction on mankind for the last 6000 years is disobedience—which is also called self-will. Man was created sinless and with a free will. But once Adam chose to disobey God, his free will became a slave of his own selfishness and turned into self will. Being born again *does not* automatically solve the problem of self will. All it does is *provide the opportunity* to deal with the problem.

The reason brilliant theologians can't understand the foreknowledge of God is because they do not understand the difference between *religious self-effort* and a *response* to the moving of God's Spirit in a person's life. Since they do not know the difference between these two things, they lump them both together and call them religious works. Then they quote passages which state that we cannot be saved "by works" (*Gal. 2:17; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5, and Rom. 11:6*), and declare very piously that if we can't be saved on the basis of anything we do, then neither can we be *elected* on the basis of anything we do. If we were elected on the basis of anything God saw foresaw us doing, then election would not be based on grace, but rather, at least partially, if not fully on our performance.

But you see, just as there is no comparison between a person who is trying to *earn* salvation through performance and the one who is *responding* to the saving power of the Holy Spirit; so there is no comparison between God electing a person based on a foreknowledge of their own self-effort, and electing that person on the basis of a foreknowledge of *their response* to His work in their lives. I say again, responding to *God's work* in our lives does not constitute the kind of "works" the Bible says can never save us. Let's look at one of these passages:

*I ask then: Did God reject his [Hebrew] people? By no means! **I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.** Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah--how he appealed to God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself **seven thousand** who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too, at the present time there is **a remnant** chosen by grace. **And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.** What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened,*

Romans 11:1-7 (NIV)

Here again Paul mentions the concept of election *through* foreknowledge. He is discussing the tragedy that the majority of God's chosen people missed the salvation that was offered them. He asks a rhetorical question: *Has God permanently rejected the entire Hebrew nation because of their persistent rebellion (which culminated in the rejection and murder of their own Messiah)?*

The answer is, No.

God has not cast away the entire nation because there has always been a remnant within the nation (which God *foreknew*), who remained faithful to Him. Some of that remnant included:

- ~ *The 7000 in Elijah's day*
- ~ *The remnant in Paul's day*
- ~ *Paul himself*

These ones (whom God *foreknew*) are called "the elect". Paul then says this elect remnant was chosen by grace and not works—and this is where the average Christian gets confused because they have been taught over and over again that anything *we* do equals "works"—and guess where this whole idea came from?

The average Christian today doesn't understand that the "works" Paul was referring to was the attempt by the Jews to earn salvation through keeping the Law. Because they have been taught over and over again that *anything we do* constitutes an effort to earn justification, they cannot understand that when Paul railed against trying to be saved by works, he was not referring to a *response* to God's moving in our lives!

The reason Paul stressed the fact that God's elect are chosen *by grace* and not *by works* is because he was talking to people who's whole religious experience was performance. He was emphasizing the grace of God because the Jews were caught up in a life of legalism. But just because Paul stressed God's grace at this point, that does not mean everything he said previously about election being *according to foreknowledge* no longer applies! Of course, it's only *because* of God's grace that He draws or saves any one. But this does not change the fact that He knows before hand who is going to respond to His grace, or that election is based on *that* foreknowledge.

It's very important that we understand there is a difference between the kind of "works" Paul mentions in Romans and various other places (which are human self-effort, legalism, and performance), and the "works" the apostle James talks about, (which are the proof that we have been regenerated).

*If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so **faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.** Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and **I will shew thee my faith by my works.** Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that **faith without works is dead?** Was not Abraham our father **justified by works**, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and **by works** was faith made perfect?....Ye see then how that **by works** a man is justified, and not by faith only.*

James 2:15-22 & 24

Works are not only important, they are absolutely necessary! If we claim to be Christians, we *better* be producing works of righteousness because such works will always accompany true salvation. If we cannot (at some point) produce good works, then our faith is in vain. This is why James could say: "I will shew thee my faith *by* my works"

This is why Jesus said we can know who is a real Christian and who isn't by looking at what kind of "fruit" they produce (Matt. 7 16-20). That fruit will *include* works of righteousness. This is why, in Ephesians 2:10, Paul said we were: "...created in Christ Jesus *unto good works...*".

