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THE MEANING OF FOREKNOWLEDGE IN ROMANS 8:29  
AND ITS ECCLESIASTICAL IMPLICATIONS

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A Thesis  
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by  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

THE MEANING OF FOREKNOWLEDGE IN ROMANS 8:29  
AND ITS ECCLESIASTICAL IMPLICATIONS

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To Jolene,  
my beautiful bride.

You are God's gift to me.

Thank you for allowing me the time to undertake this project  
and for encouraging me to write.

You are my inspiration.

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## PREFACE

On Sunday, August 20, 2000, my father and I were in an automobile accident. Seventeen minutes after arriving at the hospital my mother was told that she had a decision to make regarding her husband's life: "Continue to keep him on life support, from which he will never recover due to severe brain trauma, or take him off of it and allow him to die in his own time." Even though the accident was no fault of mine (I was the driver), for months I wrestled with the notion that perhaps there was something I could have done in the moment to change the outcome.

At my father's visitation service, and after his funeral, I vividly recall telling people, "Bad things just happen. We live in a fallen world." Of course, that is true. We do live in a sin-ravaged world, but what I really meant was "God had no control over what happened to my father. It happened, and it's sad, but God had nothing to do with it."

The problem was, however, that my father's death and my escaping of death drove me to the Bible, and when it did I was confronted with verses like Amos 3:6, Isaiah 45:6-7, and Lamentations 3:37-38, which proclaim rather straightforwardly that God is actively sovereign even over disaster, calamity, and evil. At the same time, by God's grace I believe, I was reminded of texts like Matthew 7:7-11, Romans 8:28-39, and James 1:2-4, which speak of God's providence and fatherhood and goodness and love. The culmination of these verses, and many others, led me to the unavoidable conclusion that, yes, God is sovereign over all events, and, yes, his love for me is unquestionable.

I recount these details because my father's passing, and the theology that arose from it, is critical to this thesis. I say it is critical because shortly thereafter I was introduced to the doctrine of unconditional election: that from before the foundation of the world God chose the individuals who would be saved out of the mass of fallen humanity. Again I was driven to the Scriptures. I had always believed—by matter of assumption and tradition—that predestination was according to foreseen faith, meaning that God looked down the corridors of time, saw who would place their faith in his Son, and based upon their decision chose them.

This pilgrimage plunged me into the nature of sin and the effect it had upon mankind. My eyes were opened to the inevitability (and necessity) of unconditional election and overcoming grace. I saw for the first time that if anyone was going to repent and believe, God first had to grant them that repentance and faith. The Lord, by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, had to cause them to be born again before they could even see the beauty of the kingdom of God.

The death of my father, and its theological aftermath, paved the way for me to quietly embrace God's unconditional election of sinners to salvation. It humbled me profoundly to think that God loved me in this way before the creation of the world. My hope and prayer is that all of God's elect, even those who have yet to experience that love, will someday know it—and this thesis is my small contribution to that end.

Kyle Rader

London

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Few theological discussions stir the emotions as much as God's sovereignty and man's free will. Most people would agree, however, that to be human means to possess freedom of choice. This freedom is reflected in the myriad of decisions that people make every day, such as whom to marry, where to attend college, or whether to have apple pie or New York-style cheesecake with strawberries for dessert. If we have the freedom to choose what kind of dessert we desire after a hearty meal at our favorite restaurant, undoubtedly, it is assumed, we have the same uninhibited freedom to choose in weightier matters such as our eternal destination.

But even though an assumption may be widely accepted, it is not always wise to conclude, by default, that it is necessarily true. This is the case with free will. One would be acting in haste to deduce that free will exists, at least as understood by most contemporary definitions, simply because the majority of people embrace it. Indeed, a brief sketch of church history points not only to varied perceptions of the will, but also, and perhaps even more so, to the theological tumult that the debate has brought onto the landscape of soteriology.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Space permits me to address only the historical peaks of this controversy. Nevertheless, the spectrum of thought on the nature of the will and its progression can still be clearly seen, even if in an abridged format.

## **The Controversy over Free Will: A Historical Sketch**

The history of Christian dogma is littered with controversy, as the table of contents of any historical theology textbook will demonstrate. But while disagreement and dissension can be found throughout the church's two-thousand-year lifespan, there is something unique about the debate between Augustine and Pelagius for at least two reasons: (1) It opened up a discussion that has reverberated down through the corridors of time. (2) "There has never, perhaps, been another crisis of equal importance in Church history in which the opponents have expressed the principles at issue so clearly and abstractly."<sup>2</sup>

### **Augustinianism and Pelagianism**

After years of emotional and spiritual struggle, Augustine was driven to the Christian faith and to the bishopric at Hippo.<sup>3</sup> Pelagius, on the other hand, appears to have been the antipode to Augustine. By all accounts, and to his credit, Pelagius was a moral reformer. He was deeply concerned with personal purity and personal responsibility in striving for that purity: "From a practical point of view, Pelagius was interested in leaving no place for the excuses of those who impute their own sin to the weakness of human nature."<sup>4</sup> Louis Berkhof, in comparing the two men, thus concludes, "Pelagius was a British monk, a man of austere life, of a blameless character, and of an even temper, and perhaps partly for that very reason a stranger to the conflicts of the soul,

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<sup>2</sup>Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1898), 5:169.

<sup>3</sup>We know this mainly from Augustine's *Confessions*, a spiritual autobiography in which Augustine describes, among other things, his conversion to Christianity.

<sup>4</sup>Justo L. Gonzalez, *From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation*, rev. ed., vol. 2 of *A History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 31.

those struggles with sin, and those deep experiences of an all-renewing grace, which had such profound influence in moulding Augustine's thought."<sup>5</sup>

Undeniably, the differences in each man's personality shaped his theological convictions to some degree. And these convictions, when they finally collided, produced a volcanic reaction.<sup>6</sup> Augustine became incensed at Pelagius's seeming dismissal of God's grace, and Pelagius became incensed at Augustine's seeming dismissal of human effort. The controversy that then ensued centered mainly around two issues: original sin and free will. Both men understood that an intrinsic relationship exists between the nature of sin and the nature of the will. If original sin does not exist, meaning Adam's act of disobedience did not transmit any damning and debilitating effects upon those who would come from him, then the will remains unchanged and in the same condition as Adam before the fall. If, however, there really is such a thing as original sin, and it truly does produce a nature that is enslaved, then the will is not free but instead shackled by its sinful proclivities.

It is at this point that Augustine and Pelagius came into sharp dispute. As Augustine understood Paul in Romans 5:12ff., Adam's sin cast all of humanity into a hellish nightmare. The solidarity that existed between him and his descendants meant that sin and death spread to all men. Before the fall Adam possessed "the ability to sin" and

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<sup>5</sup>Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (London: Banner of Truth, 1937), 132.

<sup>6</sup>The reading of Augustine's famous prayer in *Confessions* ("Give what you command, and command what you will") is usually attributed to be the spark that started the proverbial fire. In 405, it is told, Pelagius overheard a bishop in Rome quote the prayer and was immediately outraged. This incident, however, is contested. B. R. Rees, for example, argues that this event is unlikely and agrees with Martinetto that Pelagius' first reactions to Augustine's doctrine of grace appear in his Pauline commentary and his treatise *On the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart*. See B. R. Rees, *Pelagius: A Reluctant Heretic* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 1988), 1.

“the ability not to sin,” but after the fall the ability not to sin was lost, ensuring that all of his posterity would be born with a corrupt nature. Augustine says of Adam,

Having sinned, he was banished from that place [Eden], and by his sin he laid upon all his descendants, whom he had vitiated in himself as their source, the penalty of death and condemnation. As a result all the children born of him and his spouse who had led him into sin and was condemned together with him—children born through carnal lust as a retribution in kind for the act of disobedience—contracted original sin. . . . And so the matter stood. The whole mass of condemned human nature lay prone in evil, indeed, wallowed in it, and precipitated itself from one evil to another; and having aligned itself with the group of angels that had sinned, it was, like them, paying the well-deserved penalties for an impious rebellion.<sup>7</sup>

The fall had devastating consequences on the nature of man’s will and his freedom of choice. By the use of his free will, Augustine argued, man had destroyed himself and his free will. Now he was in bondage to sin and could not, apart from God’s grace, avail himself unto salvation: “And since this is true, what sort of liberty, I ask you, can a bonds slave possess except the liberty to sin? For he serves freely who freely does the will of his master. Hence, he who is the servant of sin is free to sin. And therefore he will not be free to do what is right until, freed from sin, he begins to be the servant of justice [righteousness].”<sup>8</sup>

The moral reformer saw this teaching as appalling. Adam’s act of disobedience injured no one but himself and left human nature unimpaired for good. Berkhof sums up Pelagius’s anthropology succinctly: “He is, like Adam, endowed with perfect freedom of the will, with a liberty of choice or of indifference, so that he can, at any moment, choose either good or evil. And the very fact that God commands man to do what is good is

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<sup>7</sup>Augustine, *St. Augustine: Faith, Hope, and Charity*, vol. 3 of *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe, trans. Louis A. Arand (New York: Newman, 1963), 34-35.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

proof positive that he can do it.”<sup>9</sup> This perfect freedom of the will is most strikingly illustrated in a letter Pelagius wrote to Demetrius, a young girl he was advising.

No one knows better the measure of our strength than he [God] who gave us our strength; and no one has a better understanding of what is within our power than he [God] who endowed us with the very resources of our power. He has not willed to command anything impossible, for he is righteous; and he will not condemn people for what they could not help, for he is holy.<sup>10</sup>

As far as Pelagius was concerned, a hereditary transmission of sin and guilt did not follow Adam’s sin. Adam provided a universally bad example, to be sure, but that was the totality of his role as the first man: “Nothing else makes it difficult for us to do good than the long custom of sinning that has infected us since we were children and has gradually corrupted us for many years. Afterwards, it holds us bound to it and delivered over to it, so that it almost seems as if it had the same force as nature.”<sup>11</sup>

The act of sinning may make it *seem as if* man’s nature is constitutionally changed, but it is only an impression. Man does not need God’s intervening and efficacious grace<sup>12</sup> for salvation or good works, Pelagius reasoned, because his will is in a perpetual equipoise, ready at any moment to turn either way. It is, as Philip Schaff describes, “the eternal Hercules at the cross-road, who takes a first step to the right, then

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<sup>9</sup>Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 133.

<sup>10</sup>Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrius*, in *A Cloud of Witnesses: Readings in the History of Western Christianity*, ed. Joel F. Harrington (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 101.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>12</sup>Pelagius did not deny God’s grace; he simply defined it differently than Augustine. Chiefly, God’s grace is external. It includes the human conscience, the law of Moses, and the teachings and example of Jesus. Furthermore, God also provided people with free will and the ability to choose good or evil.

a step to the left, and ever returns to his former position.”<sup>13</sup> By contrast, Augustine held that the grace of God is necessary due to the will’s natural state of slavery. Man possesses a will, and he is free to choose what he wants, but as long as his will is under the sway of its master, the devil, he will only—and always—choose according to the sin that he so desires.

Pelagius’s views were first propagated in Rome, from 409 to 411, principally through his commentary on the Pauline epistles. His system<sup>14</sup> was then introduced to the church at North Africa by his disciple Coelestius, where, within a year, he was pronounced a heretic and excommunicated from the church for denying its true teachings. Likewise, his teacher and mentor would suffer the same fate. In the years that followed, numerous synods passed sentences of condemnation on Pelagius’s doctrines, establishing his name as one of the most deplored in the history of the church. Although Pelagianism was ultimately condemned as heretical, it has not passed out of existence. Alister McGrath, summing up the famous controversy, observes, “Yet Pelagianism continues to be a deep influence on Western culture, even if its name means little to most. It articulates one of the most natural of human thoughts—that we are capable of taking control of ourselves and transforming ourselves into what we would have ourselves be.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952-53), 3:803-4.

<sup>14</sup>Due to the variegated nature of its origin and development, Pelagianism is best regarded as an amalgam of the ideas of several writers—primarily Pelagius, Coelestius, and Rufinus of Syria, but also the later writer Julian of Eclanum.

<sup>15</sup>Alister McGrath, *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* (London: SPCK, 2009), 170.

## Semi-Pelagianism

Not everyone accepted the bishop of Hippo's strong denial of free will. John Cassian, Vincent of Lerins, and Faustus of Rhegium, among others, launched a vigorous rebuttal against both Augustine's dismal view of man and Pelagius's elevated view of man, which history would eventually term Semi-Pelagianism.<sup>16</sup> William Shedd, in introducing the doctrines of the Semi-Pelagians, begins by noting, "It was intended by its advocates to be a middle-position between Augustinianism and Pelagianism. The essence of the theory consists in a *mixture* of grace and free-will. There are two efficient agencies concerned in the renovation of the human will: viz., the will itself and the Holy Spirit."<sup>17</sup>

The terms "monergism" and "synergism" may help distinguish between the historical developments of the doctrine of regeneration.<sup>18</sup> Monergism means "to work alone," while synergism means "to work together." "Salvation is monergistic for Pelagius but it is a *humanistic* monergism because God's aid (*adjutorium*) is not fundamentally necessary or prevenient since man is able in and of himself to exercise works of righteousness that merit eternal life, and therefore save himself."<sup>19</sup> Salvation for Augustine is also monergistic but it is a "divine" monergism because its sole creator is

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<sup>16</sup>Semi-Pelagianism derives its name not from a particular person but from a particular system of beliefs. Like Pelagianism, it is best understood as a synthesis of ideas of those who held those beliefs.

<sup>17</sup>William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 2:106-7.

<sup>18</sup>Generally, "monergism" is the view that God alone effects salvation. For the purpose of illustration, however, I will be using the term in a slightly different manner.

<sup>19</sup>Matthew Barrett, *Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 3.

God.<sup>20</sup> What Cassian and his contemporaries sought was neither humanistic monergism nor divine monergism but a “synergism,” or working together, of the human and the divine.

As the Augustine-Pelagius debate filtered through the provinces of France, John Cassian, founder of the monastery at Marseilles, became gravely concerned about the implications of both men’s teachings. As much as he possibly could, he wanted to safeguard the universality of God’s grace and the real moral accountability of fallen man. Gregg Allison, recounting the doctrine of sin in the early church, describes Cassian as setting up the controversy between Augustinianism and Pelagianism as two horns of a dilemma: “Does God have compassion on us because we have shown the beginning of a good will? Or does the beginning of a good will follow because God has had compassion on us?”<sup>21</sup> The abbot answers,

So great is the Creator’s kindness toward his creatures that his providence not only accompanies it but actually constantly precedes it. This is what the prophet experienced and clearly affirmed: “My God will go before me with his mercy” (Psa. 59:9). When he sees in us some beginnings of a good will, he immediately enlightens it and strengthens it and urges it on toward salvation. He increases that which he himself planted or which he sees has arisen from our own efforts.<sup>22</sup>

According to Cassian, salvation can be effected by either God or man, creating a kind of “both/and” scenario. Sometimes God increases that which he himself has

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<sup>20</sup>This does not mean that the will is completely inactive; it simply means that at the initial point of renovation the will’s quickening can only be attributed to a supernatural source, namely, the Holy Spirit, and only afterward is it liberated from its bondage and free (and therefore willing) to choose Christ.

<sup>21</sup>Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 349.

<sup>22</sup>John Cassian, *The Third Conference of Abbot Chaeremon*, quoted in Allison, *Historical Theology*, 349-50.



previously implanted in a person, and then leads man toward salvation, and at other times he may simply notice the good efforts already present and urges that person onward. The grace of God and human free will, then, live harmoniously together. In all cases, Semi-Pelagians assert, the human will is good enough and capable enough to cooperate with God's grace.

By affirming both human and divine activity, Cassian was, in his mind, able to protect the grace of God and the moral accountability of fallen man, which is what he and those who stood with him wanted so desperately to do. "Therefore, while Pelagius taught a *humanistic* monergism and Augustine a *divine* monergism, the Semi-Pelagians taught a *human-initiated synergism*. Man is able to take the first move toward God, cooperating with or resisting his grace."<sup>23</sup> The three systems, in sum, can be compared as such: Pelagianism asserts that man is morally "well," Semi-Pelagianism maintains that he is morally "sick," and Augustinianism holds that he is morally "dead."

Many found the Semi-Pelagian middle-ground enticing, and in 473 the Synod of Arles condemned certain Augustinian positions, including the denial of cooperation between human obedience and divine grace, as well as the destruction of human free will after Adam's fall. In their place, the synod affirmed a combined effort between God's grace and man's free will.<sup>24</sup> The victory, however, was short-lived, as the Council of Orange in 529 condemned the teaching that God's grace comes at human request and that faith, or even a minimal desire to believe, is part of human nature and not the result of

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<sup>23</sup>Barrett, *Salvation by Grace*, 5.

<sup>24</sup>The ablest advocate of the Semi-Pelagian theory was Faustus of Rhegium, whose writings greatly influenced the decisions of the council of Arles and Lyons (AD 475), both of which sanctioned Semi-Pelagianism.

divine grace. The Semi-Pelagian proposal that God gives some people a good will but others already have a good will—thus enabling them to seek out salvation—was also denounced. In addition, the council made clear declarations concerning the tragedy of sin in humanity, claiming that no man can believe in God, or in fact do any good for his sake, unless God’s grace goes before him. Thus, the Augustinian view of sin was firmly launched into the Middle Ages.<sup>25</sup>

### **Calvinism and Arminianism**

R. C. Sproul asserts, “The modern controversy over free will is so frequently linked to John Calvin and Calvinism that many assume the Swiss Reformer was singularly responsible for ascribing to fallen man an enslaved will.”<sup>26</sup> But as evidence reveals, historically this is not the case. Calvin, in essence, only underscored in the sixteenth century what Augustine had in the fourth and fifth centuries: that Adam’s sin had a real and devastating effect upon his descendants. It did not simply serve as a bad example, as Pelagianism taught, or merely weaken man, as Semi-Pelagianism taught, but rather it changed the very makeup of his nature:

Therefore, after the heavenly image was obliterated in him [Adam], he was not the only one to suffer this punishment—that, in place of wisdom, virtue, holiness, truth, and justice, with which adornments he had been clad, there came forth the most filthy plaques, blindness, impotence, impurity, vanity, and injustice—but he also entangled and immersed his offspring in the same miseries. This is the inherited corruption, which the church fathers termed “original sin,” meaning by the word “sin” the depravation of a nature previously good and pure.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Allison, *Historical Theology*, 350.

<sup>26</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 105.

<sup>27</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1:246.

Agreeing with Augustine, Calvin held that original sin deprived man's nature of the righteousness it once enjoyed. Although still very much intact, his will was now voluntarily enslaved, incapable and unwilling of moving toward the good unless renewed by God's grace:

Since the Spirit of God declares that every imagination of man's heart from infancy is evil (Gen. 6:5; 8:21); that there is none righteous, none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God (Ps. 14:3); but that all are useless, corrupt, void of the fear of God, full of fraud, bitterness and all kinds of iniquity, and have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:10); since he proclaims that the carnal mind is enmity against God, and does not even leave us the power of thinking a good thought (Rom. 8:6; 2 Cor. 3:5), we maintain with Augustine, that man, by making a bad use of free will, lost both himself and it. Again, that the will being overcome by the corruption into which it fell, nature has no liberty. Again, that no will is free which is subject to lusts which conquer and enchain it.<sup>28</sup>

To this James Arminius did not object. The Dutch theologian confessed that by his own foul deed, Adam turned away from the light of his own mind and from his chief good, which was God, and hurled himself and all humanity into a pit that could not be escaped.<sup>29</sup> In fact, when speaking of the nature of man's will and its ability, Arminius did not hesitate to use language every bit as strong as Calvin's: "In this state, the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and weakened [*attenuatum*], but is also imprisoned [*captivatum*], destroyed, and lost. And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers

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<sup>28</sup>John Calvin, *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 1:76.

<sup>29</sup>James Arminius, *Public Disputations of James Arminius*, in *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1977), 1:526. Disputation 11 is titled "On the Free Will of Man and Its Powers."

whatever except such as are excited by Divine grace.”<sup>30</sup> Keith Stanglin and Thomas

McCall thus correctly note,

Arminius emphasized the total inability of humans to turn to God on their own. The natural person does not will the good, indeed *cannot* will, think, or do the good. Although natural faculties and hints of primeval wisdom remain in the intellect after the fall, “they cannot carry humanity to the knowledge and love of the true and saving good.” Whatever freedom remains to humanity after the fall, it is not sufficient to turn to God. Divine grace must intervene.<sup>31</sup>

Undoubtedly, both Augustine and Calvin would heartily affirm Arminius’s view of original sin and its consequences. But if that were the end of the matter, there would be no controversy. Arminius further concluded that *prevenient grace*<sup>32</sup> had neutralized the effects of Adam’s sin and restored to mankind the free will it once enjoyed before the fall. This is so “because God has taken the whole human race into the grace of reconciliation, and has entered into a covenant of grace with Adam, and with the whole of his posterity in him. In that he promises the remission of all sins to as many as stand steadfastly, and deal not treacherously, in that covenant.”<sup>33</sup> The promise of remission of sins to as many as persevere was Arminius’s way of saying that sufficient grace for salvation is universal *for* all but not common *to* all. It is common only to those who accept God’s gift and remain faithful to his covenant of grace.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 526.

<sup>31</sup>Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 151.

<sup>32</sup>The word “prevenient” comes from the Latin verb *praevenio*. It is the basis for the English word “prevent,” which in archaic usage had the meaning of “precede.” Literally, then, prevenient or preventing grace is understood to be grace that *precedes* or *comes before* salvation. More properly, it precedes any human decision in regard to salvation. Augustine used the term as well in his battle with Pelagius. In contemporary usage, however, it is mostly identified with the views of James Arminius and John Wesley. Unless otherwise noted, I will be using the term strictly in reference to Arminianism.

<sup>33</sup>Arminius, *The Apology or Defence of James Arminius*, arts. 13-14, 13.1, in *The Writings of James Arminius*, 1:318.

By positing the notion of prevenient grace, Arminius effectively rendered original sin “null and void.” Original sin exists; that cannot be denied. But it has been overridden to the point of existing only *hypothetically*. In reality, every man now is free to believe or not believe in the gospel by his own self-determining choice: “If he assents to the truth, trusts in the grace of God and obeys the commandments of Christ, he receives a greater measure of divine grace, is justified *on account of his faith* and, if he perseveres to the end, becomes a partaker of life eternal.”<sup>34</sup> As Roger Olson explains, “Grace heals the deadly wound of sin and enables humans, who are otherwise in bondage of the will to sin, to respond freely to the message of the gospel. Grace brings God’s undeserved and unmerited favor to humans who exercise faith with repentance and trust in Christ alone for salvation.”<sup>35</sup>

Amidst a backdrop of political and social instability, controversy slowly emerged. After Arminius’s death, his followers, in 1610, drafted a statement of faith known as “The Remonstrance,” making public their views about election, the atonement, and God’s grace. Then, in November of 1618, a major synod was convened to examine the doctrines brought forth by the Remonstrants. After deliberating for several months, the Synod of Dort, representing the Dutch Reformed Church, condemned the teachings of Arminianism and adopted distinctive canons reaffirming historic Calvinism: “These canons make abundantly clear the difference between the views of Arminius and the

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<sup>34</sup>Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 221.

<sup>35</sup>Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 160-61.

Remonstrants and the views of classical Reformed theology. The issue of the efficacy of grace is in the final analysis crucial to the Reformation principle of *sola gratia*.<sup>36</sup>

### **Familiarity with the Literature**

At this juncture the meaning of foreknowledge steps boldly into the spotlight. Just as an intrinsic connection exists between the nature of sin and the nature of the will, there also exists an intrinsic connection between the nature of man's will and the nature of God's foreknowledge, for how one understands the will ultimately determines how one defines foreknowledge as it relates to election—and on that point there is no consensus. Both Arminians and Calvinists (and every stripe in between) know what is at stake is not personal reputation. Rather, it is something incomparably more significant: God's name and glory.

Perhaps one of the most-cited works in the Arminianism-Calvinism debate is Forster and Marston's *God's Strategy in Human History*.<sup>37</sup> Refuting Calvinism, Forster and Marston examine God's purposes with Israel and the church, as well as provide a detailed interpretation of Romans 9-11. Furthermore, they furnish detailed "subject" and "word" studies, including an intensive analysis of the term "foreknowledge." Theologians agree that election is according to foreknowledge (Rom 8:29; 1 Pet 1:2). They disagree, however, over the definition of foreknowledge. Forster and Marston delineate seven shades of meaning of the word γινώσκω ("to know") as they understand it to be used in Scripture. They conclude that the Hebraic sense of γινώσκω, which ultimately they define

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<sup>36</sup>Sproul, *Willing to Believe*, 139.

<sup>37</sup>Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1973).

as “choose,” must be rejected for the more natural meaning that God’s predestining purpose was set out in full light of those who would receive that destiny in Christ.

Another work frequently referenced is Clark Pinnock’s *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*.<sup>38</sup> Contributing to this compilation are Arminianism’s top scholars, such as I. Howard Marshall, Jack Cottrell, and Jerry Walls. *The Grace of God, the Will of Man* defends the proposition that God is a dynamic personal being who respects the freedom he chose to delegate to his human creatures and relates sensitively to them in his plans for the whole of history. God is love, and he expresses that love by working salvation among us under the conditions of genuine mutuality. This means primarily that he is not deterministic, as is the God of Calvinism. Even so, he remains sovereign—and a truly sovereign God, they declare, is a God who is free to limit himself in regard to his works, a God who is free to decide not to determine if he so chooses, and a God who is free to bestow the gift of relative independence on his creatures.

This gift of independence has undeniable implications on free will, faith, and the meaning of foreknowledge, as is demonstrated in Arminian commentaries. Godet’s *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* is an example.<sup>39</sup> Appealed to frequently by free-will theologians, Godet’s treatment of Romans 8:29 points out that if the meaning of foreknowledge is “elect, choose, or destine beforehand,” it is not only without example in the New Testament but also makes “foreknew” and “predestine” identical in meaning, whereas the degrees of divine action are clearly distinguished and graduated. Because

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<sup>38</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, ed., *The Grace of God, the Will of Man* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989).

<sup>39</sup>Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1889).

God lives above time, Godet argues, foreseeing is seeing. To say it another way, knowing what will be is knowing what to him already is. God's foreknowledge, therefore, is of the believer's faith, which in his sight existed before the foundation of the world.

Leroy Forlines, in his treatment of Romans, approaches the subject of foreknowledge and election from a unique angle.<sup>40</sup> He argues that God deals with us not in a cause-and-effect manner but in an influence-and-response manner. What it means to be created in the image of God, fundamentally, is that we are persons; we act, think, and feel. The cause-and-effect model that Calvinism portrays, Forlines claims, is mechanical and deterministic, a statement with which Pinnock and the authors of *The Grace of God, The Will of Man* would most assuredly agree. Forlines's influence-and-response model, as a result, fits perfectly with Arminianism's framework of soteriology. God can woo us, draw us, and even influence us in a strong and compelling fashion, but how we respond is decisively left up to us. For God to treat us any other way would be for God to treat us as less than persons.

Nevertheless, the majority of Arminian arguments focus on foreknowledge as God's prescience. In his commentary on Romans, Osborne, like Godet, provides the more traditional interpretation of foreknowledge as it relates to salvation.<sup>41</sup> Recognizing that the majority of commentators understand "foreknew" to be virtually equivalent to "predestine," he outlines six reasons why this is such an impressive and even persuasive

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<sup>40</sup>F. Leroy Forlines, *Romans*, The Randall House Bible Commentary (Nashville: Randall House, 1987).

<sup>41</sup>Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, The IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).



position,<sup>42</sup> yet wonders if it is the most natural understanding of the verb. It is better, Osborne asserts, to interpret foreknowledge as God knowing the individuals who would respond in faith to his call. Osborne's contribution to the study of Romans in general, and to the subject of foreknowledge in particular, is his clear and concise exposition, as it provides a fine example of the classical Arminian interpretation of Romans 8:29-30.

As there are competent and willing theologians to contend for an Arminian understanding of election, foreknowledge, and grace, there are equally competent and willing theologians to contend for a Calvinistic understanding of election, foreknowledge, and grace. In *Still Sovereign*, edited by Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware, the authors reject the teachings found in Pinnock's *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*.<sup>43</sup> They maintain that God's saving grace is set only upon some, namely those whom, in his great love, he elected long ago to save, and that his grace is necessarily effective in turning them to belief. Particularly of interest is S. M. Baugh's essay, "The Meaning of Foreknowledge."<sup>44</sup> He argues against the objection that Calvinists blur God's

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<sup>42</sup>(1) The relational love inherent in "foreknew" goes further than mere foreknowledge of choices and means "to determine to enter a relationship," that is, God's choice or election (as in Rom 11:2; 1 Pet 1:2, 20). (2) It relates to his preordained plan from verse 28. (3) It is a foreknowledge that determines rather than just knows what is to happen. (4) The emphasis is on the second verb, *predestined*, and the first verb simply prepares for it. (5) It connotes that God knew his people, not just about what they would decide to do. (6) Since it refers to a prior intimate knowledge of believers, it by nature becomes synonymous with God's choice "before the creation of the world" (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20). These six reasons, and why Osborne finds them unpersuasive, will be further examined in chapters three and four. See Osborne, *Romans*, 221.

<sup>43</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, eds., *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

<sup>44</sup>S. M. Baugh, "The Meaning of Foreknowledge," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 183-200.

foreknowledge and predestination, showing that they are not synonymous terms but rather two separate and distinct pre-creation acts of God.<sup>45</sup>

If, however, only one book had to be recommended to the layperson seeking to understand better the doctrine of unconditional election, it should be Sam Storms's *Chosen for Life*.<sup>46</sup> Arguably, it is the most readable and practical treatment of the doctrine of unconditional election in the theological marketplace today. Leaving no stone unturned, Storms confidently addresses historical, theological, exegetical, and practical issues, and he does not shy away from Calvinism's so-called "problematic" passages. While Arminians often quote 1 Timothy 2:3-4, 2 Peter 3:9, and John 3:16 as definitive evidence against unconditional election, Storms shows what he considers to be the more likely interpretations of those texts. *Chosen for Life* gives the Christian community a fair assessment, from a Calvinistic perspective, of both conditional and unconditional election, and leaves the reader to decide.

While *Chosen for Life* does an excellent job of clarifying Calvinism's most vilified doctrine, it still may leave the studious student of Scripture desiring a more technical study of Romans 8:29-30. Pertinent to the discussion of free will and foreknowledge is John Murray's *The Epistle to the Romans*.<sup>47</sup> His discussion of foreknowledge, alongside of Baugh's in *Still Sovereign*, is among the best Calvinistic literature has to offer. If one wants to understand rightly foreknowledge in the Hebraic

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<sup>45</sup>A common Arminian objection is that the Calvinist definition of *foreknew* collapses the distinction between "foreknowledge" and "predestination." This matter will be addressed in chapter four.

<sup>46</sup>C. Samuel Storms, *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

<sup>47</sup>John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 315-20.

sense, which is the predominant argument Calvinists put forth, then one must interact with Murray's commentary. Rejecting the "foreknowledge as foreseen faith" view, he argues that the dismissal of this interpretation is not dictated by a predestinarian interest. Murray's main contribution, though, is his strong emphasis on the distinction between foreknowledge and predestination. He concludes that the Arminian objection, while popular, is palpably without warrant or reason.

In addition, Douglas Moo's *The Epistle to the Romans* provides the theological community with a noteworthy discussion of foreknowledge.<sup>48</sup> Admitting that the most common meaning of the verb "foreknow" is "to know ahead of time," which suggests that God foresees something peculiar to believers, Moo nonetheless doubts it is the correct interpretation in Romans 8:29. He outlines three reasons, making it hard to conceive, as far as he can discern, that foreseen faith is the ground of God's choosing. Though Moo's reasoning is not altogether different from Murray's, it is always beneficial to hear an argument presented in a new and fresh way. Read together, Murray's and Moo's exegeses of Romans 8:29-30 will equip any reader with a solid grasp of the Reformed view of foreknowledge and its relationship to predestination.

However, it is helpful to read a book that presents all views of predestination in one volume, and that is what Chad Brand's *Perspectives on Election* accomplishes.<sup>49</sup> It sets forth the five common views of predestination that have developed over the course of church history. Written by prominent scholars from each respective system, *Perspectives*

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<sup>48</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 531-35.

<sup>49</sup>Chad Owen Brand, ed., *Perspectives on Election: Five Views* (Nashville: B & H, 2006).

*on Election* enables its readers to hear the best arguments that each position has to offer. In addition, responses are then provided by the four other writers, allowing not only each view's strengths to be seen but also its weaknesses. Particularly, Jack Cottrell, representing the classical Arminian view of election, gives an intensive and concerted rebuttal of the Hebraic sense of foreknowledge. Alone, it serves as a fitting counterpoint to Baugh, Murray, and Moo.

### **Void in the Literature**

Unquestionably, volumes have been written to defend both the Arminian and Calvinist definitions of foreknowledge. Even a brief examination of the above-mentioned resources reveals as much. But while I have greatly benefited from many of the Calvinist authors, and am firmly convinced they are correct in their view, there remains a void to be filled. This void is seen in at least two ways. First, although many convincing arguments have been written in support of foreknowledge in the Calvinistic sense, a sustained, comprehensive argument from one source does not exist. What is needed is an intensive treatment that defends the Hebraic understanding of foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 from all possible angles of argumentation.

Second, a survey of Calvinist literature reveals a lack of clear connection between the Reformed view of foreknowledge and its impact on the church. All agree that orthodoxy informs orthopraxy, and certainly this is no more true than in the relationship between soteriology and ecclesiology. The question that then must be asked—and answered—is this: Does a Calvinistic view of foreknowledge make a significant difference in the practical outworking of one's life and faith over and above the Arminian view?

## **Thesis**

My thesis will argue that the term “foreknew” in Romans 8:29 refers to God’s covenantal commitment to individuals he set his love upon before the foundation of the world and, as such, has far-reaching implications for the church, both individually and corporately. First, however, it will examine both the Arminian and Calvinist understandings of election and foreknowledge in their historical and soteriological frameworks. Then, a consideration of the biblical evidence will demonstrate that the Calvinistic sense of “foreknew” is most faithful to Scripture. Finally, it will conclude by expounding upon what it means to be foreknown by God and delineating the implications of that foreknowledge for the body of Christ.

## CHAPTER 2

### FOREKNOWLEDGE AS FORESEEN FAITH

It is not uncommon in contemporary ecclesiastical thought to believe that the five points of Calvinism—popularly known as TULIP—developed solely from Calvin’s personal theology. The impetus, however, for the acronym TULIP likely has its origin in the five articles of “The Remonstrance” that Arminius’s followers presented to the States of Holland in July of 1610,<sup>1</sup> in which they affirmed (1) a conditional election based upon foreseen faith, (2) an atonement that is universal, (3) that man stands in need of God’s grace to be renewed in thought and will, (4) the possibility of resisting such grace, and (5) an uncertainty as to whether man could lapse from that grace (which was later amended to a definite statement that true believers may fall away through their own fault and lose their faith fully and finally).<sup>2</sup> This chapter will focus chiefly upon Arminianism’s understanding of foreknowledge and its relationship to election. First, it will define conditional election. Second, it will present a defense of prevenient grace. Third, it will delineate the various Arminian interpretations of Romans 8:29.

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<sup>1</sup>The document was unsigned but was undoubtedly the work of Jan Uitenbogaert. See A. W. Harrison, *Arminianism* (London: Duckworth, 1937), 50.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

## Conditional Election Defined

The positions that the Remonstrants set forth came principally from the teachings of James Arminius. It is often assumed that Arminius's dramatic about-face to conditional election happened rather ironically when he was asked to refute the opinions of Dirck Coornhert.<sup>3</sup> Coornhert, who rejected certain aspects of Calvin's teachings, found the doctrine of unconditional election particularly distasteful. After studying Coornhert's writings, comparing them with Scripture, and wrestling long and hard with his own conscience, Arminius reportedly reached the conclusion that his opponent was right.

Fascinating as this story may be, its accuracy has been questioned. Carl Bangs, a leading expert on the life and thought of Arminius, concludes that "Arminius was not in agreement with Beza's (a student of John Calvin's) doctrine of predestination when he undertook his ministry at Amsterdam; indeed, he probably never had agreed with it. The issues had not been raised sharply for him, however, until the events just related here, at which time he took a specific stand against both the high Calvinist positions then proposed—supralapsarianism and sublapsarianism."<sup>4</sup> Stanglin and McCall, in agreement with Bangs, also propose, "Not only did Beza never require his students to agree with his precise predestinarian views, but Arminius never gives any hint that he had a change of heart. It is just as likely that Arminius, as an heir of the early Dutch Reformation, always held to a sort of conditional predestination."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>For example, see Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1985), 2:179.

<sup>4</sup>Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury, 1985), 141.

<sup>5</sup>Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 29.

Possibly Arminius was asked to refute Coornhert because, as a one-time student of Beza's, it was naturally assumed he held the same soteriological convictions as his former teacher. Or, as Bangs alternatively suggests, he was intentionally put in a difficult position to force his hand.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of the details, Arminius's view of election was clearly expounded in a speech he delivered to the magistrates of Holland on October 20, 1608, which was later translated into Latin as *Declaratio sententiae* (Declaration of Sentiments). As requested, Arminius gave his opinions on the controversial topics of the day, including, among other things, providence, predestination, free will, grace, assurance of salvation, and perfection of believers. Because he delivered this speech to laymen in a mostly non-technical manner, the *Declaration of Sentiments* remains a very accessible introduction to the controversies surrounding Arminius's time in Leiden (compared to the more technical and academic disputations). And since it was given less than a year before his death, the speech represents his mature and seasoned opinions on these issues. For these reasons, the *Declaration of Sentiments* is the best place to begin reading and understanding Arminius and his views.<sup>7</sup>

### **Arminius and Election**

Roger Olson correctly says, "Only the most cynical scholar could claim that Arminius and Arminians deny predestination."<sup>8</sup> He is also correct in saying, "They know that Arminius set forth an alternative to Calvinism's interpretation of God's decrees and

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<sup>6</sup>Bangs, *Arminius*, 141.

<sup>7</sup>Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 39.

<sup>8</sup>Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 179.



predestination.”<sup>9</sup> Certainly then, the Dutch theologian believed in election; he just defined it differently than the Reformed tradition. In his *Declaration of Sentiments*, Arminius insisted on working out an order of four sequential decrees that treats human beings as fallen and as desired by God for salvation through Christ:

- I. The FIRST absolute decree of God concerning the salvation of sinful man, is that by which he decreed to appoint his Son, Jesus Christ, for a Mediator, Redeemer, Savior, Priest and King, who might destroy sin by his own death, might by his obedience obtain the salvation which had been lost, and might communicate it by his own virtue.
- II. The SECOND precise and absolute decree of God, is that in which he decreed to receive into favor *those who repent and believe*, and, in Christ, for HIS sake and through HIM, to effect the salvation of such penitents and believers as persevered to the end; but to leave in sin, and under wrath, *all impenitent persons and unbelievers*, and to damn them as aliens from Christ.
- III. The THIRD divine decree is that by which God decreed to administer *in a sufficient and efficacious manner* the MEANS which were necessary for repentance and faith; and to have such administration instituted (1.) according to the *Divine Wisdom*, by which God knows what is proper and becoming both to this mercy and his severity, and (2.) according to Divine Justice, by which He is prepared to adopt whatever his wisdom may prescribe and put it in execution.
- IV. To these succeeds the FOURTH decree, by which God decreed to save and damn certain particular persons. This decree has its foundation in the foreknowledge of God, by which he knew from all eternity those individuals who *would*, through his preventing [prevenient] grace, *believe*, and, through his subsequent grace *would persevere*, according to the before described administration of those means which are suitable and proper for conversion and faith; and, by which foreknowledge, he likewise knew those *who would not believe and persevere*.<sup>10</sup>

Arminius’s first decree can be succinctly stated as *the election of Jesus Christ*.

The fundamental objection Arminius proposed to the Calvinist schemes of predestination is that they were Christocentrically insufficient, meaning that their starting point is man and not God’s Son. As Olson describes, “Jesus Christ seems to arrive as an afterthought

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Arminius, *Declaration of Sentiments*, in *The Writings of James Arminius*, 1:247-48.

to God's primary decree to save some and damn others."<sup>11</sup> Christ, according to Arminius, is the pre-eminent object of election. In fact, he is the very foundation of the decree, so that all election is "in Christ," flows from Christ, and thus exalts Christ to the highest level of supremacy and glory.

The second decree proposed is *the election of the church*. It is, as Arminius delineates, corporate in nature. God chose to receive into favor those who repent and believe, and likewise leave in sin and under wrath those who do not. This type of predestination Arminius expounded in his exposition of Romans 9. Those predestined collectively make up the body of Christ.<sup>12</sup> "The first two decrees, then, lay down a doctrine of absolute predestination that has as its object Jesus Christ, and through him, the church."<sup>13</sup>

Following the decree of the church is *the appointment of means*. The third decree states that God determined to provide the necessary, sufficient, and powerful means of repentance and faith, enabling all to believe, if they will, when confronted with the message of the cross. "The preaching of the gospel is a serious call," explains Bangs. "Divine mercy and justice are involved. If God is to be both merciful and just, the reprobate must not be denied access to sufficient, powerful means to repentance and faith. The reprobate cannot be damned for disobedience to a call not made to them."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 183.

<sup>12</sup>Bangs, *Arminius*, 351.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 352.

The fourth, and final, decree is *the election of individuals*. Arminius states that this decree—the decree to save certain particular persons and damn certain particular persons—is rooted in God’s foreknowledge, which he defines as God’s prescience of who will repent, believe, and persevere through the enabling (preventing) grace they had received. Yet while there is widespread scholarly acknowledgment that Arminius believed in the doctrine of election, Olson points out that popular Christian opinion has become firmly convinced that the difference between Calvinists and Arminians is that the former believe in predestination and the latter believe in free will. “That has been elevated to the status of a truism in American pop theology and folk religion. *But it is false.*”<sup>15</sup>

### **Contemporary Arminian Perspectives**

To prove that Arminius believed in individual election is nevertheless not the foremost issue. Instead, the cardinal issue is what Arminius believed *about* individual election. According to Arminius, election is patently conditional; that is, it is based upon God’s foresight of individual faith, a faith that all persons are enabled to exercise through the renewing power of prevenient grace. Furthermore, conditional election can take on different nuances, as is evidenced in Arminius’s second decree of the election of the church as a corporate entity, as well as in contemporary Arminian perspectives.

The simplest framework of conditional election is *individual* in the “strictest” sense. Jack Cottrell defines the classical Arminian doctrine of predestination as “the view that before the world ever existed God conditionally predestined some specific

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<sup>15</sup>Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 179, emphasis added.

individuals to eternal life and the rest to eternal condemnation, based on his foreknowledge of their freewill<sup>16</sup> responses to his law and to his grace.”<sup>17</sup> He stresses,

When the Bible speaks of predestination to salvation, it refers to persons and not to an impersonal plan (e.g., Rom. 8:29-30; 1 Pet. 1:1-2). In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 (NASB) Paul says that “God has chosen you,” the Christians at Thessalonica, “for salvation.” In Romans 6:13 Rufus is called an elect person. Revelation 17:8 implies that specific names have been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. What can this be but individual predestination? As we shall see below, a distinctive feature of the Arminian view of predestination is that it is based on literal divine foreknowledge (Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:1-2). True foreknowledge is foreknowledge of *individuals*. One cannot believe in predestination according to foreknowledge and at the same time deny individual predestination. Thus a consistent Arminian theology affirms the predestination of individuals.<sup>18</sup>

Robert Picirilli, also an Arminian, emphasizes the personal and individual nature of conditional election as well in his book *Grace, Faith, Free Will*. Citing Arminius’s fourth decree of election, he concludes that “what Arminius taught was election of individuals as *believers*, but individuals nevertheless.”<sup>19</sup> A truly Arminian soteriology, as both Cottrell and Picirilli rightly contend, is a soteriology that affirms individual election. Before the foundation of the world “certain particular persons” were chosen, or not chosen, based solely upon God’s foreknowledge of how they would respond to the gospel. To deny such individual election is to deny Arminius’s own teaching.

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<sup>16</sup>Arminians differ on what they mean by a “freewill” response. A Pelagian free will and an Arminian free will are not, by definition, synonymous. That does not affect this discussion, however. For the purposes of this thesis, what matters is that the will is in a state to believe when presented with the gospel.

<sup>17</sup>Jack Cottrell, “The Classical Arminian View of Election,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2006), 72.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>19</sup>Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism* (Nashville: Randall House, 2002), 52.

A second framework of conditional election is primarily *corporate* in nature. Those taking this view “assert that God in his precreation counsels predetermined that all who later would fall into a certain category of people would be chosen for eternal salvation. That is, God determined that he would give salvation to anyone who would fulfill certain conditions.”<sup>20</sup> The act of predestination, as understood in the corporate sense of election, applies not so much to individuals as it does to a class, group, or category of unspecified people. Robert Shank, for instance, downplays individual election and highlights class election when discussing the first chapter of Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians. “Obviously, the corporate body of the elect is comprised of individuals. But the election is primarily corporate and only secondarily particular.”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, C. Gordon Olson writes that the apostle’s letter to the church at Ephesus “militates for corporate, not individual, election.”<sup>22</sup>

While individual and corporate election can be seen as two separate and distinct views, it should not be thought that the ideas are completely at odds with one another. Olson is one such theologian who comfortably holds both particular and class predestination together, thus upholding Arminius’s second and fourth decrees:

It is also a fact that all true Arminians believe in predestination, but not in Calvinist foreordination. That is, they believe that God foreknows every person’s ultimate and final decision regarding Jesus Christ, and on that basis God predestines people to salvation or damnation. But Arminians do not believe God predetermines or preselects people for either heaven or hell apart from their free acts of accepting or resisting the grace of God. Furthermore, Arminians interpret the biblical concept of unconditional election (predestination to salvation) as corporate. Thus,

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<sup>20</sup>Cottrell, “Classical Arminian View,” 78.

<sup>21</sup>Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Election* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989), 45.

<sup>22</sup>C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism: An Inductive, Mediate Theology of Salvation* (Cedar Knolls, NJ: Global Gospel Publishers, 2002), 38.

predestination has an individual meaning (foreknowledge of individual choices) and a collective meaning (election of a people). The former is conditional; the latter is unconditional. God's predestination of individuals is conditioned by their faith; God's election of a people for his glory is unconditional. The latter will comprise all those who believe.<sup>23</sup>

The third category of conditional election can be described predominantly as being "in Christ." Perhaps the most popular expressions of this view are Forster and Marston's *God's Strategy in Human History* and Pinnock's *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*.<sup>24</sup> Appealing to Ephesians 1:4, Forster and Marston contend that the central idea in the election of the church is that "we are chosen in Christ. The church is elect because it is in Christ and he is elect."<sup>25</sup> This means that God did not first choose us and then put us in Christ; rather, we share in Christ's election by the privilege of being believers, and so are chosen in him.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, William MacDonald draws attention to the corporate unity concept in Ephesians 1:3-14 and comments, "One must not talk about election without mentioning Christ in every breath—not mechanically—but in recognition of the truth that there is not a chance of being chosen outside of him."<sup>27</sup> "Christ is the chosen one in and through whom in corporate solidarity with him the church is selected to be God's own.

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<sup>23</sup>Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 180.

<sup>24</sup>As well, Robert Shank's *Elect in the Son* is a comprehensive work that has been influential in propounding this view.

<sup>25</sup>Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1973), 130.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>27</sup>William G. MacDonald, "The Biblical Doctrine of Election," in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 222.

No one is ever chosen *on his own*, that is, outside of Christ, or apart from incorporation in the church.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Prevenient Grace Defended**

Nuanced as these views of conditional election may be, there is one common thread that binds them all together: each clearly requires some semblance of free will, be it natural or restored, in order to be anthropologically and soteriologically cohesive.