I tell you truly, the majority of God's people today do not know the difference between these two kinds of works because they have been taught over and over again that *anything we do* constitutes the kind of works Paul denounces throughout the New Testament. This is the kind of confusion Calvin's stupidity has produced.

Discerning the difference between our own religious effort, and God's work in us, is not always a cut and dry issue because on the surface, many times they can look identical. A legalist will do many of the things a genuine Christian does. Both of them will pray and read their Bibles; they *both* go to church; they *both* tithe; they *both* give to charities; they *both* do good deeds in the name of the Lord.

Once again, the kind of works Paul refers to all the time—the ones he contrasts with grace—are the result of people who, in their own religious strength or zeal, do what they think (or have been taught) Christians should do. The kind of works which accompany salvation—which are the consequence of partaking of God's grace—are the result of people yielding to the work of redemption *God is doing* in them. Works that come as a result of yielding to the work God is doing in us DO NOT equal performance and legalism.

Since most people don't realize just how powerful God's foreknowledge is, they are not only ignorant of the basis upon which God elects people, they also *misinterpret* passages of Scripture which make reference to that foreknowledge. For example, in the following passage, God tells Jeremiah He knew him before he was even born:

Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

Jeremiah 1:5

The way this is worded has caused some teachers to believe we pre-existed as *disembodied spirits* before we were conceived, and that God had some kind of tangible relationship with us in that state. But in reality, this is simply a statement of God's foreknowledge. He didn't know Jeremiah in some pre-existing state. He knew Jeremiah *in His foreknowledge*. He knew before hand what kind of person Jeremiah would turn out to be. He knew before hand what kind of relationship He would have with Jeremiah, both as a person and as a prophet. He knew before hand what kind of choices Jeremiah would make throughout His entire life—and He knew before hand his final, eternal destiny.

Another popular passage that is misunderstood because of our ignorance of God's foreknowledge, is the one where God says he loved Jacob and hated Esau.

*(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that **the purpose of God according to election** might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob **have** I loved, but Esau **have** I hated.*

Romans 9:11-13

Calvinists love to use this particular passage to prove that man really has no free will. "See", they say, "God shows His *absolute* sovereignty by choosing one brother over the other, *before* they were even born. Yes, it is true that God chose Jacob over Esau before they were born. However, it is *not* true that His choice was an *arbitrary* one.

There was *a reason* He chose one child above the other. In His foreknowledge, He saw that one of them would value greatly his Hebrew heritage, his birthright, his inheritance, and his relationship with the God of Israel; while the other one wouldn't care about these things at all, and would be a man who lived only for the immediate desires of his flesh. It was on the basis of *this* foreknowledge that God made His choice of Jacob over Esau.

What Calvin believed was that God's choice of Jacob was completely arbitrary, and that once He chose Jacob, He then made sure *Jacob* turned out the way He wanted, and that *Esau* turned out the way He wanted. In other words, God *predestined* Esau to be evil; then He made sure Esau turned out to be evil; then He hated Esau because he turned out to be what he was pre-destined to be; and on the day of resurrection God will cast him into eternal torment. This is the kind of "god" John Calvin served; and this is the view of God many Christians still have.

It's because of the power of God's foreknowledge that He was able to "rest" on the Seventh Day of creation and declare that *all* His works were finished. Because of His foreknowledge, even though we are free to choose whether or not we will accept His offer of salvation, and even though we are free to turn our backs on that salvation at any time, His sovereignty will never be affected or held captive by those fickle choices. He has finished the work; and nothing we do can hinder or change that finished work.

*And on the seventh day God **ended his work** which he had made; and **he rested** on the seventh day from **all his work** which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from **all his work** which God created and made.*

Genesis 2:2-3

The "work" being referred to in Genesis is not simply the creation of the material universe and this planet with it's inhabitants. The Scripture says *all* God's works are known to Him *from eternity* (*Acts 15:18*). This is also made clear by the writer of Hebrews.

*Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swore in my wrath, **They shall not enter into my rest.**)*

Hebrews 3:10-11

*Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into **his rest**, any of **you** should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, **if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.***

Hebrews 4:1-3

The works God rested from here are not the work of creation. God was not angry at the Hebrews because they refused to enter into His *past* work of creating the material universe! The "rest" they were to enter (which is specifically called "*my rest*" by God), was the conquering of the Promised Land and being a light to the nations. This was all part of the work God had *completed* by the seventh day.

In other words, by the seventh day, *everything* was finished (in God's foreknowledge). By the seventh day, everything that was ever going to happen had already happened (in His foreknowledge). By the seventh day, God knew each and every person who would ever be born; He knew every choice every of those billions of people would

ever make; He knew where all those gazillions of choices would lead those billions of people; and He knew the *final destiny* of every one of them. *Think of how awesome our God is when you go to bed tonight.*

From Our Vantage Point...in this realm of time and space, nothing is set in stone. We do not know the end from the beginning. When we are saved, we do not know if we will endure till the end, or if at some point we will fall away. That's why Peter tells *us* to make our calling and election sure.

From God's Vantage Point...outside of time and space (and with His foreknowledge), things are set in stone because the work has *already* been completed. Therefore, He is able to calmly build His Eternal Temple in this realm of time and space. He's not busy replacing dead stones with living stones every day, as people fall away from the faith. Nor is He up in heaven, frantically shuffling a million destinies around as a result of those who have failed to make their calling and election sure.

While we are making our calling and election sure in the realm of time and space, God stands outside of time and space, and He knows who will make their calling and election sure and who won't. He knows who will start the race and finish it, and who will start the race and at some point, drop out. In fact, from God's vantage point, everyone who is going to make it has *already* made it. Every one who is going to end up in God's kingdom when the dust settles is *already* there. They have *already* been assigned their place and role in the kingdom, based on the choices God foresaw them making throughout their entire lives—such is the power of God's foreknowledge!

This is why, even though I know I am saved, and even though I believe I am called and elected to be a son, I also know there is always a possibility that I may miss that mark if I fail to make my calling and election sure down here in this realm of time and space. God already knows where I am going to end up. *Indeed, in His foreknowledge I am already there.* I am already in the place that I have made for myself, based on the choices I have made throughout my life. God already knows where I *have* ended up. The problem is, He's not telling! I have to wait until the end of my earthly pilgrimage to discover what He already knows, and has known all along. This is the power of God's foreknowledge. Everything is already done and settled on His end. But on our end there are a few questions that have to be answered:

~ *Will we enter into His finished work?*

~ *Will we remain in that work till the end by making our election sure?*

At this point it must be emphasized again that *knowing* something is going to happen in advance is not the same as *causing* that thing to happen. Just because God foreknows what we will do, just because He foreknows the choices we will make and where those choices will eventually lead, that does *not* mean He causes us or predestines us to make those choices. Just because He knows before hand that a person (based on their own free will choices) will end up eternally lost, that does not mean He *planned* for them to be lost, or that He *willed* that they be lost, or that He *caused* them to be lost.

If I see you walking down some railroad tracks, and off in the distance I see a train coming, and if I tell you about the train but you refuse to listen, then I will be able to exercise some foreknowledge of my own. I will know before hand that within the hour you will be dead. But that does not mean I caused you to walk on those tracks. Neither does it mean I caused that train to come down those same tracks at that time. Neither does it mean I caused you to ignore my warning.

This is why Calvin's view of God's sovereignty is so wicked. And this is why Calvinists are guilty of dishonoring the very God they claim to serve. They say that *knowing in advance* what people will do (and then planning things accordingly) is the same as *predestining* people to do what they will do (and then planning things accordingly). Friends, there's a big difference between these two views. One exalts the majesty and justice and righteousness of our God. The other one ascribes wickedness and injustice to our God. *Which view will you choose?*