Cottrell, representing the classical Arminian view of predestination in the book *Perspectives on Election*, begins his essay with this very observation: “Arminianism as such, in its broadest sense, is simply non-Augustinianism or non-Calvinism. It has many variations, from the evangelical views of Arminius himself to left-wing liberalism. What holds them all together is the rejection of the Augustinian concept of true total depravity (bondage of the will), and a belief in significant free will, at least in relation to the ability to accept or reject the gospel offer of salvation.”<sup>29</sup> Later in the chapter, while discussing human sinfulness, Cottrell further clarifies the point of departure between Arminianism and Calvinism as to the nature of the will:

Classical Arminianism has a different view of the nature of man as a sinner. While there are variations in the explanation of why this is so, all Arminians believe that at the time of the hearing of the gospel call, every sinner has the free will either to accept or to reject it. This is in essence a denial of the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity. Some Arminians believe that no sinner is ever totally depraved; others believe that all people are initially afflicted with total depravity but that God through a universal preparatory grace mitigates the depravity and restores a measure of freedom. Either way the result is the same: when the moment of choice comes, sinners have a freedom of the will to meet or not to meet the conditions for salvation. This is a prerequisite for the Arminian concept of conditional election.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 228.

<sup>29</sup>Cottrell, “Classical Arminian View,” 70.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 120-21.

It is fair to deduce then, from Cottrell's own words, that free will is the hinge on which conditional election turns. Since this is true, then prevenient grace, by logical necessity, is the hinge on which free will turns. For man to possess free will, he *must* have within himself the ability to either choose or reject the gospel message by his own self-determining power, hence prevenient grace. Before looking at the arguments for such universal enabling grace, it is necessary to define it properly. Prevenient grace "is that grace which 'goes before' or prepares the soul for entrance into the initial state of salvation. It is the preparatory grace of the Holy Spirit exercised toward man helpless in sin."<sup>31</sup> More specifically, it "erases the debilitating effects of sin on minds, restores moral free agency, convicts of sin, and exerts a Godward influence on hearts."<sup>32</sup> By virtue of prevenient grace, the Arminian maintains, all people are born—and exist—in a preliminary state of grace, providing every human soul with the potential for salvation.

### **Arguments for Prevenient Grace**

The evidence for prevenient grace can be categorized into five lines of argument.<sup>33</sup> First, the *judicial* argument, from which Arminius's thought mainly comes, holds that prevenient grace is primarily a result of God's justice. Second, the *Christological* argument, formulated first by John Wesley, asserts that prevenient grace is the direct result of the cross and the first benefit of Christ's universal atonement. Third, the *incarnational* argument appeals to John 1:9, which teaches that Jesus' coming

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<sup>31</sup>H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1952), 2:345-46

<sup>32</sup>Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 56.

<sup>33</sup>These categories should not be thought of as "concrete," as they do overlap in many areas. Rather, they should simply be seen as aids to help traverse the different angles of argumentation for prevenient grace.



brought a universal enlightenment upon all mankind. Fourth, the *causal* argument sheds light on the numerous warnings, invitations, and commands in Scripture that imply a natural ability to give a positive response. Fifth, the *ontological* argument, taking its stance from the nature of God, puts forth the love of God and his desire for all to be saved as the grounding for such enabling grace.

**The judicial argument for prevenient grace.** There is no question that Arminius believed Adam's first sin had crippling and devastating effects upon mankind, even to the point of rendering his progeny unable and unwilling to come to Jesus on their own. However, Arminius's doctrine of original sin differs from classical Calvinism in that he did not believe the human race suffers any penal consequences for Adam's sin. Although somewhat difficult to follow, Arminius's specialized vocabulary is nonetheless revealing:

It may admit of discussion, whether God could be angry on account of original sin which was born with us, since it seemed to be inflicted on us by God as a punishment of the actual sin which had been committed by Adam and by us in Him . . . . I did not deny that it was *sin*, but it was not *actual sin*. . . . We must distinguish between actual sin, and that which was *the cause of other sins*, and which, on this very account might be denominated "sin."<sup>34</sup>

Before attempting to tackle Arminius's doctrine of original sin, Stanglin and McCall offer these words of wisdom: "It is important to distinguish between, on one hand, the first sin committed by the primordial couple and, on the other hand, the lasting effects of that sin on the couple and their posterity."<sup>35</sup> That insight proves invaluable in understanding Arminius's anthropology, particularly what it is he attempts to

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<sup>34</sup>Arminius, *The Apology or Defence of James Arminius*, 1:374-75.

<sup>35</sup>Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 142.

communicate in the above passage. Both Calvinists and Arminians usually interpret the above statement as Arminius speaking of Adam's sin in the sense that it produces sinful acts in his descendants through the corrupt nature they receive, but concluding that it cannot be called the "actual sin" of his descendants in the sense that they are in any way culpable for his specific sin.<sup>36</sup> In other words, Arminius appears to draw a line of distinction between "actual sin," Adam's first act of disobedience of which only he is responsible, and "the cause of other sins," that corrupt nature that we all inherit via Adam's first act of disobedience.

What then would Arminius deduce are the lasting effects of the first sin? Again, Stanglin and McCall offer helpful words of discernment: "Two points are crucial for grasping Arminius's thoughts on original sin. First, he defines it primarily as a lack of original righteousness. Second, he further describes original sin as punishment, but not guilt."<sup>37</sup> Original sin, according to Arminius, is more accurately described as personal deprivation rather than personal depravation, the difference being not that *guilt* was *imputed* in the Fall (depravation) but that *righteousness* was *lost* in the Fall (deprivation). Furthermore, the punishment mankind received due to Adam's sin is—and *only is*—the corrupt nature they received from him. And yet while that corrupt nature is a misfortune, a terrible and terrifying misfortune, it does not result in all of humanity being guilty before God in the same way that Adam was.

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<sup>36</sup>William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 2:184–85; Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 2:108. Picirilli, contrary to most Arminians, believes that Arminius did hold that Adamic guilt was passed to his posterity. See Picirilli, *Grace Faith Free Will*, 152.

<sup>37</sup>Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 145.

This discussion is relevant, as it bears directly on the notion of prevenient grace. Because mankind is innocent of Adam's sin, he is not liable to punishment except for his own voluntary acts of transgression. Since man labors under this unfortunate disability, "it is no more than equitable, that God should furnish a grace that shall be a sufficient assistance to overcome the inherited evil."<sup>38</sup> From this trajectory of logic, Arminius, and likewise his earliest followers, regarded the restorative grace bestowed upon our depraved nature as flowing from the justice of God.<sup>39</sup> After all, it would be grossly unfair of God to condemn the majority who were unable to believe the gospel because they were not visited by grace.<sup>40</sup> Thus the judicial nature of God demands that a preparatory grace go before all mankind.

**The Christological argument for prevenient grace.** John Wesley took the concept of prevenient grace and added an element to it that Arminius had not. Whereas Arminius argued that prevenient grace is a matter of God's justice, Wesley held that it was strictly due to the grace of God flowing from what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Orton Wiley, in outlining the differences between Arminianism and Wesleyanism, notes, "Wesley on the other hand, regarded this ability [the ability to cooperate with God] as solely a matter of grace, an ability conferred through the free gift of prevenient grace, given to all men as a first benefit of the universal atonement made by Christ for all men."<sup>41</sup> Charles Hodge sums up Wesleyan thought in much the same way, emphasizing

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<sup>38</sup>Shedd, *History of Christian Doctrine*, 2:190.

<sup>39</sup>Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 2:108.

<sup>40</sup>Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 56-57.

<sup>41</sup>Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 2:108.

the restored ability to cooperate with God as a direct consequence of the atoning cross work of Christ:

Wesleyanism (1) admits entire moral depravity; (2) denies that any men in this state have any power to co-operate with the grace of God; (3) asserts that the guilt of all through Adam was removed by the justification of all through Christ; and (4) ability to co-operate is of the Holy Spirit, through the universal influence of the redemption of Christ.<sup>42</sup>

At the heart of Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace is a strong rebuttal against Calvinism's doctrine of limited atonement. Citing passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 and 1 John 2:2, which clearly state that Jesus died for "all" and for the sins of "the whole world," Wesley challenged all those who defended a restricted atonement to produce scriptures which repeal, or even modify, such unambiguous declarations as those he had quoted.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Jesus himself claims in John 12:32, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Titus 2:11, as well, states that "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people."<sup>44</sup>

That Jesus died for all and for the sins of the whole world, and that he draws all people to himself, even "bringing salvation" for all people, clearly intimates that the grace given in the atonement is not limited to a select group of individuals that God has previously chosen. Instead, it is given indiscriminately to all without exception, providing each person the opportunity to either accept or reject the gospel message when it is presented to him or her. The doctrine of limited atonement, by contrast, is not only

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<sup>42</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, as quoted in Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 2:108.

<sup>43</sup>Arthur Skevington Wood, "The Contribution of John Wesley to the Theology of Grace," in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), 216.

<sup>44</sup>John 16:8-11; 1 Tim 2:5-6; Hebr 2:9; 2 Pet 2:1; and Rev 3:20 are also frequently cited in support of a Christological-type argument for prevenient grace.

philosophically deficient and theologically repugnant, but most of all, logically contradictory to the clear teaching of passage after passage of Scripture.<sup>45</sup> The Bible clearly teaches, says the Arminian, that Jesus died for the sins of all individuals, and man can—and must—respond to the free offer of salvation.

**The incarnational argument for prevenient grace.** A Scripture text that is appealed to frequently in support of prevenient grace is John 1:9: “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” Although not analyzed in detail by Wesleyan authors, the understanding of this verse seems straightforward enough:

The coming of Jesus into the world brought enough light to all people so that they are now able to reject or accept the message of the gospel. The illumination (*phōtizei*) refers to the granting of grace that overcomes the darkness that penetrated human hearts as a result of Adam’s sin. This illumination does not guarantee salvation; it simply makes it possible for men and women to choose salvation.<sup>46</sup>

The stark reality of Jesus’ incarnation, and thus the grace that he brought with him, has a powerful ongoing effect: it lifts the veil off blinded eyes, illuminates every darkened soul, and gives all people everywhere sufficient knowledge so that they are now fully capable of deciding for or against the gospel. Grant Osborne, discussing the prominence of salvation in John’s prologue, affirms this interpretation: “Every person is enlightened and drawn toward the life that is in the Logos. Those who reject it are part of the ‘world,’ the realm of darkness. Those who accept it are ‘born of God’—i.e., they

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<sup>45</sup>Terry L. Miethe, “The Universal Power of the Atonement,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 92.

<sup>46</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?,” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 237.

receive the new spiritual birth (see 3:3, 5) that comes from God alone.”<sup>47</sup> This enlightenment, brought about by the incarnation, draws every individual to the beauty of Christ and presents him or her with the opportunity of either remaining a child of darkness or becoming a child of God.

**The causal argument for prevenient grace.** A fourth type of argument in defense of prevenient grace implies that a causal relationship exists between the warnings, invitations, and commands in Scripture and a grace that goes before all people and prepares them to respond positively. The plain and simple fact that such calls and commands are given in the Bible suggests that they are able to be carried out freely by every person. Otherwise, why would God command people to do what he knows they cannot do? The character of God is such that he has provided the means for every individual to do (or not to do, if they so choose) what he has said.

Leroy Forlines, a senior theologian from the Free Will Baptist camp, enters the discussion of how God deals with his creatures from a unique angle by setting forth what he terms an “influence-and-response” model against the Calvinistic “cause-and-effect” model. Because we are created in the image and likeness of God, that means, fundamentally, that we are persons; we act, think, and feel just as our Creator does. If this were not the case, then we would be less than personal and not true to what it means to be created in God’s image:

Yet the fact that human beings are relational creatures means that their actions cannot be explained as independent in the absolute sense. *Influence* is brought to bear on their actions. *Influence* in personal decisions can never be equated with *cause* as in mechanical cause and effect relationships. *Influence* and *response* are

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<sup>47</sup>Grant R. Osborne, “Soteriology in the Gospel of John,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 92.

more appropriate terms, where persons make decisions, than the terms *cause* and *effect*.<sup>48</sup>

Since God is a person, in the sense of having personhood, and since we are created in God's image, he deals with us first and foremost, Forlines stresses, as persons. That means that God can influence us, and he assuredly does, but ultimately our response is *our* response, for that is what it means to be in a relationship and to interact with one another relationally. God does all that he can to warn us, to invite us, to call us, even to command us to repent and believe in his Son, yet in the end all he can do (that is, all he chooses to do) is influence us and wait to see how we respond. The repeated warnings, invitations, and commands issued in the scriptures, then, cause (or assume) prevenient grace to be a reality on the grounds of (1) the character of God, and (2) the fact that humans are made in the image and likeness of God.

**The ontological argument for prevenient grace.** The ontological argument for prevenient grace is similar in principle to the causal argument in that it infers such grace as a necessary consequence flowing directly from God. The main difference between the two lines of thought, however, is the basis from which each is rooted. "Prevenient grace is supported by the very nature of God. A God of mercy, wisdom, justice, and love would not leave human beings without an opportunity to repent and choose salvation. A God of love and mercy who desires all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4)

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<sup>48</sup>Leroy Forlines, *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation* (Nashville: Randall House, 2011), 12.

would see it that all have the chance to partake of salvation. If God elects only a few, he is guilty of partiality.”<sup>49</sup>

This reasoning, which is common, fervently appeals to the many biblical texts that express God’s universal love. For example, there is no clearer expression of that love than found in Jesus’ words to Nicodemus in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Or 2 Peter 3:9: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”<sup>50</sup>

God’s love for everyone guarantees that the Holy Spirit pursues everyone in every age, creating space for surrender and the possibility of final salvation. Since the conviction brought about by the Holy Spirit includes an initial degree of illumination and enabling, we might even say that God unilaterally begins the process of salvation for everyone and presses to extend that process toward full salvation.<sup>51</sup>

A God of such loving nature and character, who himself is said to be love (1 John 4:8), must provide every person with an equal opportunity to hear the name of Jesus and believe in Jesus’ name. If not, then God cannot be said to be love, and his love is nothing more than a charade. What is implied in this argument is not just opportunity but also *ability*. Every person, by virtue of God’s universal love, has the inherent ability to

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<sup>49</sup>Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?,” 239.

<sup>50</sup>Ezek 18:23 and 32 are also frequently cited: “Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord, and not rather that he should turn from his way and love?” “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.”

<sup>51</sup>Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 72.



come to Jesus for eternal life. Undoubtedly that is what John meant when he recorded Jesus' words: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that *whoever* believes in him [not the elect only] should not perish but have eternal life."

In sum, five separate and distinct arguments for prevenient grace have been outlined: the judicial argument, the Christological argument, the incarnational argument, the causal argument, and the ontological argument. Even so, as this section comes to a close, it will prove beneficial to keep one thing in mind: while the roads to prevenient grace are many, in the end they all lead to the same destination—man possesses a free will, and he must use that will to determine his status as either elect or non-elect.

### **An Arminian Exegesis of Romans 8:29**

Election, or predestination, is often explained in the Bible as resulting from God's foreknowledge. Romans 8:29 says, "For those whom he [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." In his first epistle Peter writes "to those who are the elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Pet 1:1-2). What is unmistakable in these passages—and undisputed—is that foreknowledge *precedes* election. In fact, foreknowledge is the very grounds of election. God elects on the basis of his foreknowledge. In the Arminian framework, as a result of prevenient grace, this means that God's foreknowledge is defined as "foreseen faith." Before the foundation of the world God foresaw those individuals who would repent and believe in his Son and consequently elected them unto salvation. This understanding of foreknowledge is most clearly demonstrated in the exegesis of Romans 8:29, through both the traditional and non-traditional interpretations of the text.

## The Traditional Interpretation

The most common Arminian interpretation of Romans 8:29 coincides with Arminius's fourth decree, the decree by which God decided to save and damn certain particular persons according to his foreknowledge of their faith and perseverance. Frederic Godet, a Swiss theologian frequently cited by contemporary Arminian authors,<sup>52</sup> takes such a position in his commentary on this well-known verse. Admitting that the verb "to know" often carries the connotation of "to love" or "to approve," he argues that, even so, it is still not allowable to exclude from it its first and foremost meaning of prescience.<sup>53</sup> "There is not one passage in the N. T. where the word *know* does not above all contain the notion of *knowledge*, properly so called."<sup>54</sup> In what respect then did God foreknow his people in Romans 8:29? Godet answers,

Obviously it is not as being one day to *exist*. For the foreknowledge in that case would apply to all men, and the apostle would not say: "*whom* he foreknew." Neither is it as future saved and glorified ones that He foreknew them; for this is the object of the decree of *predestination* of which the apostle goes on to speak; and this object cannot at the same time be that of the foreknowledge. There is but one answer: foreknown as sure to fulfil the condition of salvation, viz. *faith*; so: foreknown as His *by faith*.<sup>55</sup>

Neither does God's foreknowing, emphasizes Godet, create faith. "The act of *knowing*, exactly like that of seeing, supposes an object perceived by the person who knows or sees. It is not the act of seeing or knowing which creates this object; it is this

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<sup>52</sup>Cottrell, "The Classical Arminian View on Election," 85; F. Leroy Forlines, *Romans*, The Randall House Bible Commentary (Nashville: Randall House, 1987), 233; Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, The IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 222.

<sup>53</sup>Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1889), 108.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 109.

object, on the contrary, which determines the act of knowing or seeing.”<sup>56</sup> The reasoning is that God, who lives above time and space, simply saw faith as already existing, a natural result of his divine and perfect knowledge. “We thus get at the thought of the apostle: Whom God knew beforehand as certain to believe, whose faith He held eternally, He designated [predestined] as the objects of a grand decree.”<sup>57</sup>

As well, Grant Osborne’s exegesis of Romans 8:29 provides a clear and concise example of traditional Arminian thought. Like Godet, Osborne acknowledges the Hebraic sense of the verb *know* but moves beyond it to stress the prescience aspect of the word: “The verb is connected to the Hebrew *yada* (Gen 18:19; Ps 1:6; 18:43; Jer 1:5) for God’s loving knowledge of his people, but it adds the idea of ‘knowing beforehand,’ referring to God’s foreknowledge of all events.”<sup>58</sup> This foreknowledge, Osborne asserts, along with Godet, does not mean that God determines believers’ decisions beforehand.<sup>59</sup> “It is better to link this [foreknowledge] with the emphasis on faith decision in 3:21-4:25 (seventeen times) and interpret it as God’s foreknowledge regarding those who respond in faith to his call.”<sup>60</sup> Picirilli, like Godet and Osborne, argues in a similar manner and reaches the same conclusion:

To “foreknow” means to know in advance. God foreknows all things perfectly. But His advanced knowledge of an event does not *cause* that event any more than our after knowledge causes the things we know. He knew from before the foundation of

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Osborne, *Romans*, 221.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 222.

the earth who would put faith in Him, and he determined to do certain things for them.<sup>61</sup>

The traditional Arminian interpretation of Romans 8:29 is thus easily outlined. God, by the very nature of who he is, knows all past, present, and future events. This being true, he knew, even before he created them, the individuals who at some point in time would freely choose to believe in his Son. Having that knowledge of their future faith decision, he then elected these persons unto salvation, a salvation that ultimately would culminate in glorification. This framework of election is called conditional election because it is “conditioned” upon human choice. Simply put: “Those who make the right decisions are chosen by God to be a part of his family and are predestined to eternal life; those who make the wrong decisions are rejected by God and are predestined to eternal damnation.”<sup>62</sup>

### **Non-Traditional Interpretations**

While all Arminians affirm the freedom of the will in some sense or another, all do not interpret Romans 8:29 in entirely the same manner. Forlines, for example, deviates from the traditional Arminian understanding in that he interprets the passage through the grid of his “influence-and-response” model:

In my opinion, it has been a mistake over the centuries to focus the conflict between Calvinists and Arminians on whether fallen or redeemed man has a free will. The real question is: Is fallen man a personal being, or is he sub-personal? (The same question can be asked concerning redeemed man.) Does God deal with fallen man as a person? If He does, He deals with him as one who thinks, feels, and acts. To do otherwise undercuts the personhood of man. This God will not do; not because something is being imposed on God to which he must submit, but because God

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<sup>61</sup>Robert E. Picirilli, *The Book of Romans*, Clear Study Series (Nashville: Randall House Publications, 1975), 166.

<sup>62</sup>Cottrell, “The Classical Arminian View of Election,” 84.

designed the relationship to be a relationship between personal beings. God will not violate His own plan.<sup>63</sup>

Since God has determined to be in an “influence-and-response” relationship with man, that decisively rules against Calvinism’s “cause-and-effect” doctrine of unconditional election. Moreover, it reaches beyond Arminianism’s traditional interpretation of Romans 8:29 to a more accurate depiction of how God deals with human beings: “Let me now give a further word as it relates to foreknowledge of faith and election. I am not saying that God, as a *bystander*, looked through the corridors of time and saw that certain ones would believe and thus elected or chose them for salvation. *If God were only a bystander, there would be no one believing in Christ. There would be no salvation.*”<sup>64</sup> What God “foreknew” then is this:

In eternity past, God foresaw Himself as having the same kind of active involvement in the human race that He is now having. He foresaw the same program of preaching, witnessing, and teaching that is now taking place. God saw Himself working through the redeemed as they would make known the gospel. He saw the work of the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of those who would hear His Word. In that context, He saw those who would believe, and He chose or elected them to be His. These He affectively foreknew as being His own.<sup>65</sup>

Shank, on the other hand, underscores the collective nature of election in his treatment of Romans 8:29-30: “The certainty of election and perseverance is with respect, not to particular individual men unconditionally, but rather with respect to the *ekklēsia*, the corporate body of all who, through living faith, are in union with Christ, the true Elect and the Living Covenant between God and all who trust in His righteous Servant.”<sup>66</sup> This

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<sup>63</sup>Forlines, *Romans*, 234.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup>Shank, *Elect in the Son*, 206.

“unbreakable chain of salvation,” as Romans 8:29-30 is often called, is indeed an unbreakable chain for the elect, affirms Shank, but the elect should not be thought of as individuals that God unconditionally chose apart from their decisions. The elect, instead, is the corporate body of people who unite themselves to Jesus through faith, and after that, persevere in that faith.<sup>67</sup>

Even further removed from the traditional Arminian position is an interpretation held by scholars such as Ben Witherington. Witherington argues that Paul, in the highly contested Romans 8 text, is simply speaking about the future of believers and not some mass of redeemed humanity out of which God chose some to be among the elect:

It is possible that in such a situation Paul wanted to tell believers not how they became Christians in the first place but rather how God always had a plan to get believers to the finish line, working all things together for good, showing them how they will be able to persevere through whatever trials they may face along the way. In Christ they have a glorious destiny, and, Paul will go on to stress, no outside power, circumstance, degree of suffering, or temptation can rip them out of the firm grip that God has on their lives.<sup>68</sup>

The words “foreknow” and “predestine” do not refer in the first instance, then, to some limitation on human freedom, nor do they refer to some arbitrary decision by God that some people are to be denied a chance at salvation: “They simply point to the fact that God knows the end to which he will bring his creation, namely redemption, and that the destiny is firmly set in his purposes.”<sup>69</sup> Walls and Dongell suggest this view as an alternative interpretation to the unbreakable chain of salvation as well: “This may show

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 206-18.

<sup>68</sup>Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 228.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 229.

us that Paul is viewing the entire series not from a vantage point within human history but from the end of human history, after God has brought to completion the whole redemptive plan. Seen from the end of history, Paul observes that all Christians who have been glorified have of course been foreknown, predestined, called and justified.”<sup>70</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to (1) define the doctrine of conditional election, (2) defend the concept of prevenient grace, and (3) delineate the various Arminian interpretations of Romans 8:29. According to Arminianism, God looked through time and space, saw who would in history repent and believe in his Son, and chose those individuals for salvation on the basis of their free-will response to the gospel invitation. This response is made possible only because prevenient grace has granted every person the ability to make that decision of his or her own volition.

Although Arminians differ as to their exegesis of “the golden chain of salvation” passage, ultimately they all conclude that the will is free to choose. Since man is able to repent and trust in Christ for salvation, it is precisely that personal faith decision that God “foresaw” when he contemplated whom he would “predestine” for glorification and, by the same token, leave alone to suffer the fate of their own wrong choice. Thus God’s foreknowledge in all Arminian interpretations of Romans 8:29, to a greater or lesser extent, is primarily defined as foreseen faith.

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<sup>70</sup>Walls and Dongell, *Why I am Not a Calvinist*, 81.

## CHAPTER 3

### FOREKNOWLEDGE AS COVENANTAL COMMITMENT

Classical Calvinism is most commonly summarized by the acronym TULIP. Frequently called the doctrines of grace, TULIP stands for Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints.<sup>71</sup> These five points focus upon the central act of God saving sinners and stand at the very epicenter of Calvinistic soteriology. One will not understand Calvinism properly without first grasping, as a unified whole, what these doctrines teach and the order in which they are taught.

In short, TULIP teaches that man's sinful corruption is so deep and strong that it makes one a slave to sin and morally unable to overcome one's own rebellion and blindness. God's election, as a result, is an unconditional act of free grace that was given before the world began to certain individuals through Jesus Christ. Christ's atonement is universal in its worth--that much is sure--but it is effective only for those who trust in him. The full, saving effectiveness of the atonement Jesus accomplished is limited to those for whom that saving effect was prepared.<sup>72</sup> This means that at the appointed time

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<sup>71</sup>Many Calvinists note that these are not the best terms to describe the doctrines they represent. Although it upsets the longstanding and easily memorizable TULIP, a few changes to the traditional acronym are usually suggested to provide a more accurate depiction of Calvinism's soteriology: (1) radical depravity; (2) unconditional election; (3) definite atonement; (4) overcoming grace; and (5) perseverance, or preservation, of the saints.

<sup>72</sup>This doctrine provides the perfect example of what Calvinists mean when they find fault with the acronym TULIP. To limit the atonement sounds restrictive and intrinsically offensive: here is this



the resistance that all human beings exert against God is wonderfully overcome by God's saving grace for the undeserving rebels he freely chooses to save. Ultimately, those who are saved by God and justified in his sight will win the fight of faith and inherit the kingdom of heaven.<sup>73</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to define the doctrines of unconditional election and total depravity and delineate the Calvinistic interpretation of Romans 8:29 as it relates to foreknowledge and election.<sup>74</sup> It will, therefore, mirror chapter two in structure and in content, making the differences between Arminianism and Calvinism more clear. These are not unimportant matters, as they have everything to do with how sinners are saved. Is it because of a decision a person makes? Or is it a decision God made? Whereas Arminius advanced man's choice as the final determiner, Calvin advanced God's choice as the final determiner.

### **Unconditional Election Defined**

It is difficult to overstate the contention that the doctrine of election has caused throughout church history. This being so, two kinds of men often arise in response to Calvinism's troubling doctrine: "Some would say little about it for fear of disturbing the

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wonderful atonement and someone wants to limit it! However, it is more accurate to describe their doctrine of atonement as definite atonement, or even particular redemption, as it definitely accomplishes what God intended.

<sup>73</sup>Adapted from John Piper's *Five Points: Towards a Deeper Experience of God's Grace* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 15-16.

<sup>74</sup>It is beyond the scope of this chapter to give a full explanation of each of the five points of Calvinism. For the moment, however, it will suffice to say that the defensibility of the Calvinistic system is dependent not only upon the biblical validity of each of the five doctrines but also upon the sequence in which they fall.

faith of the weak, others allow human curiosity to wander into forbidden paths.”<sup>75</sup> As to the first type of person, he surmises that perhaps it best not to teach such a divisive doctrine if it is only going to cause strife, controversy, and dissension within the church. Calvin addressed this reaction in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, warning that we must “guard against depriving believers of anything disclosed about predestination in Scripture, lest we seem either wickedly to defraud them of the blessing of their God or to accuse and scoff at the Holy Spirit for having published what it is any way profitable to suppress.”<sup>76</sup> Concerning the second response to election, Calvin predicts that if such brash audacity is present, undoubtedly these men will leave no secret to God that they will not search out and unravel. So, he exhorts, they need to be reminded of the task in which they are embarking: “Let them remember that when they inquire into predestination they are penetrating the sacred precincts of divine wisdom.”<sup>77</sup>

Calvin, seeking to avoid both impending dangers, saw a better path toward the mysterious decree of divine election: “Let us, I say, permit the Christian man to open his mind and ears to every utterance of God directed to him, provided it be with such restraint that when the Lord closes his holy lips, he also shall at once close the way to inquiry.”<sup>78</sup> As did Arminius, Calvin proceeded down the darkened road of predestination with caution, wanting to rely wholly upon Scripture to shape, form, and fashion his understanding. Although they reached different conclusions about the nature of God’s

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<sup>75</sup>A. Dakin, *Calvinism* (London: Duckworth, 1940), 90.

<sup>76</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 2:924.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:922.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:924.

electing grace, there is no question as to the sincerity of each man's endeavor and his desire to remain faithful to the biblical witness.

### **Calvin and Election**

One will recall that Arminius worked out a scheme of four decrees of election that began with Christ and ended with individual predestination. They flowed one into the other in this order: (1) the election of Jesus Christ; (2) the election of the church; (3) the election, or appointment, of means; and (4) the election of individuals. In like manner, Calvin too built his doctrine of election in a very systematic fashion, outlining three separate and distinct stages: the election of the Israelite nation, the election and reprobation of individual Israelites, and the election of individuals as actual election.

Calvin, first, drew attention to *the election of the nation of Israel* in support of his doctrine of particular predestination: "God has attested this not only in individual persons but has given us an example of it in the whole offspring of Abraham, to make it clear that in his choice rests the future condition of each nation."<sup>79</sup> He cites as proof Moses' words to Israel as he commands them to obey their God, declaring the cause of their deliverance to rest squarely upon the fact that God loved their fathers "and chose their offspring after them" (Deut. 4:37). Furthermore, Calvin points out Deuteronomy 7:6-8, where Moses tells Israel,

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 2:927.

to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.<sup>80</sup>

Of course, even Arminians acknowledge God's undeserved and unconditional election of Israel. For instance, Forster and Marston affirm that "God's choice of Israel was declared while Israel and Edom were both in the same womb. It was not earned, either by works or by foreseen works. Their election was not something they took for themselves. It was a choice made in God's free strategy."<sup>81</sup> As well, MacDonald, reflecting upon how the Creator relates to his creatures, notes that in the Old Testament God made many choices that were special to him, one of which was his choosing of Jacob over his twin brother Esau, later to become the nation of Israel.<sup>82</sup> "Although the people of other nations were far more numerous, they would always be secondary, since Israel in the flesh of Abraham had historical priority."<sup>83</sup>

Calvin, however, is doing something more than acknowledging God's free choice of the nation of Israel to be his special possession: "It may be interpolated here that in grounding his doctrine of predestination Calvin makes much use of the Old Testament."<sup>84</sup> In "making much use of the Old Testament," Calvin is essentially constructing his doctrine of unconditional election from the ground up. He is giving his doctrine historical roots by establishing the *principle* of God's sovereign choice in the

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<sup>80</sup>Calvin also refers to numerous other texts to underscore, in one way or another, God's free choice of Israel as his beloved nation, including Exod 32:9, Deut 9:6, 23:5, Ps 47:4, and Amos 3:2.

<sup>81</sup>Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1973), 122.

<sup>82</sup>William G. MacDonald, "The Biblical Doctrine of Election," in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 208-9.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>84</sup>Dakin, *Calvinism*, 93.

pages of the Old Testament. God *does* unconditionally choose, and the fact that he chose Israel out of all the nations of the earth proves it. Hence, Calvin feels justified to write the following: “I had good reason to say that here we must note two degrees, for in the election of a whole nation God has already shown that in his mere generosity he has not been bound by any laws but is free, so that equal apportionment of grace is not to be required of him.”<sup>85</sup>

A second, and more limited, degree of election is *the election and reprobation of individual Israelites*. In this stage Calvin asserts that God’s more special grace is clearly evident: “From the same race of Abraham God rejected some but showed that he kept others among his sons by cherishing them in the church.”<sup>86</sup> Ishmael and Esau are cited as examples of the reprobate, and Isaac and Jacob as examples of the elect. Calvin continues,

By their own defect and guilt, I admit, Ishmael, Esau, and the like were cut off from adoption. For the condition had been laid down that they should faithfully keep God’s covenant, which they faithlessly violated. Yet this was the singular benefit of God, that he had deigned to prefer them to other nations, as the psalm says: “He has not dealt thus with any other nations, and has not shown them his judgments” [Ps. 147:20, cf. LXX].<sup>87</sup>

On the one hand, Calvin recognizes the role that Ishmael and Esau played in their own demise, yet on the other hand he ascribes the greater responsibility to God: ultimately, God deemed it worthy that Ishmael and Esau be cut off from adoption. Thus Calvin interprets not only the “general” election of the nation of Israel but also the

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<sup>85</sup>Calvin, *Institutes* 2:929

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*

“specific” election and rejection of certain men as proper grounds for his doctrine of predestination. Once more, he roots the fundamental premise of God’s right to choose in the Old Testament: “There we read how God chose a particular nation from among the nations of the earth, and also in that nation He chose who He would, as for example, Abraham. Always with the covenant idea there goes this principle of selection, and this is carried over to the new dispensation.”<sup>88</sup>

Having established a pattern of God’s unconditional choosing, Calvin turns to *the election of individuals in Christ*.<sup>89</sup> “Although it is now sufficiently clear to Calvinists that God by his secret plan freely chooses whom he pleases, rejecting others, still his free election has only been half explained until we come to individual persons, to whom God not only offers salvation *but so assigns it that the certainty of its effect is not in suspense or doubt*.”<sup>90</sup> In Calvin’s mind, that God “assigns salvation to whom he pleases” is merely a natural extension of how he worked under the old covenant. God is not, in essence, doing anything new or that he has not done before. He is simply acting as he always has, choosing the individuals he desires according to his own good pleasure, purpose, and will.

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<sup>88</sup>Dakin, *Calvinism*, 93.

<sup>89</sup>When discussing election, Arminians often distinguish between predestination unto *salvation* and predestination unto *service*. Cottrell, for example, says, “Discerning the difference between the two is crucial for a correct understanding of what it means to say God has predestined some to salvation” (Jack Cottrell, “The Classical Arminian View of Election,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand [Nashville: B & H Academic, 2006], 73-74). By making this distinction, Arminians are able to uphold the texts that clearly teach God’s unconditional and individual election, such as the many Old Testament passages where God calls people to perform certain tasks or carry out certain functions, while at the same time deny that God unconditionally elects individuals for salvation.

<sup>90</sup>Calvin, *Institutes* 2:930, emphasis added.

Election should not be conceived as happening separate from Christ, however.

While Arminius objected to the doctrine of unconditional election, claiming that it was

Christologically insufficient, Calvin reached a different conclusion:

The adoption was put in Abraham's hands. Nevertheless, because many of his descendants were cut off as rotten members, we must, in order that election may be effectual and truly enduring, ascend to the Head, in whom the Heavenly Father has gathered his elect together, and has joined them to himself by an indissoluble bond. So, indeed, God's generous favor, which he has denied to others, has been displayed in the adoption of the race of Abraham; yet in the members of Christ a far more excellent power of grace appears, for, engrafted to the Head, they are never cut off from salvation.<sup>91</sup>

Calvin, here, affirms that God has gathered his elect together "in the Head," that is, in

Christ. The principal reason that the bond between God and the elect is incapable of

being destroyed, Calvin's words seem to suggest, rests not upon the elect and what they

have done but upon Christ and what he has done:

In other words, when God elected a people from the fallen mass of humanity, he never intended to save them apart from his Son but only by means of what his Son, the Lord Jesus, would accomplish in his redemptive work. Jesus is therefore the means by which God's electing purpose is put into effect as well as the goal of that election, inasmuch as it is God's purpose through election to sum up all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10).<sup>92</sup>

Having laid the proper foundation for the doctrine of unconditional election, it is now

fitting for Calvin to formally define it:

As Scripture, then, clearly shows, we say that God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction. We assert that, with respect to the elect, this plan was founded upon his freely given mercy, without regard to human worth; but by his just and

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>C. Samuel Storms, *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 110.

irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment he has barred the door of life to those whom he has given over to damnation.<sup>93</sup>

It is obvious after examining Arminius's and Calvin's understandings of election that they are very different from one another. Arminius believed that the decree to save certain particular persons and damn certain particular persons was rooted in God's foreknowledge of who, in history, would repent of their sins, believe in his Son, and persevere through the prevenient grace they had received. Calvin denied this notion. "We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For not all are created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death."<sup>94</sup>

### **Contemporary Calvinist Perspectives**

When surveying contemporary Calvinist literature one does not find the degree of variation one finds in the Arminian camp.<sup>95</sup> By and large, the only differences one discovers are differences of personal expression, or rather, how the doctrine is communicated through the vehicle of personal vocabulary. Even so, the differences of expression are useful, as they help articulate Calvinism's difficult doctrine of unconditional election.

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<sup>93</sup>Calvin, *Institutes* 2:931.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:926.

<sup>95</sup>Specifically, I am referring to the differences between individual election, corporate election, and election that is seen as being primarily "in Christ."



A concise definition of the Calvinist teaching is given by Loraine Boettner in *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. With an economy of words and clarity, he defines election as “a sovereign free act of God through which He determines who shall be made heirs of heaven.”<sup>96</sup> As Calvin did before him, Boettner emphasizes God’s sovereign and free act of determination. It is God alone who determines an individual’s final eternal state. In similar manner, R. C. Sproul stresses God’s grace to save but includes the negative side of election as well, that of “reprobation”: “From all eternity God decided to save some members of the human race and to let the rest of the human race perish. God made a choice—he chose some individuals to be saved unto everlasting blessedness in heaven, and he chose others to pass over, allowing them to suffer the consequences of their sins, eternal punishment in hell.”<sup>97</sup>

Bruce Ware’s expanded definition provides even further clarification and then underscores the relationship between foreknowledge and election.

Unconditional election to salvation may be defined as God’s gracious choice, made in eternity past, of those whom he would save by faith through the atoning death of his Son, a choice based not upon anything that those so chosen would do, or any choice that they would make, or on how good or bad they might be, or on anything else specifically true about them (i.e., their qualities, characters, decisions, or actions) in contrast to others, but rather based only upon God’s own good pleasure and will.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1932), 148.

<sup>97</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Grace Unknown: The Heart of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 141. The language of God “passing over” individuals is common in Calvinistic literature. It is their way of expressing God’s *passivity* in the lives of the non-elect as opposed to his *active* involvement in the lives of his elect. God does not work fresh evil in the heart of the non-elect to keep them from coming to Jesus, says the Calvinist, because they are already in a state of guilt, corruption, and spiritual deadness. So what does God do? He merely passes them over, leaving them to the fate which they deserve and have chosen.

<sup>98</sup>Bruce A. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation: Unconditional, Individual, and Infralapsarian,” in *Perspectives on Election*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 4.

In other words, unconditional election, as opposed to conditional election, specifically denies that God elects persons based upon his advanced knowledge, in eternity past, of their future decision of whether to receive Christ or not when presented the gospel. That is, divine election is not based upon or conditioned by the foreseen faith of those who will, in time, believe in Christ.<sup>99</sup>

It is the final element of Ware's definition—that God's gracious choice is based *only upon God's good pleasure and will*—that is an especially vital point for Calvinists. To say that God chooses some for salvation while passing over others seems unfair, unjust, and, above all, unloving, cries not only the Arminian but any logically thinking person. Even Calvinists recognize this problem: “The term ‘unconditional election’ is not the most helpful term from a Calvinist point of view. It implies that God's election of some people for eternal life is an irrational process that is not rooted in anything that God Himself could define. It implies that God Himself doesn't know why He elects this person and not that person.”<sup>100</sup>

Sproul states the dilemma even more poignantly:

The very word *predestination* has an ominous ring to it. It is linked to the despairing notion of fatalism and somehow suggests that within its pale we are reduced to meaningless puppets. The word conjures up visions of a diabolical deity who plays capricious games with our lives. We seem to be subjected to the whims of horrible decrees that were fixed in concrete long before we were born. Better that our lives were fixed by the stars, for then at least we could find clues to our destiny in the daily horoscopes.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>100</sup>Andrew M. Davis, “Unconditional Election: A Biblical and God-Glorifying Doctrine,” in *Whomever He Wills: A Surprising Display of Sovereign Mercy*, ed. Matthew Barrett and Thomas J. Nettles (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2012), 41.

<sup>101</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 1-2.

How does Calvinism respond to such strong objections? One response is that God has a purpose for everything he does, the Calvinist claims, including electing mostly people who are not wise, influential, or of a noble birth, electing mostly people who are foolish, weak, and despised in the eyes of the world so that he can shame the powerful, rich, and arrogant of this world (1 Cor 1:26-28; Jas 2:5). Also, God chooses to elect a multitude of people greater than anyone can count from every tribe, language, people and nation for His own purpose as well. (Rev 7:9) “So ‘unconditional election’ should better be called ‘sovereign election,’ for God has His sovereign purposes in who is elected and who is not.”<sup>102</sup> But there is an even greater purpose in God’s unconditional election. While the *immediate* goal of election is the salvation of sinners, the *ultimate* goal is worship. Sam Storms writes,

The preeminent reason why God did not leave all humanity in the just reward of their sin was so that the glory of his grace might be praised. Election was undertaken to establish a platform on which the glory of God’s saving mercy might be seen and magnified and adored and praised (cf. Eph. 2:7). Here we see again a consistent theme in Scripture: *all that God does, he ultimately does to glorify himself!*<sup>103</sup>

### **Total Depravity Defended**

There is a reason why the five points of Calvinism begin with “total depravity,” other than the fact that the acronym TULIP starts with the letter “t.” Theological necessity demands that “unconditional election” follow “total depravity,” for if not, then no one would be saved. Pursuant to Calvinist reasoning, the incapacitating

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<sup>102</sup>Davis, “Unconditional Election,” 41.

<sup>103</sup>Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 41, emphasis added. See also John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God’s Delight in Being God* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2000), 121-55.

realities of human depravity make it impossible for anyone to come to Jesus of his or her own free will. This is precisely why the Arminian notion of prevenient grace is so destructive to Calvinistic soteriology: it breaks the logical and theological link that exists between the first two points of TULIP. Before arriving at Calvinism's rejoinder to prevenient grace, a thorough explanation of total depravity will help establish how Calvinists reach the conclusions that they do.

“Total depravity” may not be the best term to describe Calvinism's doctrine of sin and its consequences. It does, of course, explain why men need to be saved but may also, inadvertently, imply that the human race is as evil as it can be, that we are *utterly* wicked, incapable of doing any human good at all, which is not what Calvinists mean when they use that term. Often put forward, instead, is the alternative “radical depravity,” or radical corruption.<sup>104</sup> Radical depravity teaches that sin has penetrated to the “root” or core of man's being. Every area of his life has been touched and affected by sin in some way. The whole person is corrupted, as Sproul describes: “No vestigial ‘island of righteousness’ escapes the influence of the fall. Sin reaches into every aspect of our lives, finding no shelter of isolated virtue.”<sup>105</sup>

### **Dimensions of Human Depravity**

As five unique lines of argument can be outlined for prevenient grace, five unique dimensions of argument can be outlined for human depravity. First, the *universal* dimension of human depravity emphasizes that all people without exception sin. Second,

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<sup>104</sup>The word *radical* derives from the Latin *radix*, which means “root.”

<sup>105</sup>Sproul, *Grace Unknown*, 118.

the *convictional* dimension stresses that the entirety of the human race stands guilty and condemned before God because of their association with Adam. Third, the *incarcerational* dimension calls attention to mankind's incarcerated state: he is a slave to sin and Satan and has no hope, within himself, of ever breaking free. Fourth, the *spiritual* dimension of total depravity focuses upon the spiritual inability and deadness of human nature. Fifth, the *penal* dimension relates to the sentencing of eschatological judgment that every individual faces apart from union with Christ.<sup>106</sup>

**The universal dimension of human depravity.** The Bible teaches that *everyone* without exception sins. "For there is no one who does not sin" (1 Kgs 8:46). Proverbs 20:9 asks, "Who can say, 'I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin'?" James reminds us that "we all stumble in many ways" (Jas 3:2). Paul declares, "For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin," (Rom 3:10), and later, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

This stark picture of the universality of sin is vigorously affirmed by Calvinists and Arminians alike: "There is no differentiation," says Witherington, "between one sort of sinner and another. All have sinned and fall short of God's glory."<sup>107</sup> "Sin conquers all people," asserts Osborne, "and forces them to live under its power."<sup>108</sup> Murray agrees:

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<sup>106</sup>As was true with the five lines of argument for prevenient case, these five "dimensions" should not be considered as concrete categories but merely as an aid in systematizing and understanding the doctrine of human depravity.

<sup>107</sup>Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 101.

<sup>108</sup>Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, The IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 86.

“All without exception or discrimination are in the category of sinners.”<sup>109</sup> Sin, wrote John Stott, “holds the human race in guilt and under judgment. [It] is on top of us, weighs us down, and is a crushing burden.”<sup>110</sup> The iron fists of sin, both camps affirm, smash through every self-perceived stronghold to grab hold of all persons.

**The convictional dimension of human depravity.** Not only does everyone without exception sin, but we are all born into the world as sinners and *guilty* before God as sons and daughters of Adam. That the human race stands condemned before God is illustrated in Jesus’ words to Nicodemus: “Whoever does not believe in the Son of God is condemned *already* because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18, emphasis added). Paul states that “one trespass [Adam’s first act of sin in the garden of Eden] led to condemnation for all men” (Rom 5:18).

But what does it mean to stand *condemned* before God? Murray contends that condemnation is a judicial sentence, and “it is the judicial sentence which pronounces us to be unrighteous.”<sup>111</sup> Because of Adam’s sin, all of his descendants enter into this world as guilty, condemned, unrighteous sinners. How this is so, of course, has been the subject of long and intense debate. Pelagius, though himself not holding to original sin or original guilt, understood the phrase “because all sinned” in Romans 5:12 to refer to the “actual voluntary sins of all men.” Adam provided a bad example that all have followed, but that is it. Others, in the Augustinian tradition, contend that Adam’s progeny became depraved

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<sup>109</sup>John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 112.

<sup>110</sup>John Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 99.

<sup>111</sup>Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 195.

“in him”. That is, because the whole human race was germinally present in the first man, the whole human race therefore sinned, making him equally guilty as Adam. Murray ultimately rejects both views<sup>112</sup> and concludes,

the “all sinned” of verse 12 and the one trespass of the one man of verses 15-19 must refer to the same fact or event, that the one fact can be expressed in terms of both singularity and plurality, as the sin of one and the sin of all. And the only solution is that there must be some kind of solidarity existing between the “one” and “the all” with the result that the sin of the one may at the same time and with equal relevance be regarded as the sin of all.<sup>113</sup>

Moo, likewise, rejects the interpretation that “all sinned” refers to actual acts of sin in one’s person, as Pelagius held, in favor of the “corporate” sense of the phrase:

The point is rather that the sin here attributed to the “all” is to be understood, in light of vv. 12a-c and 15-19, as a sin that in some manner is identical to the sin committed by Adam. Paul can therefore say both “all die because all sin” and “all die because Adam sinned” with no hint of conflict because the sin of Adam *is* the sin of all. All people, therefore, stand condemned “in Adam,” guilty by reason of the sin all committed “in him.”<sup>114</sup>

To bolster his argument that Adam stood as the federal representative of the human race, and that Paul was thinking along those same lines, Moo draws attention to the conceptions of corporate solidarity in the Jewish world of Paul’s day: “This notion, rooted in the OT, held that actions of certain individuals could have a ‘representative’ character, being regarded as, in some sense, the actions of many other individuals at the same time.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Murray argues against the Pelagian position and admits that the Augustian view “stands on more biblical grounds.” For a more detailed exposition, see Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 180-87.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>114</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 326.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 327.

Schreiner, on the other hand, proposes a view of Romans 5:12 that affirms both “Adamic responsibility” and “personal sinning”<sup>116</sup>: “As a result of Adam’s sin death entered the world and engulfed all people; all people enter the world alienated from God and spiritually dead by virtue of Adam’s sin. By virtue of entering the world in a state of death (i.e., separated from God), all human beings sin.”<sup>117</sup> Thus he interprets Romans 5:12 in this way: “For this reason, just as sin entered into the world through one man and death entered through sin, and so death spread to all people, and on the basis of this death all sinned.”<sup>118</sup> In the final analysis of man’s relationship to Adam, whether one preserves his corrupt nature, affirms corporate solidarity, or holds a combination of both, the outcome remains the same: our union with the first man means that all men stand convicted in the eyes of God and deserving of his holy wrath.<sup>119</sup>

**The incarcerational dimension of human depravity.** As sons and daughters of Adam, we are *slaves* of sin and unable to escape Satan’s clutches. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). Paul, writing to the Christians at Rome, instructs them about the wonderful realities of being united with Christ and writes, “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we could no longer be enslaved to

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<sup>116</sup>He is not, however, defending the Pelagian interpretation. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 275.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 275-76.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>119</sup>Eph 2:3 is also an important verse in defense of the convictional element of human depravity. Paul speaks of the now “alive” Ephesians as once being “children of wrath,” a Semitic phrase indicating that wrath is one’s destiny. See Walter L. Liefeld, *Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 59; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 162-63.



sin” (Rom 6:6). And again: “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness” (Rom 6:17-18). Furthermore, Paul’s description of how we lived before God made us alive is graphic and hopeless: “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Eph 2:1-3).

There are two ways a person can be enslaved: either from an *external* force or an *internal* force. That we are slaves to sin, enslaved by its power, dead in trespasses and sins, following the course of this world and the one (Satan) who rules this world, that we live in the passions of our flesh and carry out the desires of our body and mind, that by nature God’s wrath rests upon us, are all indicators that our bondage comes not from the outside but from the inside. Humanity is, as Paul describes to Timothy, caught in the snare of the devil and captured by him to do his will (2 Tim 2:26).

The state of the will, as Calvinism’s doctrine of total depravity insists, is not in any way inclined toward goodness, or even neutrality. The *incarcerated* will always chooses the will of its master, the devil, and never any spiritual good. This does not mean, of course, that those who sin are in any way aware of their bondage to sin, for “those who sin are slaves to their sin whether they realize it or not.”<sup>120</sup> What it does

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<sup>120</sup>Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 406.

mean, however, is that they cannot, on their own, break away from their captor and need a power greater than their own to do so.

**The spiritual dimension of human depravity.** Contra Arminianism's hypothetical depravity, Calvinism's doctrine of depravity is real, certain, and definite. We are born into the world as *spiritually incapable* and *spiritually dead* persons. Just as a corpse is incapable of responding to any physical stimuli, a spiritually dead person is incapable of responding to any spiritual stimuli. Man does not, in reality, possess the *ability* or restored ability to believe in Jesus. "No one can come to me," Jesus asserts, "unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). But "people like to feel independent. They think that they come or that they *can* come to Jesus entirely of their own volition. Jesus assures us that this is an utter impossibility. No one, no one at all, can come unless the Father draws him."<sup>121</sup> "Ultimately, therefore, salvation depends not on human believing, but on the 'drawing' action of the Father (presumably by the Holy Spirit) by which God moves a person to faith in Christ."<sup>122</sup>

According to Calvinists, 1 Corinthians 2:14 confirms this definition of spiritual deadness: "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." C. K. Barrett notes that the natural man, then, is most easily defined negatively. He is a man who has not received the Holy Spirit. His natural resources, for example his intellectual resources, are, or may be, complete. He is not in any ordinary

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 328-29.

<sup>122</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 213.

sense a bad man, or a foolish man, or an irreligious man. But lacking the Spirit of God he cannot apprehend spiritual truths.<sup>123</sup> “Therefore, what the apostle here affirms of the natural or unrenewed man is that he cannot discern the truth, excellence, or beauty of divine things. It is not simply that he does not do it or that he will not do it, but he cannot.”<sup>124</sup>

The difficulty, Calvinism argues, is not merely in man’s will but in his whole inner state. There is a spiritual deadness, a separation from God’s life, in his innermost being that makes it impossible for him to make any movement toward Jesus:

This biblical statement about the ‘deadness’ of non-Christian people raises problems for many because it does not seem to square with the facts of everyday experience. Lots of people who make no Christian profession whatever, who even openly repudiate Jesus Christ, appear to be very much alive. One has the vigorous body of an athlete, another the lively mind of a scholar, a third the vivacious personality of a filmstar. Are we to say that such people, if Christ has not saved them, are dead? Yes, indeed, we must and do say this very thing. For in the sphere which matters supremely (which is neither the body, nor the mind, nor the personality, but the soul), they have no life.<sup>125</sup>

How then can spiritually dead men and women who are separated from the life of God feel sorrow for their sin, see the beauty of Christ on the cross, and turn to him for forgiveness and salvation? The Calvinist responds, “They cannot, nor do they want to.”

**The penal dimension of human depravity.** The word “penal” relates to the prescribing of punishment, and the ultimate penalty for sin is judgment in the form of *eternal death*. Admittedly, a “never-ending” punishment for a “lifetime” of sin seems

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<sup>123</sup>C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary Series, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: A & C Black, 1971), 77.

<sup>124</sup>Charles Hodge, *1 Corinthians* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1995), 58.

<sup>125</sup>John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 1979), 72.

grossly unfair, until the relationship between sin and eternal judgment is viewed in the proper perspective. Punishment is commensurate with the crime, and the crimes sinful man has perpetrated against his Creator are of the most heinous kind. Given, then, our inherited guilt in general and our personal guilt in particular, eschatological judgment justly awaits every person born into this world: “And these [the unrighteous] will go away into eternal punishment,” warns Jesus, “but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt 25:46). “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23).<sup>126</sup> “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15).

These five dimensions of total depravity illustrate the “scope” of Calvinism’s anthropology; and it should be reiterated that there is much common ground between Arminians and Calvinists at this point. Most Arminians would emphatically affirm all five dimensions of human depravity as described above. Most would emphatically maintain that human beings are born with a corrupt nature that is in bondage to sin, and that they can do no good apart from the grace of God. Nevertheless, they disagree, and disagree resolutely, as to the existence of prevenient grace: “The problem is that there is no clear and adequate basis in Scripture for this concept of universal enablement. The theory, appealing though it is in many ways, simply is not taught explicitly in the Bible.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>Although eternal death is not specifically mentioned in this verse, undoubtedly that is Paul’s meaning. In the scriptures, spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death cannot be neatly parceled; in fact, spiritual death inevitably leads to its physical and eternal counterparts, thus encompassing what can be called “total” death. Further, “death” in this verse clearly stands in contrast to “eternal life,” which certainly refers to an eschatological destiny.

<sup>127</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 925.

## A Calvinist Exegesis of Romans 8:29

Prevenient grace enables all people to freely believe in Christ if they so choose. But if prevenient grace is not substantiated in Scripture, then election based upon foreseen faith cannot be validated, and if conditional election cannot be validated, then “foreknowledge” cannot be defined as such in Romans 8:29.<sup>128</sup> Martin Lloyd-Jones, addressing this very issue, cautions his readers at this point:

We must be most careful, however, in our interpretation of the term. There are those who say that it simply means that God is omniscient, and knows everything; that there is nothing which God does not know. And because God is omniscient, of necessity He has prescience. If He knows everything; if there is no ‘time’ where God is, no past, present, or future; and if God knows all and everything at the same time; then from our angle it obviously follows that God knows everything before it happens. Such people argue therefore that all that is meant here is that God, because He is God, knows beforehand what will happen. Then they go further and say that God knows beforehand that certain people will believe the gospel, and there He ‘predestinated’ them to be conformed to the image of His Son. They maintain that this is all that ‘did foreknow’ means, simply that God knew beforehand who these people were who would in course of time believe. It is not difficult, however, to show the utter inadequacy of such an explanation of this term.<sup>129</sup>

Lloyd-Jones continues in a fashion common to Calvinist rebuttal. First, he notes that no reference in this text is to what you, or I, or anyone else may or may not do. All the statements concern what God alone does. Next, he highlights the way “foreknew” is regularly used in the New Testament by appealing to the other verses where the word is

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<sup>128</sup>The concept of conditional election rests specifically upon God foreseeing faith and generally upon prevenient grace. However, if prevenient grace is proven biblically untenable, then God choosing people for salvation based upon foreseen faith, which is made possible by prevenient grace, is an impossibility, and conditional election therefore falls apart as a valid interpretation. Thus, Arminians argue that prevenient grace is taught in the Scriptures because (1) they see it in the Scriptures, and (2) it is necessary for their framework of soteriology to hold together.

<sup>129</sup>D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 8:17-39: The Final Perseverance of the Saints* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 233.

used.<sup>130</sup> He reaches two conclusions: (1) “There is only one sense and one meaning to ‘foreknowledge,’ and that is ‘foreordination.’”<sup>131</sup> (2) “When we read in the Scripture that God ‘knows’ someone, or certain people, it means that He has a special interest in them, that He has set His love upon them, that He is planning and has purposed certain things with respect to them.”<sup>132</sup> Inherent within predestination, then, is a notion of special interest, love, and purpose. Thus “foreknowledge,” argues Lloyd-Jones, equals “foreordination,” and “foreordination,” it follows, equals “foreloving.”

Calvin, of course, expressed a similar sentiment in his commentary on the passage. “The foreknowledge of God here mentioned by Paul is not mere prescience, as some inexperienced people foolishly imagine, but adoption, by which He has always distinguished His children from the reprobate. . . . It follows from this that this knowledge depends on God’s good pleasure, because in adopting those whom He would, God had no foreknowledge of anything outside Himself, but simply marked out those whom He purposed to elect.”<sup>133</sup>

While Calvinism affirms that God knows all past, present, and future events, that he is all-knowing in every sense of the word, its definition of foreknowledge has an “intimate” and “loving” cast to it that distinguishes people one from another. This is

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<sup>130</sup>The word “foreknew” (or “foreknowledge”) is used seven times in the New Testament. Twice it is used of the foreknowledge of man (Acts 26:5; 2 Pet 3:17), and the other five occasions it is used with respect to God (Acts 2:23; Rom 8:29, 11:2; 1 Pet 1:2, 20). Lloyd-Jones cites Acts 2:23 (4:27-28); Rom 11:2; 1 Pet 1:2, 20.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., 236

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., 237.

<sup>133</sup>John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew’s Press, 1961), 180-81.

obvious in Calvin's use of the word *adoption*, in which, as he describes, God "distinguishes" his children from the reprobate. Centuries later Calvinists use this same terminology as they interpret Romans 8:29. Stott notes, "Foreknowledge is sovereign, distinguishing love."<sup>134</sup> The verb "know" in the Scripture, observes Murray, has a pregnant meaning which goes beyond that of mere cognition: "It is used in a sense practically synonymous with 'love', to set regard upon, to know with peculiar interest, delight, affection, and action."<sup>135</sup>

Moo also argues that the "foreknowledge as foreseen faith" interpretation is unlikely for reasons identical to his predecessors. First, defining the word in that way does not conform to the general pattern of usage in the New Testament. The majority of uses of the verb "foreknew" and its cognate noun "foreknowledge" do not mean "know before" in the intellectual sense but rather "enter into a relationship with before" or "choose, or determine, before." Second, that the verb "foreknew" in Romans 8:29 carries this peculiarly biblical sense of "know" is suggested by the fact that it has a simple personal object. Paul does not say that God knew anything *about* us but that he knew *us*, which is reminiscent of the Old Testament sense of know. Third, it is only *some* individuals—those who, having been "foreknown," were also "predestined," "called," "justified," and "glorified"—who are the objects of this activity; and this shows that an action applicable only to Christians must be denoted by the verb.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 249.

<sup>135</sup>Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 317.

<sup>136</sup>Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 532-33.

Further examples of similar arguments could be given,<sup>137</sup> but it is enough to say (at least for the moment) that Calvinists, first and foremost, locate the background of “foreknew” in the Old Testament, where for God “to know” refers to his covenantal love in which he sets his affection on those whom he has chosen.<sup>138</sup> The reasoning here, again, is grounded in *principle*: God freely, unconditionally, and mercifully chose the nation of Israel to be his special people out of all the peoples upon the face of the earth, and so he does with individuals unto salvation. Hence the relationship between foreknowledge and election is that God has predestined those upon whom he has set his covenantal affection:

So the *foreknowledge* of Romans 8:29 is not the mere awareness of something that will happen in the future apart from God’s effective grace. Rather it is the kind of knowledge referred to in Old Testament texts like Genesis 18:19 (“I have chosen [literally: *known*] Abraham so that he may charge his children...to keep the way of the LORD”), and Jeremiah 1:5 (“Before I formed you in the womb, I *knew* you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations”), and Amos 3:2 (“You only [Israel] have I *known* from all the families of the earth”).<sup>139</sup>

Baugh, in like manner, denies that God foresees faith and affirms the Hebraic connotation of personal commitment. He argues that the classic Arminian interpretation of Romans 8:29, that God’s foreknowledge of faith is in view, is clearly reading one’s theology into the text: “Paul does not say: ‘whose faith he foreknew,’ but ‘whom he foreknew.’ He foreknew us. This is not to say that God was ever ignorant of the fact that we would believe. But in Romans 8:29, predestination is not dependent on faith; rather,

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<sup>137</sup>Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 233-39; Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 248-49; Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 315-18.

<sup>138</sup>The Hebraic sense of foreknowledge will be expounded in full in the next chapter.

<sup>139</sup>Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, 142-43.



God predestines us on the basis of his gracious commitment to us before the world was.”<sup>140</sup>

In light of this personal and covenantal sense of “knowledge,” he then offers this rendering of Romans 8:29: “Those to whom he [God] was previously devoted.”<sup>141</sup> Supplying “foreknowledge” with this meaning, the Calvinist interpretation of verses 29-30 would read as such: “For those to whom he [God] was previously devoted he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

### **Conclusion**

Mirroring chapter 2, this chapter has (1) defined unconditional election, (2) defended total depravity, and (3) delineated the Calvinist interpretation of Romans 8:29. By doing so it has further revealed the differences between the Arminian and Calvinist frameworks of soteriology. While Arminians claim that God looked through time and space, saw who would in history repent and believe in his Son, and predestined those individuals based upon their free-will response to the gospel, Calvinists deny this is possible. After all, whom would God choose, for all of humanity was spiritually dead and unable and unwilling to come to Jesus for salvation? Instead, through an act of sheer grace, God set his affection upon some and marked them out for glory. This is what Calvinists call unconditional election: God’s choosing based not upon foreseen faith but

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<sup>140</sup>S. M. Baugh, “The Meaning of Foreknowledge,” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 194.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid.

upon his own covenantal commitment to those he desired to bring into conformity to Christ. So foreknowledge is not to be defined as something that God *sees*, that is, faith, but rather as something that God *does*, which is lovingly commit himself to those he chooses.

CHAPTER 4  
THE MEANING OF FOREKNOWLEDGE  
IN ROMANS 8:29

Scripture must be the highest court of appeal in all matters of controversy between Christians. Of course it is good to consult what other Christians believe, but ultimately every thought, belief, and theological system must be judged by the criterion of God's Word. If that thought, belief, or theological system fails to be faithful to God's Word, then it must be rejected regardless of the sentiment or tradition that might be attached to it. Yet, while all born-again believers look to the Scriptures as their final rule of authority, differences of interpretation still exist. So perhaps it should be emphasized—especially at the onset of this particular chapter—that the existence of disagreement does not call into question the reliability of the Bible. Instead, it points to the existence of another reality: that there are incorrect interpretations of Scripture. Therefore, every Christian who wants to know divine truth must labor hard in the pages of the Bible, embracing certain biblical claims while at the same time rejecting others.

This chapter will present five arguments in favor of the Calvinistic sense of foreknowledge in Romans 8:29. These five arguments, when taken cumulatively, show that foreknowledge cannot be understood as foreseen faith. The five arguments are as follows: (1) defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith requires that the concept of prevenient grace be true, which is an idea not substantiated from Scripture; (2) foreseen faith is foreign to the text of Romans 8:29; (3) the verb γινώσκω, from which “foreknew”

is derived, often connotes love, affection, and relationship; (4) the terms “foreknowledge” and “predestination” are not synonymous; (5) since justification is by faith, and only those who are called are justified, it must be that God’s calling produces faith.<sup>1</sup>

### **Foreknowledge in the Calvinistic Sense: Five Arguments**

*Argument 1: Defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith requires that the concept of prevenient grace be true, which is an idea not substantiated from Scripture.* In order to define foreknowledge as foresight of faith, a self-determining will that can freely believe in Christ must be either “natural” to human nature or “restored” to human nature. Because of the overwhelming biblical evidence that testifies to mankind’s spiritual deadness, the majority of Arminians have embraced man’s inability to come to faith of his own volition. Robert Reymond, in responding to the classical Arminian view of predestination in *Perspectives on Election*, presents the case for total depravity very succinctly. He argues that men

by nature *cannot* bring forth good fruit (Matt. 7:18), by nature *cannot* hear Christ’s word that they might have life (John 8:43), by nature *cannot* accept the Spirit of truth (John 14:17), by nature *cannot* be subject to the law of God (Rom. 8:7), by nature *cannot* discern the truths of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14), by nature *cannot* confess from the heart Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), by nature *cannot* inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50), by nature *cannot* control the tongue (James 3:8), and by nature *cannot* come to Christ (John 6:44-45, 65). In order to do any of these things, they must receive powerful aid coming to them *ab extra* [from without]. So there simply is no such thing among men as free will that can always choose the right if it wants to.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This argument goes beyond the text of Romans 8:29-30. Nevertheless, it is implied in the logical sequence of divine activities.

<sup>2</sup>Robert L. Reymond, “Responses to Jack W. Cottrell,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 136-37.

It is nearly impossible (without utterly dismissing the avalanche of scriptural witness) to reach any other conclusion than that man is spiritually dead in his trespasses and sins, enslaved to sin and to Satan, and completely unable and unwilling to come to Christ for salvation. As demonstrated in chapter 1, even Arminius spoke like a Calvinist when it came to the issue of the seriousness of sin and its debilitating effects upon mankind.<sup>3</sup> Even so, the unbreakable link between total depravity and unconditional election was proven breakable with the notion of prevenient grace. It is not an overstatement, then, to say that prevenient grace is the citadel of Arminianism. Indeed, it is the very fortress that protects the logic of Arminian soteriology and makes it possible for foreknowledge to be defined as foreseen faith. But does the notion of prevenient grace withstand the rigor of exegetical scrutiny?

The judicial argument for prevenient grace maintains that such enablement is primarily a result of God's justice. It would be unjust of God to sentence people to an eternal punishment when they are not able to decide against that punishment and for a loving Savior. Prevenient grace, as an act of fairness on God's part, restores man's free will so that he is able to come to Christ if he so chooses. Olson states that this "is necessary to protect God's reputation."<sup>4</sup> Arguing from the vantage point of God's justice, however, fails on the grounds that it does not take human depravity seriously enough. Scripture teaches that although believers know God's eternal power and his divine nature through the creation that they enjoy, they willingly live lives that neither honor God nor

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<sup>3</sup>James Arminius, *Public Disputations of James Arminius*, in *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 1:526. Disputation 11 is titled "On the Free Will of Man and Its Powers."

<sup>4</sup>Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 98.

give thanks to him (Rom 1:19-20). In fact, they live the entirety of their existence following the course of this evil age, reveling in the passions of their flesh, and carrying out the desires of their body and mind, and, as a result, God's wrath naturally rests upon them (Eph 2:1-3). By sentencing sinners to eschatological punishment, God is not treating them unfairly. He is (1) giving them what we want, which is a life without him, and (2) giving them what they deserve, an eternity separated from his loving presence.

Furthermore, God does not need his creatures to protect his reputation: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen 18:25) And whatever punishment God brings is right and just: "You are just in these judgments, O Holy One" (Rev 16:5). "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments" (Rev 16:7). Whatever God's actions may be and whatever God's punishment may be, his ethic of fairness, rightness, and justice cannot be called into doubt. Suppose for a moment that God has not granted universal enabling grace, and suppose for a moment that he does set his electing love upon some while passing over others. That scenario does not entail injustice being performed. It is often assumed that the opposite of justice is mercy, but it is not. The opposite of justice is non-justice. Thus, there is justice and there is non-justice, but within the category of non-justice resides both mercy and injustice. If God sets his saving love upon David (who does not deserve it) but not upon John (who likewise does not deserve it), David has received "mercy" while John has received "justice," but neither has received "injustice."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the judicial argument for prevenient grace, while logically and emotionally attractive, must be rejected on the basis that it fails to agree

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<sup>5</sup>This illustration was adapted from R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1986), 26.

with what the Scriptures say about God's holy and righteous character: in all matters God is fair and just.

A second argument for prevenient grace is fundamentally Christological. Appeal is made to grace given in the atonement and Christ's death for all as an indication of prevenient grace. Pinnock, for example, when discussing his theological pilgrimage from Augustinianism to Arminianism, explains, "Christ's death on behalf of the [human] race evidently did not automatically secure for anyone an actual reconciled relationship with God, but made it possible for people to enter into such a relationship by faith."<sup>6</sup>

Later in the same volume, Miethe argues in similar fashion. He asks:

What is the nature of God and the nature of man as created in God's image? Does the Bible teach that Jesus died for the sins of mankind? Does the Bible teach that man, created in God's image, can [i.e., is free to] and must respond to God's free gracious offer of salvation? I answer that the Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus died for the sins of all people, and man can and must respond to the free offer of salvation.<sup>7</sup>

John 12:32 is cited frequently to support the universal power of the atonement: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Of course Jesus is referring to his approaching death, resurrection, and ascension, when he will be lifted up on a cross, then lifted up from the grave, and finally lifted up to heaven. Further, Jesus tells us that his "lifting up" will result in all people being drawn to him. This drawing, Arminians suggest, does not ensure that all people will come to Jesus for salvation but does enable them to do so. Whether they come fully and finally for forgiveness of sins and eternal life is entirely their choice.

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<sup>6</sup>Clark Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 23.

<sup>7</sup>Miethe, "The Universal Power of the Atonement," in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 84.

This is not the first usage of the verb ἐλκυο (“to draw”), however, in the Gospel of John. In the Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44).<sup>8</sup> Jesus is teaching that no one has the ability to believe in him for salvation unless, first, the Father draws him—and this drawing is inextricably linked to his Father giving certain individuals to him. “All that the Father gives me will come to me,” Jesus proclaims, “and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” So God “giving” certain persons to Jesus results in them being “drawn” to him, which is equivalent to coming to faith in him.

That this is an inevitable drawing is seen both in verses 37 and 44: “All that the Father gives me will come to me,” Jesus asserts; and again, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” Don Carson rightly comments, “The combination of v. 37a and v. 44 prove that this ‘drawing’ activity of the Father cannot be reduced to what theologians sometimes call ‘prevenient grace’ dispensed to every individual, for this ‘drawing’ is selective, or else the negative note in v. 44 is meaningless.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it should be noted that there is not one example in the New Testament of the use of ἐλκυο where resistance is successful. Always the drawing power is triumphant. “Ultimately, therefore, salvation depends not on human

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<sup>8</sup>That “to come” to Jesus means “to believe” in Jesus is clear from v. 35: “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever *comes to me* shall not hunger, and whoever *believes in me* shall never thirst.’” Thus, the phrase “comes to me” is synonymous with “believes in me.”

<sup>9</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 293.



believing, but on the ‘drawing’ action of the Father (presumably by the Holy Spirit) by which God moves a person to faith in Christ.”<sup>10</sup>

If one allows Scripture to interpret Scripture, the “drawing” of John 12:32 cannot be taken to mean, as Carson points out, a universal enablement that attracts all persons to Jesus; and since universalism is not taught in the Bible, there must be another meaning in view. The arrival of some Greeks triggers for Jesus the awareness of his “hour,” a word that typically in the Gospel of John refers to his arrest, crucifixion, and death (cf. John 2:4; 7:30). It is only through this “hour” of suffering and eventual glory (his resurrection) that all ethnic groups, even Gentiles, will be able to approach Jesus for salvation, as his words suggest: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). The drawing of all people in John 12:32, then, does not refer to an enablement that draws all people without “exception”; instead, it refers to an effectual work of the Father that successfully draws all people without “distinction,” meaning both Jews and Gentiles.

Other texts are also cited to prove that Christ’s work on the cross brought with it a universal and enabling grace. These passages state that Jesus died for “all” and for the sins of “the whole world” (2 Cor 5:14-15; 1 John 2:2). But regardless of how “all” and “the whole world” are defined in these verses—whether as “all without *distinction*” or “all without *exception*,” as in the preceding paragraph—the notion of prevenient grace is still absent. Nowhere do these passages teach that the atonement resulted in a restored will to all people. The same is true of Titus 2:11: “For the grace of God has appeared,

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<sup>10</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 213.

bringing salvation for all people.” “The grace of God that brings salvation” is a roundabout way of referring to the contents of the gospel message. It highlights Christ’s incarnation and accomplishment. Certainly Jesus Christ is God’s gracious gift to humanity that brought salvation to all people, but again, there is no hint in this verse of prevenient grace or a restored will. Paul simply states the fact of the historical gospel and what it means: that through Christ’s coming salvation is now offered to all (every person and all people groups).<sup>11</sup>

Arguably the most common scriptural support for prevenient grace comes from John 1:9, which I have termed the “incarnational” argument. Schreiner notes that the crucial phrase in this verse is φωτίζει πάντα άνθρωπον (“enlightens every person”), which Wesleyans understand to refer to prevenient grace.<sup>12</sup> Jesus’ coming into the world brought enough revelation to all people so that they are now able to reject or accept the message of the gospel. The primary lexical meaning of φωτίζει (“enlighten”) is “to shed light upon,” “to make visible,” “to bring to light,” and only secondarily “to illuminate (inwardly).”<sup>13</sup> The context suggests that the primary meaning, to shed light upon, is the correct meaning:

Some are shown to be evil because they did not know or receive Jesus (John 1:10-11), while others are revealed to be righteous because they have received Jesus and have been born of God (John 1:12-13). John 3:19-21 confirms this interpretation. Those who are evil shrink from coming to the light because they do not want their

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<sup>11</sup>It is likely that Paul refers in Titus 2:11 to all people without distinction. See Thomas R. Schreiner, “Problematic Texts for Definite Atonement in the Pastoral and General Epistles,” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. David and Jonathan Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 386-87.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?,” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 239.

<sup>13</sup>Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 123-24.

works to be exposed (v. 20). But those who practice the truth gladly come to the light so that it might be manifest that their works are wrought in God (v. 21).<sup>14</sup>

That all persons are enlightened does not necessitate the bestowment of grace. Rather, the light exposes and reveals the moral and spiritual state of one's heart.<sup>15</sup> As Köstenberger states, it is an external illumination of objective revelation that requires a response.<sup>16</sup> Or as Carson more bluntly describes: "It [the light] shines on every man, and divides the race: those who hate the light [that is, those who hate Jesus] respond as the world does (1:10): they flee lest their deeds should be exposed by this light (3:19-21). But some receive this revelation (1:12-13), and thereby testify that their deeds have been done through God (3:21)."<sup>17</sup> Thus Jesus, the true and genuine light, enlightens everyone in the sense that one's response to him reveals where one stands in relation to him. It is how one responds to Jesus and his message, as the context makes clear, that in a very real, tangible, and public way exposes one's true nature.

A fourth defense of prevenient grace, the causal argument, appeals to the warnings, invitations, and commands in Scripture which imply that they are able to be freely carried out by every person. After all, why would God give commands unless people were given some ability to obey them? Does this not imply that people have the ability to repent if they would only choose to do so? It should be acknowledged that Arminian logic is coherent here, and one can see why they would deduce human ability

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<sup>14</sup>Schreiner, "Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?," 240.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Kostenberger, *John*, 35-36.

<sup>17</sup>Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 124. This is fundamentally the same argument that Schreiner makes.

from the giving of commands. Nonetheless, even though their reasoning is commendable, it does not necessarily follow that their conclusion is true. An argument may be logically coherent and not fit with the state of affairs in the world because the answer given is incomplete. More specifically, the causal argument for prevenient grace is not in accord with the reality of life as it is portrayed in the Scriptures.<sup>18</sup>

Romans 2:4 is an example: “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” Of course it is true that God’s kindness “should” lead people to repentance, but the depravity of our sinful and hard hearts makes that an impossibility unless enabled by God’s grace (2 Tim 2:25-26). Hence, it must again be stressed what this text does not say: nowhere in this verse is prevenient grace taught, implied, or even insinuated by Paul. While the lavishness of God’s kindness, forbearance, and patience should certainly lead sinners to repent of their sins and turn to Jesus, the reality of life as it is portrayed in the Bible paints a different picture, as Romans 2:5 shows: “But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.”

Forlines’s “influence-and-response” model, although unique in its approach, also fails to agree with the reality of life as portrayed in the Scriptures. He argues that because man is created in God’s image, God deals with him solely on the basis that he thinks, feels, and acts:

To do otherwise undercuts the personhood of man. God will not do this—not because something is imposed on God to which He must submit, but because God designed the relationship to be a relationship between *personal beings*. Human beings are personal beings by God’s design and were made for a *personal*

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<sup>18</sup>Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?,” 242-43.

*relationship* with a personal God. God will not violate His own plan. The nature of the case does not demand that God work in a cause and effect relationship with human beings.<sup>19</sup>

Forlines's argument is fraught with red flags. I shall mention only two. First, it is filled with highly emotive language that threatens his readers' sense of freedom. For example, he speaks of anything other than a self-determined will as "undercutting the personhood of man," something that God would never do because it would "violate His own plan." Language like this inevitably stirs the emotions and elicits a strong reaction against any who oppose such a view of man's liberty. Second, and more importantly, Forlines's "influence-and-response" logic is refuted by the testimony of Scripture. The Bible abounds with verses that teach a "cause-and-effect" relationship between God and man. Proverbs alone states, "The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD" (Prov 16:1). "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps" (Prov 16:9). "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will." This does not sound like God is influencing us and waiting to see how we respond. Moreover, specific instances can be cited throughout Scripture that illustrate God's absolute control over our lives, even over our response to his commands.<sup>20</sup> In no way does this undermine man's accountability, for the Bible teaches both God's sovereignty and human responsibility. But to claim that God only interacts with men and women in an "influence-and-response" relationship is simply untrue.

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<sup>19</sup>F. Leroy Forlines, *Romans*, The Randall House Bible Commentary (Nashville: Randall House, 1987), 49.

<sup>20</sup>One of the clearest examples of this is 2 Chron 30:1-12, which will be examined in Argument 5.

Perhaps the biggest challenge unconditional election faces comes in the form of the ontological argument, which puts forth the love of God as the ground of prevenient grace. Admittedly, it is hard to understand how a God who loves the world and desires all to be saved can at the same time choose only some to be saved. What one is dealing with entering into this discussion is the interplay between God’s universal love and his electing love (John 3:16; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9; 1 John 4:8; Matt 22:14; John 6:37, 44, 65; 8:47; 10:26-29; Rom 8:29-30; 9:6-23; 11:5-10; 1 Cor 1:26-30; Eph 1:4-5; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13; Jas 2:5); that is, how these two seemingly contradictory wills of God are harmonized. It is emotionally tempting at this point to let those texts which speak of God’s universal love snuff out those texts which speak of God’s electing love. However, one must allow the whole counsel of God to speak, reconciling what can be reconciled and leaving to mystery what belongs to mystery.

We shall first examine John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” This verse is commonly used as the first line of attack against unconditional election.<sup>21</sup> It is argued, “Jesus says whoever believes in him will be saved—whoever. Therefore unconditional election cannot be true. God loves the world and would never limit his love in that way.” A few comments will suffice as to why this verse does not refute Calvinism’s doctrine of election. (1) The term *κοσμος* (“the world”) in the Gospel of John does not emphasize the “individuals” in the world but rather the “badness” of the world. According to John, the world is the mass of fallen humanity that is in rebellion

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<sup>21</sup>Personally, John 3:16 has been quoted to me more than any other verse to refute that God unconditionally chooses whom he will save.

against its Creator (e.g., John 1:10; 7:7; 14:17, 22, 27, 30; 15:18-19; 16:8, 20, 33; 17:6, 9, 14).<sup>22</sup> What makes God’s love so amazing, then, is not that the world is so big but that the wicked do not deserve it. (2) Calvinists wholeheartedly agree that whoever believes in Jesus will be saved. That is not, nor has it historically been, an issue of disagreement. (3) This verse does not say anything about man’s “ability” to believe in Jesus. It merely promises that whoever does believe in him will be saved. To use this verse as a rebuttal against unconditional election, therefore, does not work. It implies that man has the ability to come to Jesus of his own free will, which is explicitly denied in Scripture and even by Jesus himself (John 6:44).

God’s universal love is also expressed in 1 Timothy 2:4, which states that God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” It is possible that careful exegesis of this verse would lead us to believe that God’s desire for all people to be saved does not refer to every individual person in the world but rather to all “sorts” of people, since “all people” in verse 1 may well mean groups such as “kings and all who are in high positions” (v. 2).<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, this interpretation has been unconvincing to Arminians and likely will continue to be.<sup>24</sup> Besides, it is possible that “all people” means

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<sup>22</sup>Overwhelmingly, the world stands in stark opposition to Jesus and his disciples.

<sup>23</sup>This interpretation is popular among some Reformed theologians because it shifts God’s love from an “individual” emphasis to a “class,” or group, emphasis: God desires all *kinds* of people to be saved, and that includes kings (v. 2) and those in high positions. This is seen as necessary in order to avoid the collision between God’s electing love and his general desire for all people (all individuals) to be saved.

<sup>24</sup>I. Howard Marshall, for example, writes, “This interpretation means that vv. 3f. provide justification for praying for the government authorities in 2:2. This interpretation (like the previous one) is followed by scholars who find a doctrine of particular election underlying the NT. However, nothing in the context suggests such a limitation. Nor does this interpretation secure the desired result, since in the last analysis divisions between individuals and classes of humankind merge into one another” (I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastor Epistles*, The International Critical Commentary Series [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999], 427).

“all individual persons,” so further inquiry is needed into this passage and those like it.<sup>25</sup>

What is undisputed is this: although God truly desires all people to be saved, in reality that does not come to pass. But what are we to think of a desire of God’s that goes unfulfilled? There are two possibilities:

One possibility is that there is a power in the universe greater than God’s, which is frustrating him by overruling what he desires. Neither the Reformed nor the Arminians affirm this. The other possibility is that God wills not to save all, even though he “desires” that all be saved, because there is something else he wills or desires more, which would be lost if he exerted his sovereign power to save all.<sup>26</sup>

Simply put, all of God’s desires do not rise to the level of volition. There is a greater commitment, a greater good, which is more valuable to God than saving all people by his sovereign, efficacious grace. Arminians hold that the greater value is free will and the possible resulting love relationship with God that might come about through the right response to the gospel message. Calvinists suggest that the greater value is the full manifestation of God’s glory in both his wrath and mercy (Rom 9:22-23) and the humbling of man so that he enjoys giving all credit to God for his salvation (1 Cor 1:29).<sup>27</sup> The controversial 1 Timothy 2:4 does not settle the matter, for it neither tells us what that greater commitment is, nor does it teach that man has the ability to believe in Christ of his own free will. Since I do not find in the Scriptures that human beings

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<sup>25</sup>For instance, 2 Pet 3:9 states, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, *not wishing that any should perish*, but that all should reach repentance.” It is often argued that in context Peter is speaking to professing Christians (but is patient toward *you*), so that technically speaking God’s desire that none should perish refers to those whom Peter is writing, that is, those who are professing Christ. Nonetheless, what was said of 1 Tim 2:4 could likewise be said of this passage: further inquiry needs to be made into the relationship between God’s universal love and his electing love.

<sup>26</sup>John Piper, *Does God Desire All to be Saved?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 39.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*



possess the power of self-determination, I agree with the Calvinist interpretation that God deems his glory as the higher commitment that restrains him from saving all people.

In attempting to reconcile God's universal love and his electing love (as much as it is humanly possible to do so), it must be acknowledged that the Bible speaks of the love of God in different ways. There is, for example, the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father (John 3:35; 14:31). This is a unique relationship that exists only between God the Father and God the Son. It is not only "eternal," in that it has no beginning and no end, but it is also the "purest" relationship that has ever existed, in that it is not (nor can it be) tainted by sin. As well, there is God's providential love for his creation. God created this world and deemed it "good"—indeed, "very good"—and continually provides for all people, believers and unbelievers alike (Matt 5:45).<sup>28</sup> Therefore, when scholars distinguish between God's universal love and his electing love, it is not a sign of divine schizophrenia or exegetical confusion. Instead, it is a biblical attempt to come to grips with the two wills of God as taught in the Bible.

John Piper has given thoughtful consideration to this subject and shared his conclusions in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*.<sup>29</sup> He reasons that God's emotional life is infinitely complex and far beyond our ability to fully comprehend:

For example, who can comprehend that the Lord hears in one moment of time the prayers of ten million Christians around the world, and sympathizes with each one personally and individually like a caring Father (as Hebrews 4:15 says he will), even though among those ten million prayers some are brokenhearted and some are

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<sup>28</sup>Carson is tremendously helpful in thinking through the different aspects of the love of God. See D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 2000).

<sup>29</sup>John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?", in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 126-27.

bursting with joy? How can God weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice when they are both coming to him at the same time—in fact are always coming to him with no break at all?

Or who can comprehend that God is angry at the sin of the world every day (Ps. 7:11), and yet every day, every moment, he is rejoicing with tremendous joy because somewhere in the world a sinner is repenting (Luke 15:7, 10, 23)? Who can comprehend that God continually burns with hot anger at the rebellion of the wicked, grieves over the unholy speech of his people (Eph. 4:29-30), yet takes pleasure in them daily (Ps. 149:4), and ceaselessly makes merry over penitent prodigals who come home?<sup>30</sup>

It is this divine emotional complexity that allows God to desire all to be saved and yet only set his saving love upon some. He is able, as Piper describes, to see the world through two lenses: either through a narrow lens or a wide-angle lens. When God looks at a painful or wicked event through his narrow lens, he sees the tragedy or sin for what it is in itself, and he is angered and grieved. But when God sees a painful or wicked event through his wide-angle lens, he sees the tragedy or sin in relation to everything leading up to it and everything flowing out from it: “He sees it in all the connections and effects that form a pattern or mosaic stretching into eternity. This mosaic, with all its (good and evil) parts, he does delight in (Ps. 115:3).”<sup>31</sup>

If this seems unfathomable, it is because in part it is. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:8-9). And, as Paul proclaims in Romans 11:33, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” Of course, these are not easy answers, but they are answers

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 126-27.

<sup>31</sup>Piper, *Does God Desire All to be Saved?*, 45.

derived from the text of Scripture. God's people must humbly bow to what they see in Scripture and leave unrevealed matters to him, accepting that the secret things do not belong to us but only to our Lord (Deut 29:29).

I have sought in this argument to establish that prevenient grace cannot be substantiated from Scripture. As best as I am able to discern, I do not see one verse in the entirety of the Bible that teaches that a universal enabling grace has restored man's will to its pre-Fall "neutral" condition. When people claim otherwise, it appears to be driven more by philosophical presupposition than exegetical conclusion. It is thus fitting to conclude with the words of Arminian Clark Pinnock: "I also knew that the Bible has no developed doctrine of universal prevenient grace, however convenient it would be for us if it did."<sup>32</sup>

*Argument 2: Foreseen faith is foreign to the text of Romans 8:29.* Romans 8:29 says, "For those whom he [God] foreknew [προγινώσκειν] he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." The verb προγινώσκω means "to know beforehand," and without question God knows beforehand all things and all people. The Bible declares consistently that God's knowledge is vast, great, and all-encompassing.<sup>33</sup> However, the remainder of verse 29 teaches that those whom God foreknew "he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." Since all people are not predestined to be conformed into the image of Christ, it is only those whom God "foreknew," and since God knows all people in the sense of cognitive awareness, God's foreknowledge of all men in general

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<sup>32</sup>Clark Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 22. Pinnock goes on to deny total depravity, appealing to the notion that Scripture implores people *as though they are able* to respond.

<sup>33</sup>The Old Testament, for example, provides abundant evidence for God's omniscience. See Pss 139:2, 18; 147:5; Prov 16:2; Isa 41:23; 66:18; Ezra 1:1-4.

cannot be what Paul has in mind. Rather, he is using the word in a narrower sense, defining a special and distinct group of people separate from all people as a universal whole.

It is this reality that forces interpreters to clarify further προγινώσκειν. What precisely is it that distinguishes those whom God foreknew and marked out to be conformed to the image of his Son from those whom God did not foreknow and mark out to be conformed to the image of his Son? Simply acknowledging the narrower sense of “foreknew” does not answer all the questions that the term raises. Indeed, that God’s foreknowledge defines a special and distinct group of people separate from all people as a universal whole is agreed upon by both Arminians and Calvinists. It is when the issue is pressed further (as it must be) that disagreement arises; hence, the former interpret foreknowledge as “foreseen faith” and the latter as “covenantal commitment.”

Admittedly, many Calvinists readily grant the appeal and reasonability of defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith. Schreiner confesses, “Such an interpretation is attractive in that it forestalls the impression that God arbitrarily saves some and not others.”<sup>34</sup> Moo concedes that “foreknew,” as its etymology in both Greek and English suggests, usually means “to know ahead of time.” “This being the commonest meaning of the verb, it is not surprising that many interpreters think it must mean this here also.”<sup>35</sup> Murray agrees: “The most common [understanding] is to suppose that what is in view is God’s foresight of faith. God foreknew who would believe; he foreknew them as his *by*

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<sup>34</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 452.

<sup>35</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 532.

*faith.*”<sup>36</sup> Paul Jewett, as well, notes that among Protestants the position that bases God’s election on his foresight of faith has long had an appeal. One could even argue that it is the most widely held view. He explains why this is so:

It can easily be inferred from a fundamental strand of biblical revelation: the Scriptures plainly teach that a genuine offer of salvation is made to all in the gospel (Matt. 28:19-20), that the gospel itself is the good news that Christ died for all (2 Cor. 5:14-15), and that this death commends the love of a God (Rom. 5:8) who wills the salvation of all men (1 Tim. 2:4). If God is the seeking God, the God who all day long stretches forth his hands to rebellious sinners (Isa. 65:2; Rom. 10:21), the God who solemnly declares that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11), what other position can one take? The fact that some are beneficiaries of his grace must, in the last analysis, be attributed to the free decision of the creature either to accept or to reject the grace freely offered in the gospel. At least so it would seem.<sup>37</sup>

This is what Cottrell means when he says that “Arminians reasonably infer that what God foreknows is our decision to meet these conditions, especially the condition of faith.”<sup>38</sup> What may seem reasonable, however, is not always scriptural, and in this particular scenario one is forced to ask, “Where is faith mentioned in this verse?” That God foresees a person’s faith and bases his election of an individual upon that choice is a notion that is foreign to the text and to the Bible as a whole.<sup>39</sup> To say otherwise is simply smuggling a meaning into foreknowledge that is glaringly absent from the word (and the

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<sup>36</sup>John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 316.

<sup>37</sup>Paul K. Jewett, *Election and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 70.

<sup>38</sup>Jack Cottrell, “The Classical Arminian View of Election,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2006), 85, emphasis added.

<sup>39</sup>On the contrary, Acts 13:48 teaches just the opposite: “[A]nd as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” God’s divine sovereignty in election results in the belief of the Gentiles, demonstrating that their belief was due to God’s grace alone. The clear meaning of the passage is that the ones who believed did so because they were appointed to eternal life, a note that Luke, through the Holy Spirit, saw important enough to include. Moreover, passages such as Eph 2:8-10, Phil 1:29, and 2 Tim 2:25 (as well as others) teach that faith and repentance are gifts of God.

passage) itself. The “foreknowledge as foreseen faith” view, appealing and reasonable as it may be, “presupposes” that God sees each individual’s act of self-wrought faith and consequently predestines him or her unto salvation.

Ironically, this is even acknowledged by a number of Arminian scholars. Cottrell says, “Arminians reasonably infer that what God foreknows is our decision to meet these conditions, especially the condition of faith.”<sup>40</sup> Forlines confesses, “It is true that the Bible does not specifically say that foreknown faith was the condition of election in eternity past.”<sup>41</sup> Behind these statements, of course, is the underlying belief in free will. But even Olson admits, “Arminians believe in free will because they see it everywhere assumed in the Bible.”<sup>42</sup> The reason these scholars speak so candidly about faith, free will, and foreknowledge is because they know, exactly as Forlines states, that the Bible “does not specifically say” that God foresees an individual’s faith and elects him or her based upon that prior knowledge. It is an assumption, an inference, a presupposition, and their moral integrity obligates them to be honest in their assessment. Nevertheless, even though (by their own admission) they see no hard scriptural evidence in support of defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith, they continue to hold fast to their position.

Inevitably, all forms of conditional election fall prey to defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith. Forster and Marston try to distance themselves from this fact by suggesting that in Romans 8:29 Paul is not dealing with why some came to be

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<sup>40</sup>Cottrell, “Arminian View,” 85, emphasis added.

<sup>41</sup>Forlines, *Classical Arminianism*, 186, emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup>Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 98, emphasis added.

converted and some did not; instead, he is simply writing to Christians about their position, or their status, before the Lord. They then conclude that “the foreknowledge [Paul] has in view implies a complete understanding of them, of their characters, their weaknesses, and their reactions.”<sup>43</sup> I do not see how this definition of foreknowledge varies in any substantial way from the traditional Arminian definition of foreknowledge. Does not God knowing a Christian’s “reactions” include his knowing his “reaction” to the gospel?

That this is what they are actually saying seems even clearer when they sum up their position in the final paragraphs of the chapter: “Our inheritance is obtained and our destiny worked out in Christ, and this destiny was set out by God in the full light of his knowledge of those who would so receive it.”<sup>44</sup> This is not substantially different from Arminianism’s traditional interpretation of foreknowledge. To say that the Christian’s destiny was set out by God in the full light of his knowledge “of those who would so receive it” is fundamentally saying the same thing as the traditional Arminian interpretation: God predestines individuals based upon his foreknowledge of who will and who will not repent and believe in his Son. Let us note that saying the same thing a different way is still saying the same thing, and that does appear to be what these two scholars are doing. While in many ways their treatment of foreknowledge provides an excellent word study,<sup>45</sup> in the end Forster and Marston make precisely the same interpretive error that every scholar who holds to conditional election does: they assume

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<sup>43</sup>Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1973), 205.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 204, emphasis added.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 178-208.

that a person's free-will decision to receive Christ is what God foreknew when he elected them unto glory, which affixes an element to the word that is foreign to the text.

This textual addition has been aptly called a “qualifying adjunct.”<sup>46</sup> To relieve God from the accusation of injustice, and to give mankind complete freedom in determining his eternal destiny, Arminians must add something to προγινώσκειν in Romans 8:29 that is not inherent in the word, in the verse, or in the surrounding context. Furthermore, as Murray points out, the rejection of this interpretation is not dictated by a predestinarian interest.

Even if it were granted that “foreknew” means the foresight of faith, the biblical doctrine of sovereign election is not thereby eliminated or disproven. For it is certainly true that God foresees faith; he foresees all that comes to pass. The question would then simply be: whence proceeds this faith which God foresees? And the only biblical answer is that the faith God foresees is the faith that he himself creates (*cf.* John 3:3-8; 6:44, 45, 65; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; II Pet. 1:2). Hence his eternal foresight of faith is preconditioned by his decree to generate this faith in those whom he foresees as believing, and we are thrown back upon the differentiation which proceeds from God's own eternal and sovereign election to faith and its consequents.<sup>47</sup>

In other words, even if foreknowledge is allowed to mean “foreseen faith,” that does not solve the problem of origin. Where does the individual's faith come from?<sup>48</sup> Again, any qualifying adjunct at this point is just that: an addition to the word (and the verse) that is not intrinsic to the word (or the verse). For this reason, the view that foreknowledge refers to the foresight of faith must be rejected. There is simply no exegetical rationale for defining foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 in such a manner.

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<sup>46</sup>This expression is Shedd's.

<sup>47</sup>Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 316.

<sup>48</sup>See footnote 7 in this chapter. Also, this issue will be addressed more fully in argument 5: since justification is by faith and only those who are called are justified, it must be that God's calling produces faith.



*Argument 3: The verb γινώσκω, from which “foreknew” is derived, often connotes love, affection, and relationship.* Argument one concluded that prevenient grace cannot be corroborated from Scripture. Argument two further concluded that foreseen faith is foreign to the text of Romans 8:29. This alone is enough evidence to reject Arminianism’s definition of foreknowledge and consider the possibility of an alternative interpretation. Murray proceeds forward with keen insight:

It should be observed that the text says “*whom* he foreknew”; *whom* is the object of the verb and there is not qualifying addition. This, of itself, shows that, unless there is some other compelling reason, the expression “whom he foreknew” contains within itself the differentiation which is presupposed. If the apostle had in mind some “qualifying adjunct” it would have been simple to supply it. Since he adds none we are forced to inquire if the actual terms he uses can express the differentiation required.<sup>49</sup>

Instead of adding something alien to the text, Murray suggests that the word “foreknew” should be investigated to see if it supplies within itself any extra information. Indeed it does:

The usage of Scripture provides an affirmative answer. Although the term ‘foreknew’ is used seldom in the New Testament, it is altogether indefensible to ignore the meaning so frequently given to the word ‘know’ in the usage of Scripture; ‘foreknow’ merely adds the thought of ‘beforehand’ to the word ‘know’. Many times in Scripture ‘know’ has a pregnant meaning which goes beyond that of mere cognition. It is used in a sense practically synonymous with ‘love’, to set regard upon, to know with peculiar interest, delight, affection, and action.<sup>50</sup>

The texts that support this meaning are abundant. In reference to Adam, Genesis 4:1 says, “Now Adam knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain.” Obviously, this is referring to sexual knowledge, but the point is that the word “knew” means something significantly more than that Adam was aware he had a wife named Eve. By contrast this

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<sup>49</sup>Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 316-17.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 317.

same idea is expressed in Matthew 7:23. False disciples come to Jesus claiming they have prophesied in his name, cast out demons, and performed many mighty works, and he tells them, “I never *knew* you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” This does not mean that Jesus never knew they existed, or that they were doing these works in his name. Jesus is not expressing some sort of cognitive ignorance, as if he is completely unaware of their identities and activities. He is stating that he did not know them in a personal and saving way; otherwise, he would have welcomed them into his kingdom.

Similarly, this is the sense in which Paul uses the word “know” in Galatians 4:9: “But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God . . . .” “To know God” implies a genuine relationship with him. In the case of the Galatians, they were tempted to revert back to principles and practices they had previously followed before their union with Christ (v. 9). Paul is astonished, and in essence says to them, “How can that be, now that you know the one and true living God?” From the Galatians perspective, they have just recently and experientially entered into a relationship with God. But we can know God only because he first knew us (Rom 8:29), just as we choose him because he first chose us (John 6:44; 15:16), and we love him because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). Evident in these texts, then, is that the word “know” can (and does) have the connotation of love, delight, and intimate relationship.

The background of the term is in the Old Testament, where for God “to know” refers to his covenantal love in which he sets his affection on those whom he has chosen.<sup>51</sup> Amos 3:2 speaks of this type of knowing. God is warning Israel through his

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<sup>51</sup>The Hebrew word *yada* (“to know”) carries a range of meanings, one of which can be described as “God’s special relationship with.” Willem VanGemeren notes, “The vb. is used for God’s relationship to Israel as a people, ‘You only have I known’ (Amos 3:2 NRSV), and with individual leaders

prophet that judgment is coming, and he reminds them, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” Judah and Israel believed that their special relationship as the chosen people of God would protect them from harm, but it is precisely this fact that makes them even more accountable. God knew all the peoples of the earth and easily could have chosen any of them to set his covenantal love upon. Out of love and his own autonomous decision, however, he chose Israel.<sup>52</sup> Deuteronomy 7:7-8 affirms this interpretation: “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all the peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers.” What is evident in these passages is that the word “know” is used to express God’s unconditional act of loving whom he chooses to love, apart from anything he sees in those he loves.<sup>53</sup>

Thus far I have sought to demonstrate that the word “know,” in both its New Testament usage and Old Testament background, can carry within itself the idea of

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(Abraham, Gen 18:19; Moses, Exod 33:12; Deut 34:10 [‘face to face’]; David, 2 Sam 7:20; Jeremiah, Jer 1:5). This usage does not focus on election in a narrow way, but on the relationship in its fullest sense. To know ‘by name,’ on the part of either God or humans (Exod 33:12; Ps 91:14), refers to closeness, not to a badge of identification” (Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997], s.v. “yada,” by Willem A. VanGemeren.

<sup>52</sup>This is the point of Deut 10:14-15: “Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.” The truth of God’s sovereign ownership of the entire universe, and by extension all the peoples therein, serves as a backdrop to highlight his grace in freely choosing Israel. Simply put, God owns everything and can take any nation he wants for his own special possession.

<sup>53</sup>Many other passages can be cited to support the Hebraic sense of “know” as well. Old Testament texts include Gen 18:19; Exod 33:17; 1 Sam 2:12; Ps 18:43; Prov 9:10; Jer 1:5; Hos 13:5; as well as further New Testament passages, such as John 10:14, 17:3; 2 Tim 2:19; 1 John 4:7.

affection, love, and, often, covenantal commitment.<sup>54</sup> Of course, this does not necessarily entail that we should import the Hebraic sense of “know” into Romans 8:29, but it has proven that there is exegetical grounds to do so (or at the very least consider it to be a legitimate possibility). Often forgotten in this discussion, however, is the fact that Paul uses the word “foreknowledge” just a few chapters later in Romans 11:2: “God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.” This is not an unimportant observation, and should be given serious consideration when determining the meaning of “foreknowledge” in 8:29. Bruce Ware has given this rightful attention in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*:

Now if we applied the Arminian notion of foreknowledge here, this text would mean, “God has not rejected his people *whom He knew in advance would choose Him.*” But clearly this is not the case! God chose Israel, from all the nations of the world, even though she was the smallest and weakest of the lot (Deut. 7:6-8; 14:2)! It is simply not the case that God picked Israel to be his people because he knew in advance that Israel would pick him! Rather, what Romans 11:2 is saying is this: “God has not rejected His people whom He *previously had been disposed to be in relationship with and favor.*” Both the usual lexical meaning of “foreknowledge” and the historical facts about God’s relationship with Israel indicate that this is what Paul means in Romans 11:2.<sup>55</sup>

Schreiner, as well, appeals to Romans 11:2 in arguing for the Hebraic sense of foreknowledge. “The verb προέγνω here functions as the antonym to ἀπόσατο (*apōsato*, “he rejected”). In other words, the verse is saying that God has not rejected his people upon whom he set his covenantal love (cf. also Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2, 20). Similarly, in Rom. 8:29 the point is that God has predestined those upon whom he has set his

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<sup>54</sup>Usually, context makes it very clear if this is the sense in which the word should be understood.

<sup>55</sup>Bruce A. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation: Unconditional, Individual, and Infralapsarian,” in *Perspectives on Election*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 27.

covenantal affection.”<sup>56</sup> Baugh, too, concludes that Paul refers to the concept of a committed relationship with the phrase “whom he foreknew,” as it is confirmed by the context: “God’s eternal foreknowledge, his devotion to his people before all ages, inspires the apostle to conclude with a virtual restatement of that eternal, divine commitment to us in verse 31: ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’ What better exhibits this divine determination to have us as his people than the fact that he delivered over his own Son on our behalf (Rom. 8:32)?”<sup>57</sup> Murray is right to conclude that when this import is appreciated there is no reason for adding any qualifying notion, for “whom he foreknew” is seen to contain within itself the differentiating element required. It means “whom he set regard upon” or “whom he knew from eternity with distinguishing affection and delight,” and it is virtually equivalent to “whom he foreloved.”<sup>58</sup>

Generally speaking, Arminians do not find fault with attaching the connotation of love to γινώσκω; they just find fault with doing so in the particular case of Romans 8:29. For instance, Osborne writes, “The verb is connected to the Hebrew *yada* for God’s loving knowledge of his people. . . . Yet one wonders if it is the most natural understanding of the verb.”<sup>59</sup> It is better, he concludes, to link foreknowledge to a faith decision and interpret it as God’s knowledge regarding those who would respond in faith

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<sup>56</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 452.

<sup>57</sup>S. M. Baugh, “The Meaning of Foreknowledge,” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 194.

<sup>58</sup>Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 317.

<sup>59</sup>Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 221. See also Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1889), 107-10; Forster and Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History*, 178-208.

to his call.<sup>60</sup> There is no need to address the numerous problems with Osborne’s assertion (as they have been previously discussed), other than to say that his understanding of “foreknew” is not the most natural understanding of the verb. On the contrary, his interpretation takes προγινώσκω far beyond the bounds of what the text allows.

The most natural understanding of προγινώσκειν in Romans 8:29 carries with it the notion of love, devotion, and personal commitment. It is bound up with covenantal implications, to be sure, because God is a loyal and faithful God to those he chooses to redeem. It is then appropriate to render Romans 8:29-30 in such a way that reflects that love, devotion, and personal commitment: “For those whom [God] set his heart in love he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”<sup>61</sup>

*Argument 4: The terms “foreknowledge” and “predestination” are not synonymous.* It is common for Arminians to refute the Calvinist understanding of foreknowledge on the grounds that it folds “foreknowledge” and “predestination” together, thus making the two terms basically indistinguishable, which is obviously not what Paul meant. Osborne, for example, writes,

The majority of commentators (Murray 1968; Cranfield 1975; Hendriksen 1981; Morris 1988; Stott 1994; Moo 1996; Schreiner 1998) take “foreknew” as virtually equivalent to “predestined” on several grounds: (1) The relational love inherent in “foreknew” goes further than mere knowledge of choices and means “to determine to enter a relationship with,” that is, God’s choice or election (as in Rom 11:2; 1 Pet 1:2, 20); (2) it relates to his preordained plan from verse 28; (3) it is foreknowledge

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 222.

<sup>61</sup>Foreknowledge and predestination in Rom 8:29 are roughly equivalent to what Moses says to Israel in Deut 10:15: “Yet the LORD set his heart in love (foreknowledge) on your fathers and chose (predestination) their offspring after them, you above all people, as you are this day.”

that determines rather than just knows what is to happen; (4) the emphasis is on the second verb *predestined*, and the first verb simply prepares for it; (5) it connotes that God knew his people, not just about what they would decide to do; (6) since it refers to a prior intimate knowledge of believers, it by nature becomes synonymous with God's choice "before the creation of the world" (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20). This is very impressive, even persuasive, for it fits the emphasis on divine sovereignty throughout this passage (leading into chaps. 9-11). Yet one wonders if it is the most natural understanding of the verb. For one thing, none of the other five stages are virtually equivalent (even *predestined* and *called* are different stages); rather, each one prepares for the next. Why should the first two be synonymous?<sup>62</sup>

It is clear that Osborne is familiar with how Calvinists have reached their conclusions, and even finds the arguments persuasive, yet ultimately he rejects the Hebraic sense of foreknowledge, first, on the basis that it is equivalent to predestination. While Arminians do acknowledge that  $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\kappa\omega$  can have the connotation of love, they inevitably assert that Calvinists' primary definition of  $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\kappa\omega$  is "to choose," "determine," or "set apart."<sup>63</sup> This is apparent in Forster and Marston's word study of "foreknowledge" in *God's Strategy in Human History*, as well as Cottrell's essay in *Perspectives on Election*. For instance, Cottrell writes, "For Calvinists God's foreknowledge is the act by which he (unconditionally) makes distinctions among people, *choosing* some out of the mass of future mankind to be the sole recipients of his saving grace. Foreknowledge is the same as election."<sup>64</sup>

It is not entirely accurate, however, to claim that Calvinism's primary definition of foreknowledge is election. In fact, a brief survey of even a few of the commentators Osborne cites reveals differently. Murray presents a thorough and well-

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<sup>62</sup>Osborne, *Romans*, 221.

<sup>63</sup>Godet does clearly distinguish between foreknowledge as "to choose beforehand" and the Hebraic sense of "foreloving," but rejects both in favor of foreseen faith. See Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 103.

<sup>64</sup>Cottrell, "Arminian View," 87.

articulated defense of “foreknowledge” as “foreloving.”<sup>65</sup> Stott concludes unambiguously, “Foreknowledge is ‘sovereign, distinguishing love.’”<sup>66</sup> Moo notes that “foreknowledge” likely means “know intimately,” or to “have regard for.”<sup>67</sup> Schreiner asserts that the point in Romans 8:29 is that God has predestined those whom he set his covenantal affection.<sup>68</sup> While all these commentators see foreknowledge and predestination as in some way related, that is a far cry from saying they are in every way the same. The word προγινώσκω means “to know beforehand,” and προώρισεν (*proōrisen*, predestine) “to destine beforehand.” “The latter term stresses the preordained plan of God that will certainly come to pass (Acts 4:28; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11) in accordance with his will. The former has a different nuance in that it highlights his covenantal love and affection for those whom he has chosen.”<sup>69</sup>

An analogy may help here. Suppose a guitarist visits his favorite music store and plays a handful of fine acoustic guitars. After several hours of playing he finds himself especially enamored with a particular Gibson J-45, but chooses to leave the store that day without it. On the other hand, suppose another guitarist visits his favorite music store. He too plays all the acoustic guitars and falls in love with a rather dry and spritely Martin D-18. He knows if he walks away from this rare mahogany find he will live to

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<sup>65</sup>Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 315-18.

<sup>66</sup>John Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 249.

<sup>67</sup>Moo, *Romans*, 533.

<sup>68</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 452.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 453.



regret it, so he decides to purchase it that very moment and use it to record his next album.

What is the difference between these two scenarios? The primary difference is one of purpose. The first musician, undoubtedly smitten with the J-45, ultimately decides not to take it home, while the second musician, also smitten with the guitar he has discovered, purchases the D-18 with the specific intent of using it on his next project. This, in essence, illustrates the difference between foreknowledge and predestination. Foreknowledge tells us that God set his heart in love upon certain individuals before the foundation of the world, and predestination tells us what he determined to do with them: conform them into the likeness of his Son. Simply put, προγινώσκω emphasizes God's love, whereas προόρισεν emphasizes God's "purposive intent" in that love.<sup>70</sup>

When we consider this high destiny defined, "to be conformed to the image of his Son," there is exhibited not only the dignity of this ordination but also the greatness of the love from which the appointment flows. God's love is not passive emotion; it is active volition and it moves determinatively to nothing less than the highest goal conceivable for his adopted children, conformity to the image of his only-begotten Son. To allege that the pregnant force of "foreknew" does not leave room for the distinct enunciation of this high destiny is palpably without warrant or reason.<sup>71</sup>

Arminians would be right to object if in fact Calvinists made no distinction between foreknowledge and predestination, but that allegation is, as Murray states, without warrant or reason, for a clear line of demarcation exists between these two pre-creation acts of God. Whereas προγινώσκω emphasizes God's loving commitment to those individuals he set his affections upon, προόρισεν emphasizes God's destination for

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<sup>70</sup>I am not trying to make a correlation along all points of this illustration, such as why God chooses some for salvation and others he does not. I am simply stressing that there is a clear difference between foreknowledge and predestination, emphasizing, in this analogy, that the "purpose" of predestination makes it distinct from God's prior act of foreloving (foreknowing).

<sup>71</sup>Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 318.

these same individuals. In other words, “foreknowledge” and “predestination” are not synonymous terms: they highlight two related-yet-distinct actions performed by God from before the creation of the universe. Therefore, the claim that the Calvinist definition of προγινώσκω obliterates the distinction between foreknowledge and predestination is unjustifiable and should be rejected.

*Argument 5: Since justification is by faith, and only those who are called are justified, it must be that God’s calling produces faith.* The plain point of Romans 8:29-30 is that all the foreknown will ultimately be glorified; not one person will be lost, dropped, or left out of God’s plan of salvation. Jesus speaks of this same type of inevitability, albeit using different language, when he says,

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:37-40)

Furthermore, both Jesus’ words and Paul’s words imply selectivity. To say that “all” those God foreknew are predestined, called, justified, and glorified is to say that “only” those God foreknew are predestined, called, justified, and glorified. Since justification is by faith (Rom 5:1), and Paul says that only those who are called are justified, it must be that this calling is an “effectual” calling, a calling that, without fail, accomplishes faith and consequently justification. This type of call is most clearly seen in passages such as 1 Corinthians 1:23-24: “But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” While a “general” call, a true gospel

invitation,<sup>72</sup> goes out to all people, an “inner, effectual” call goes out to the elect. This divine call creates a new heart of willing faith so that the gospel, which was once considered foolish, is now seen as the power and wisdom of God.

The Bible illustrates this effectual, or irresistible, call in various ways. Paul, speaking of those who are perishing, says to the Corinthians, “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God . . . . For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:4-6). Because men are blinded to the worth of Christ and the beauty of the gospel, a divine work, indeed a miracle, is needed for them to see and believe. Paul compares this miracle with the first day of creation when God said, “Let there be light.” When spiritually dead people come to see and believe in Jesus, it is in fact a new creation, a new birth that has taken place, which makes God’s creative power seen in Genesis 1 an appropriate parallel.<sup>73</sup>

Arminians balk at Calvinism’s doctrine of effectual calling, or irresistible grace, because they see it as God forcing someone to do something against his or her will. The doctrine of irresistible grace, however, simply means that when God pleases he

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<sup>72</sup>Matthew 22:14 demonstrates this type of call: “For many are called, but few are chosen.” Here the word *call* is used in the general sense, as it is juxtaposed with *chosen*. Although many are called in the sense of being invited, only the “chosen” actually partake of the wedding feast.

<sup>73</sup>Another example of God’s divine work that brings a person to faith in Christ is in Acts 16:14, where Lydia is listening to the preaching of Paul. Luke says, “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” This heart-opening is what happens when God “calls” those he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. It is not merely an opportunity for man to choose or reject the gospel, but an infallible work of God that creates new spiritual life, opens blinded eyes, and creates a heart of willing faith. Lydia experienced this in Acts 16:14 and so has every person who has ever come to faith in Jesus.

overcomes all resistance and makes the heart happily willing to believe in his Son rather than remain in a state of rebellion and condemnation. Generally speaking, perhaps the most explicit account of God's sovereignty over men's hearts is found in 2 Chronicles 30:1-12. King Hezekiah wrote to the people of Israel commanding them to keep the Passover, as was decreed and pleasing to the Lord: "So the couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. However, some men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD" (2 Chr 30:10-12).

What is striking in this passage is that all people were given the same decree. They were commanded by the king to return to the Lord, to not be like their fathers and brothers who were faithless, stiff-necked, and brought judgment upon themselves. Instead, Hezekiah pleaded with them to yield to the Lord and serve him only so that God's fierce anger may be abated and turned away from them. Sadly, some laughed and mocked the couriers and the king. Others, though, humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. And then the Spirit records, "The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD" (2 Chr 30:12). Verse 12 demonstrates a general principle that is at work not only in this passage but also in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6; 1 Corinthians 1:23-24; and Romans 8:29-30: behind an individual's moving/working is God's moving/working.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Space does not permit me to look at other passages that reflect the same reality. For instance, Jesus responds to certain Jews' unbelief by saying, "The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, *but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep*" (John 10:25-26, italics)

This principle is consistent with the Calvinist understanding of “calling” and “justification” in Romans 8:30. We have already noted that the calling in verse 30 is selective: “The call here is given only to those God predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, as verse 30 says, ‘Those whom he predestined, *these* he also called.’ And this call leads necessarily to justification, as verse 30 says, ‘Those whom he called, *these* he also justified.’ All the called are justified, not just some of them.”<sup>75</sup> But, again, inherent in this verse is both selectivity and inevitability. Those whom God foreknew and predestined are infallibly called and justified; and because justification is by faith, it naturally follows that the calling produces, or guarantees, faith. The calling in view, then, is a divine act by which God calls faith into being. Just as he creates light out of darkness and moves men’s hearts to obey his vice-regent king, he calls spiritually dead people to faith in his Son.

Unquestionably, the Arminian interpretation of Roman 8:29 places faith in between foreknowledge and predestination, for it is those God foresaw by their own free will who would believe in Jesus that he, in turn, predestined. But the “foreseen faith” understanding of foreknowledge is not exegetically or logically plausible. Since only those who are called are justified, it must be that the calling itself creates faith. If God foresees any faith, it is the faith that he begets in the life of the called, and this calling

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mine). Jesus does not say, “You are not my sheep because you do not believe,” but rather, “You do not believe because you are not my sheep.” The reason they do not believe is that they do not belong to him. As well, in Acts 13:48 the gospel is preached to Gentiles and Luke records, “and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” While human responsibility in believing must never be undermined, the emphasis here is that the Gentiles believing was due to God’s grace alone: their election *resulted in* them believing, and not the other way around.

<sup>75</sup>John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God’s Delight in Being God* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2000), 141.

does not come to all but only to those who are predestined. The correct interpretation of this text cannot have faith falling in between “foreknowledge” and “predestination.” Instead, it must fall in between “calling” and “justification,” thus proving the Calvinist understanding of foreknowledge to be the only legitimate interpretation.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented five arguments in favor of the Calvinistic sense of foreknowledge in Romans 8:29: (1) defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith requires that the concept of prevenient grace be true, which is an idea not substantiated from Scripture; (2) foreseen faith is foreign to the text of Romans 8:29; (3) the verb γινώσκω, from which “foreknew” is derived, often connotes love, affection, and relationship; (4) the terms “foreknowledge” and “predestination” are not synonymous; (5) since justification is by faith and only those who are called are justified, it must be that God’s calling produces faith. Considered separately, any of these five arguments provide compelling evidence against the Arminian definition of foreknowledge and for the Calvinist interpretation. But when taken cumulatively, it is inconceivable to argue that foreknowledge means foreseen faith in Romans 8:29. Instead, it seems exegetically and contextually right to define foreknowledge as God’s purposive love which results in predestination and finally glorification.

## CHAPTER 5

### FOREKNOWLEDGE AND ITS ECCLESIASTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Chapter 1 provided a brief soteriological sketch of the controversy over free will, outlining church history's three major peaks: Augustinianism and Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Calvinism and Arminianism. Chapter 2 presented foreknowledge as foreseen faith. According to Arminianism, God's foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 refers to his foresight of those men and women who would come to believe in his Son, thus resulting in their election. Chapter 3 mirrored chapter two in structure and content but from the Calvinist perspective. Foreknowledge does not mean foresight of faith; instead, it refers to God's covenantal commitment to individuals he set his love upon before the creation of the world. Chapter 4 defended the Hebraic understanding of "foreknew" by giving five lines of argument for defining προέγνω as "foreloved." Yet still a question remains: Does the Calvinistic view of foreknowledge make a significant difference in the practical outworking of life and faith over and above the Arminian view? This chapter will answer that question affirmatively by further explaining what it means to be foreknown by God and addressing three areas in which ecclesiastical life is thus affected: personal assurance, evangelism, and pastoral ministry.

#### **Personal Assurance**

The promise that God is working all things to the good for those who love him is one of the greatest assurances of the Christian life. To know that God is shaping every

moment of your life and using it to conform you into the image of his Son anchors the heart and soul like few other spiritual realities. This promise, however, does not rest upon the good intentions of man but rather upon God's foreknowledge: "For those on whom he set his heart in love he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."<sup>1</sup>

Known as "The Golden Chain of Salvation," this passage introduces the believer to five great redemptive acts of God: (1) foreknowledge; (2) predestination; (3) calling; (4) justification; and (5) glorification. The chain that begins with foreknowledge inevitably and unbreakably leads to the Christian's final state of glorification. Because this is so, how one defines foreknowledge ultimately determines one's view of salvation. As Thomas Schreiner notes, "One's understanding of Paul's soteriology is significantly affected by one's understanding of the verb προγινώσκειν (*proginoskein*, to foreknow), for predestination unto salvation is limited to those who were foreknown."<sup>2</sup> As I have argued, foreknowledge refers to God's covenantal commitment to those individuals he set his love upon before the foundation of the world. Even more wondrous, though, is that every redeemed, elect individual is a love gift from God the Father to the Son.<sup>3</sup> This truth can be traced in a progression of texts from Titus 1:2, to 2 Timothy 1:9, to John 6:37-40.

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<sup>1</sup>This is my personal rendering of Rom 8:29-30, defining *foreknowledge* as God "setting his heart in love" upon those he so chooses.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 451.

<sup>3</sup>I reserved this discussion for chap. 5 because it goes beyond the scope of chap. 4, which dealt primarily with Rom 8:29. While the notion that every redeemed, elect individual is a love gift from the Father to the Son is inherent within "those God foreknew" (Rom 8:29), it is so intimately



Paul's introductions to his epistles are often pregnant with meaning, and his letter to Titus is certainly so. After designating himself as a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul points to the purpose of his servitude and apostleship: it is for the sake of the faith of the elect and their knowledge of the truth (Titus 1:1). In other words, the apostle labors to see the elect come to faith and to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, his mission is rooted not in wishful thinking but in the certainty of God's promise of eternal life. But it is what Paul says about this eternal life that is so intriguing: that God, who cannot lie, promised eternal life "before the ages began" (Titus 1:2). Simply put, God's plan of salvation for sinful mankind was determined and decreed before man was created.

Undoubtedly, that passing comment cries out for further investigation; for to whom did God make that promise? Frankly, there are not that many options. It could not have been to mankind because mankind did not yet exist, nor could it have been to angels because there is no redemption for angels. Interestingly, Paul uses this phrase—"before the ages began"—also in 2 Timothy 1:9. He writes to Timothy, "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began" (2 Tim 1:8-9). Undeniable in this text is that God saved us and called us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, affirming once more that God's plan of salvation was determined and decreed before man was created.<sup>4</sup> In the

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connected to the life of the church—both individually and corporately—that it seemed best to discuss it in a context that dealt mainly with the church, which is the purpose of the present chapter.

Apostle's words to Timothy, however, there is an added dimension to Paul's thought: God gave us this salvation and calling to holiness "in Christ Jesus."

It appears that before God created the world he made a unique promise to his Son. At some pre-creation moment, God, as Father, desired to express his perfect love "for" his Son "to" his Son, and that desire culminated in a promise to give him a redeemed humanity as a love gift. This redeemed humanity throughout all the eons of eternity would forever praise, glorify, and serve him perfectly. So spectacular, in fact, was this promise that it captured the hearts of prophets and angels (1 Pet 1:10-12), yet simply began (and this is an unavoidable understatement) with a promise made from God to his Son.

Jesus' words in the Gospel of John testify to this intratrinitarian promise:

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:37-40)

First, it is noteworthy in this passage that the Father gives certain individuals to Jesus, which supports the conclusion drawn from Titus 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:9: every redeemed individual is a love gift from the Father to the Son. Second, the individuals whom the Father gives to Jesus will inexorably come to trust in him, proving that even though faith happens experientially in history, it is settled prior to history. Third, these same

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<sup>4</sup>Arminians agree with Calvinists up to this point. For example, I. Howard Marshall understands *before the ages began* to likely mean "before creation" rather than "a very long time ago" (OT times). The promise of eternal life, then, is more a statement of intent by God for his own sake. All the stress lies on the fact that God's purpose is eternal and unchangeable. See I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary Series (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 125-26.

individuals will not only come to faith in Jesus but persevere in their faith. Fourth, they will be resurrected into the fullness of eternal life. Finally, this is the will of God, as Paul likewise proclaims to the Ephesians:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he blessed us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:3-6)

Looking through the corridors of time, the Father set his heart in love on certain individuals and wrote their names in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev 13:8; 21:27). This book sets forth, specifically and personally, the redeemed humanity which will be given to the Son as an expression of love. Then, in time, the Father draws these individuals to faith in Christ. When the Father draws them, the sinners come; and when the sinners come, the Son receives them. When the Son receives them, he keeps them and raises them up on the last day. But why will he keep them? Why will the Son raise them up on the last day? Principally, it is because they are love gifts from his Father, and the Son would never turn down a gift from his Father. Thus the elect are precious to Jesus not primarily because of who they are, but because they are expressions of his Father's perfect love for him.

As if God's love for those whom he has given to his Son has not been stated strongly enough, it is expressed even more poignantly in John 17. Knowing that he is going to the cross to experience something he has never experienced before, namely, separation from his Father, Jesus is concerned about the interval of time in which he might not be able to watch over the ones his Father has given him, and so he prays, "Holy Father, keep them in your name" (John 17:11). Worried about not being there to attend to

his disciples and troubled over what might happen to the ones he loves, Jesus, in essence, says to his Father, “Father, a period of time is coming in which I will not be able to care for the ones you have given me. They are yours, and you love them, and you have given them to me, but I cannot anticipate all that is getting ready to happen to me, so can you take over and watch them in my absence? Can you keep them safe for the time that I will not be able to?”

Of course, Jesus is praying not only for his disciples but for all who would come to faith in him in the future: “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word” (John 17:20). And then Jesus communicates the whole purpose of salvation. With the consummated kingdom in view, he prays;

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you have loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:24-26)

What must be stressed in this passage is that the perfect and eternal love of the Father for the Son undergirds the final words of Jesus’ high priestly prayer. Jesus wants his disciples to be where he is so that they may see his glory, a glory born out of the love that his Father has always had for him:

The first witnesses could testify that they had seen Jesus’ glory (1:14), as indeed they had, not only in selected ‘signs’ (e.g. 2:11) but supremely in the cross and resurrection. Even so, they had not witnessed Jesus’ glory in its unveiled splendour. Christians from every generation glimpse something of Jesus’ glory even now (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18), but one day, when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 Jn. 3:2). The glory of Christ that his followers will see is his glory as God, the glory he enjoyed before his mission because of the Father’s love for him.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 569-70.

The love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father in the Gospel of John is expressed as early as the prologue. Introducing the theme of the incarnation, John writes, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The term *μονογενής*, which describes Jesus as God’s “only” Son, is not just a quantitative descriptor, as if John simply wants his readers to know that Jesus is an only child. It is best understood to mean that Jesus is God’s “one and only, best-loved Son.”<sup>6</sup> Not surprising, then, is the particularly intimate expression that shows up in verse 18: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” Jesus is described as being “at the Father’s side,” or, as the Greek reads, “in the bosom of the Father.” Obviously, God is spirit and does not have a bosom, so John is using human language, indeed the strongest language possible, to explain the relationship that God and his Son have with one another. In terms of analogy, even the most faithful and devoted of all human relationships is but a candle next to the sun when compared to the divine relationship that exists between God and Jesus.

Similarly, this love is reflected in the “firstborn” language of Romans 8:29: “For those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” Often neglected in this verse is that God’s predestinating work took place so that Christ might be the

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<sup>6</sup>In the Gospel of John *μονογενής* is used in three other places (1:18; 3:16, 18), and in each case it is used in relation to Jesus as God’s Son. Contextually it denotes not that Jesus was “begotten” of the Father, as in the sense of physical procreation, but rather the uniqueness of Jesus as the “One and Only” Son of God. The “beloved” or “dearest” component is reflected, for instance, in Gen 22:2, where Isaac is described as Abraham’s “only son, who he loved.” Of course Abraham did not ultimately sacrifice his son, but God did (John 3:16). Thus it is the inestimable worth of the one given—Jesus—that makes God’s love for the world so astonishing.

πρωτότοκος (“firstborn”) among a new humanity. Murray explains, “We might well ask: What can be more final than the complete conformity of the sons of God to the image of Christ? It is this question that brings to the forefront the significance of this concluding clause. There is a final end that is more ultimate than the glorification of the people of God; it is that which is concerned with the preeminence of Christ.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, salvation is not first and foremost about sinners; it is first and foremost about Jesus. Hence it is not inaccurate to say, if one may speak so boldly, that the salvation of sinners is somewhat incidental to the real issue of Jesus’ exaltation, or rather, of God the Father showing the world the great love that he has for his Son.

Still, the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Father for believers are divinely conjoined. One cannot sever God’s love from believers any more than one can sever God’s love from his Son. God determined to give Jesus a redeemed people, a people that, although imperfect, would picture the inexpressible love that he has for his Son—and this is the connecting point between God’s foreknowledge and the Christian’s assurance. When Paul speaks of those God foreknew in Romans 8:29, it must be recognized that those individuals are love gifts from the Father to the Son. That this is God’s eternal plan, to set his saving love upon certain individuals out of the mass of fallen humanity, to give them new life and bring them to faith in his Son, indeed, to welcome them into his kingdom forever, is what gives the believer not only assurance of salvation but also the assurance that all things are ultimately working together for his or her good.

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<sup>7</sup>John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 319.

Jack Cottrell, as an Arminian, rejects this assurance, claiming that in reality the idea of unconditional election has been the source of great anguish to many.<sup>8</sup> While I do not deny that unconditional election has been the source of great anguish to many sincere Christians, I reject that the source of the anguish is the doctrine itself. Instead, I submit that the source of the anguish is either (1) intellectual, not understanding that each redeemed individual is a personal love gift from the Father to the Son, or (2) emotional, not allowing that reality to reach the level of the heart. If the source of the anguish is intellectual, coming to a mental awareness of what the Scriptures teach is the first step to alleviating such distress. If it is emotional, spending time in prayer and thoughtful reflection about what it means to be a love gift from God the Father to God the Son is the proper starting point.

Regardless, that does not change the marvelous reality of Romans 8:29-30: God accomplishes the complete redemption of his people from start to finish. He sets his heart in love on a people for himself before the foundation of the world, he predestines this people to be conformed to the image of his Son, he calls them to himself in faith, he justifies them through that faith, and he finally glorifies them. All of this is God's doing. He is the subject, and we are the direct object. He is the one performing the action, and we are the ones being acted upon. After Paul makes this point, he continues in verse 31 with a joyous conclusion that has been carefully unfolded in the previous verses: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" The answer, of course, is an emphatic "no one."

This truth can only carry the weight Paul is ascribing to it if God's foreknowledge is defined as Calvinism defines it. How do we know that God is working

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<sup>8</sup>Cottrell, "The Classic Arminian View of Election," 134.

all things to our good? How do we know that no one can ultimately be against us? How do we know that we are more than conquerors through the trials and tribulations of life? How do we know that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ? How do we unflinchingly and unshakably know these things? Is it because God saw before creation that according to our own power and wisdom and intellect we would choose to believe in Jesus? Or is it because God, according to his own love and graciousness and kindness and will, set his affection upon us?

It is because God, before the ages began, set his saving love upon us that we know he is working all things together for our good. It is knowing that God “knew” us in this way before the foundation of the world that makes the promise of Romans 8:28 so precious. He did not see a decision we would make. He saw us, and loved us, and committed himself to us, and marked us out so that in the fullness of time his Son would be glorified and we would share in that glory. When answering the objections that he knew would be raised against such thinking, Paul appeals to the free and sovereign right of God to do as he wishes: “What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (Rom 9: 14-16). It is then that mercy—that divine reality that every redeemed, elect person is a love gift from God the Father to his Son—that should be the bedrock of every believer’s assurance in this age and the age to come.

### **Evangelism**

Defining προέγνω as “foreloved” does not only have a vertical dimension, as it pertains to our relationship with God, but also a horizontal dimension, as it relates to our



relationship with the others God has loved in the same way. We have already established that more important to God than the glorification of sinners is the eternal exaltation of his Son. This is the point of the πρωτότοκος language of Romans 8:29. “It is as Christians have their bodies resurrected and transformed that they join Christ in his glory and that the purpose of God, to make Christ the ‘firstborn’ of many to follow, is accomplished.”<sup>9</sup>

Amazingly, the “many to follow” are Jesus’ “brothers.” Schreiner comments that the use of the word “many” signals the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, in which all nations were blessed in Abraham. “In the OT Israel was God’s firstborn (Exod. 4:22), but now we see that Jesus Christ is God’s firstborn, and one becomes part of God’s family through union with him.”<sup>10</sup> Murray, too, emphasizes the familial connection between Jesus and those who have believed in his name:

It is all the more striking that, when the unique and eternal sonship is contemplated in the title “Son” and the priority and supremacy of Christ in the designation “firstborn”, the people of God should be classified with Christ as “brethren” (*cf.* Heb. 2:11, 12). His unique sonship and the fact that he is the firstborn guard Christ’s distinctiveness and preeminence, but it is among many brethren that his preeminence appears. This is another example of the intimacy of the relationship existing between Christ and the people of God. The union means also community and this community is here expressed as that of “brethren”. The fraternal relationship is subsumed under the ultimate end of the predestinating decree, and this means that the preeminence of Christ carries with it the eminence that belongs to the children of God. In other words, the unique dignity of the Son in his essential relation to the Father and in his messianic investiture enhances the marvel of the dignity bestowed upon the people of God. The Son is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb. 2:11).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 535.

<sup>10</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 453-54.

<sup>11</sup>Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 319-20.

That Jesus is not ashamed to call his followers “brothers” is worth thinking about. The writer of Hebrews agrees:

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.” (Heb 2:10-13)

Following the pronouns correctly is extremely important in understanding this passage. God the Father, the Creator, in his divine and eternal plan of bringing many sons to glory, found it desirable to make Jesus perfect through suffering. Obviously the author is not suggesting that Jesus was in some way inferior, imperfect, or sinful. Rather, as Jesus lived his life as a human being his maturity and wisdom increased (Luke 1:80; 2:40, 52), yet always in full obedience to his Father (John 8:29). Of course, such faithful obedience was necessary in order for Jesus to be the perfect sacrifice for sins.

Consequently, because Jesus is the perfect sacrifice for sins and sanctifies his people through his blood, the author of Hebrews calls him the founder, or originator, of salvation. Being the originator of our salvation, and God’s one and only unique Son, Jesus and those who trust in him now share a common descent, for they are members of the same family and, in reality, have the same Father. It is for this reason that Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers, because in the most profound way possible they truly are.

The author of Hebrews then quotes Psalm 22:22 to reinforce the statement that Jesus is not ashamed to call the redeemed brothers: “That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, ‘I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise’” (Heb 2:11-12). In the first eleven verses of Psalm

22 the psalmist grapples with the silence and apparent absence of God. The turning point, however, comes in verse 22, the first expression of thanksgiving in the chapter. Whether this is an oracle of rescue or a declaration of trust, it is undoubtedly a proclamation of praise. The psalmist is going to lift up the name of the Lord to other worshipers in the Israelite community. In much the same way, the author of Hebrews, emphasizing the solidarity between “the Son” of God and “the sons” of God, pictures Jesus singing and lifting up his Father’s name in the midst of a new, redeemed community, a community consisting of Jesus’ brothers, his sisters, his family. In short, Jesus is doing nothing less than leading the universal church in worship.

As worship leader, Jesus calls his brothers and sisters to trust their Father. In the midst of the redeemed he proclaims, “I will put my trust in him” (Isa 8:17), and, “Behold, I and the children God has given me” (Isa 8:18). The original context of Isaiah 8 contemplates whether the people of God will trust in God or earthly political powers. Immediately, the context of 8:11-23 poses the question of how the people will respond to the growing threat of an Assyrian takeover. Will they live in fear of earthly powers, or will they live in fear of the Lord? The author of Hebrews presents these verses in a two-step fashion in order to clarify what he has already introduced. First comes Isaiah 8:17b: “I will put my trust in him.” This prophecy expresses Jesus’ trust in his Father. He then offers Isaiah 8:18a: “Behold, I and the children God has given me,” which illustrates that the Son, the Messiah, is in a family relationship with the people of God. Just as Isaiah links himself with the children who will follow God, Jesus links himself with believers, who are likewise the Father’s children.

But what does this have to do with evangelism? Rightfully so, evangelism is driven by a love for those who do not have a personal and saving relationship with Christ. Mankind was originally created to worship and serve God forever, but, because of the fall, he is now separated from his Creator and justly deserving of his wrath. Yet the good news of the gospel is that God so loved the world that he sent his Son into it so that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life. Christians, then, believe that Jesus is the only mediator between God and man, and that there is no other name under heaven given among men by which he can be saved. It is this absolute truth, and their genuine heartfelt desire to see people come to know Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, that is the impetus for evangelism.

Now this is good and commendable—but what if this “general” love was transformed into a “sibling” love? What if this faceless love was transformed into a fraternal and sororal love? That is to say, what would happen if Christians began looking at the elect like long-lost brothers and sisters who have never known the matchless and abundant love of their Father? Would it make a difference in their evangelistic zeal and fervor?

There are countless real-life stories of siblings separated at birth who go to great lengths to locate their brother or sister. Years are spent asking questions, searching public records, conducting investigations, essentially doing whatever needs to be done to reconnect with the sibling that they so desperately want to know. If this is true in the realm of human relationships, it should be even more so in the realm of divine relationships. The Calvinistic understanding of foreknowledge ought to lead to an evangelistic zeal that is absent in the Arminian framework, not in the sense that there are

other elect who must be brought into the fold (which is the common Calvinist position, and is certainly true), but that we have long-lost family members that we must go and seek out. To state it even more personally: as we have known our Father's love, we want our brothers and sisters to know our Father's love, and we will stop at nothing to bring them into our family.

I have already shown that the purpose of Paul's ministry was for the sake of the faith of God's elect, that they may come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ (Titus 1:1). This is illustrated most clearly in Acts 18. While in Corinth the Lord said to Paul, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people" (Acts 18:9-10). The Lord's words to Paul, that he had many people in Corinth, indicate that these individuals, unknown to Paul at the time, would hear the gospel and trust in Christ for salvation. In this sense they can be called "God's people," not because they have yet come to faith in Christ but because they "will" come to faith in Christ. As God's people, that is, as individual love gifts from the Father to the Son, those whom God had set his saving love upon would positively respond to the message of the gospel. For this very reason Paul stayed a year and six months there, longer than he had stayed in any city except Ephesus, so that his brothers and sisters would come to know the love that he knew in the Father and the Son.

The point I am laboring to make is that there is a fraternal aspect to evangelism that must not be neglected, overlooked, or downplayed. This fraternal dimension is bound up in understanding God's foreknowledge as his settled and covenantal love upon certain individuals from before the creation of the world. Furthermore, we should not think that

this love is limited, for we know how salvation history will play out. Revelation 7:9-10 records, “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

Evangelism that will cross streets and continents must begin with the knowledge that we have eternally long-lost brothers and sisters who are separated from us and, most tragically, from their Father. The Calvinist understanding of foreknowledge will only produce fervor in evangelism, however, if first it is grasped at the personal and individual level. But once it is known at the level of the intellect and felt at the level of the heart, it will naturally impact both personal evangelism and corporate missions. Evangelism that was once driven by a general love for the lost will now be driven by a sibling love for the lost. Evangelism that was once considered faceless is now considered familial. Evangelism that was once seen as abstract and obligatory is now intimately personal. While I am under no delusion that learning to love in this way will be an easy task, I am saying that this is what the church must strive for.

### **Pastoral Ministry**

The recurring theme of this chapter is that every elect, redeemed individual is a love gift from the Father to the Son. It is this truth that must arrest the heart and mind of every person who belongs to Christ. Perhaps this is most pressing, however, in the life of the one who has been entrusted with watching over the souls of the foreloved, the pastor.

The office of pastor is one of two offices that God has established for the church,<sup>12</sup> and the Bible uses numerous terms to describe it: “elder,” “overseer,” and “pastor.”

One of the main functions of the elder is to lead the church (Rom 12:8). Paul writes that an elder “must manage his household well,” and then adds the reason, “for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Tim 3:4-5). The idea is that if a man is not capable of private leadership in his home, then he is not capable of public leadership in his church. Simply put, a man’s ability to lead, that is, his spiritual character and fitness, either qualifies or disqualifies him for the role of elder. Hence an elder must possess the qualities necessary to lead because that is his fundamental role in serving the body of Christ. Likewise, the author of Hebrews instructs the congregation, “Obey your leaders and submit to them” (Heb 13:17). Again, the leaders, probably the elders, have a certain authority given to them by God to lead the church, for that is their duty and responsibility. The term “elder,” then, conveys the idea of a wise and spiritually-mature leader.

Occurring only five times in the New Testament, the term “overseer” has a different nuance of meaning. For instance, in Acts 20:28 Paul tells the Ephesian elders that the Holy Spirit has made them “overseers” who are to shepherd the church of God. As elders, their primary obligation was to watch over and care for God’s church. Furthermore, it seems that the terms “elder” and “overseer” are used interchangeably. In his greeting to the church at Philippi, Paul addresses all the saints, including the “overseers” (Phil 1:1). It is thus reasonable to conclude that both terms are used because

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<sup>12</sup>The other is the office of deacon.

they reveal different aspects of the office: “elder” highlights character, whereas “overseer” highlights function.

Although the term “pastor” is commonly used in our modern church context, its noun form is only found in Ephesians 4:11, where Paul writes that Christ has given the church “pastors and teachers” to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Greek construction favors rendering this phrase as “shepherd-teachers,” which emphasizes yet another role of the pastor, that of instruction of God’s Word. Consistent with this interpretation is Paul’s words to Timothy: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim 5:17). All elders of a church may not exert the same energy toward preaching. Those who do, though, shepherd God’s people in a very particular way: through a steady and healthy diet of biblical teaching. In sum, the terms “elder,” “overseer,” and “pastor” all refer to the same office but accent different aspects of that office, each equally important and equally needed when shepherding the body of Christ. I now consider how these terms relate to foreknowledge.

Elders must be mature, wise, and able to lead. In doing so, he must have a mind and heart that is grounded in the proper knowledge of exactly who it is he is leading. And who is it that he is leading? He is leading the church, a redeemed community that is comprised of individual love gifts from the Father to the Son. Each believer is precious, prized, and treasured, not because of his personality or social status or spiritual gifting, but because he represents the unsurpassed love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father. Surely seeing every individual in the church through the optic of this kind of love will have a sobering effect upon one’s ministry and leadership.



While the stubborn may still be stubborn, the cranky still cranky, and the critical still critical, the hard-to-love now become a bit more loveable, just as in need of leadership as everyone else. The call to lead, it can be said, takes on a new seriousness in light of the value of what one has been entrusted with, God's love gift to his Son.

Likewise, oversight of God's love gift is no small matter. Watching over someone's soul surely means far more than seeing him or her for a few hours on Sunday. Indeed, a significant investiture of time is required to truly care for anyone's spiritual and eternal state. Home visits, hospital visits, and phone calls are thus an expectation for any pastor, especially if the congregation is of small to moderate size. Yet how well an overseer "oversees" his congregation is directly related to how he "perceives" them. If they are little more than a group of people to preach to on Sunday, that will undoubtedly (and probably quickly) rise to the surface. But if they were given to Jesus by his Father before the creation of the world, in precisely the same way that the pastor was, then sitting beside their hospital bed at 3:00 in the morning is not a burden, nor a mere obligation, but rather an act of love for them and their Father.

Of course, some pastors have a special place in their hearts for pastoral care, and some have a special place in their hearts for preaching and teaching, and almost any congregation will be able to identify their own pastor's inclinations. Those with a passion for preaching and teaching hardly need any encouragement to continue to work hard in doing so. Nevertheless, the preacher's motivation must be kept in check. Whereas preaching for the sake of the craft of preaching may produce fine, fluid works of art, inevitably it will also produce cold, passionless, Spirit-less sermons. But preaching for individuals whom the Father has given to the Son will have dramatically different

results.<sup>13</sup> There will be an emotive appeal woven into the tapestry of the message that otherwise would not be present. He wants his brothers and sisters not just to know about their Father's love, but to experience it in the deepest and most profound ways possible. Moreover, this holds true for unbelievers in the congregation as well, for the preacher also recognizes that there may be one listening to him at that very moment who is his long-lost brother or sister. As a result, he is evangelistic in his praying before the sermon, evangelistic in his preparation for the sermon, and evangelistic in his delivery of the sermon.

Defining foreknowledge as “foreloving,” as God giving certain individuals to his Son before the foundation of the world, will have an equalizing effect upon pastoral ministry as well. For example, pastors who are uniquely gifted preachers may see an urgent need to be more pastoral in the care of their congregation, whereas pastors who are uniquely gifted overseers may see a dire need to spend more time in their study.

Essentially, it calls for the pastor to examine his ministry and assess his strengths and weaknesses, not for his own sake but for the sake of those God has given, first, to Jesus and, second, to him. Therefore, if he wants to be faithful to his calling, it must begin with seeing the church through the eyes of God—and that means seeing each member of the church as an individual love gift from God to his Son.

Beyond this, he also will have further work to do, particularly in communicating this glorious truth to others. If he is ministering to a congregation steeped

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<sup>13</sup>Martyn Lloyd-Jones defines preaching as “theology coming through a man who is on fire.” This definition is an apt description of how the Calvinistic sense of foreknowledge should transform a preacher's pulpit ministry. See Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971), 97.

in Arminian thought and tradition, such teaching will be especially difficult, and much patience and prayer will be needed. However, if his church already accepts the doctrine of unconditional election, it will prove to be a much easier and joyful task. In this case, teaching through the relevant passages, fielding questions as they come, is probably the best place to begin. As a follower of Jesus Christ, discovering that God loved you before time, and in fact gave you to his Son as a love gift, is a once-in-a-lifetime discovery that one should rediscover over and over again. Indeed, the pastor is truly blessed to be able to proclaim such glorious and life-changing news to his own family.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has further considered what it means to be foreknown by God and examined three ways in which the Calvinistic sense of foreknowledge directly affects the church. That God set his saving love upon every Christian before the creation of the world, that they are collectively a love gift from the Father to the Son, grounds the heart and mind like no other spiritual reality. The double assurance that one's salvation is secure and that God is working all things to the good is cemented not in one's thoughts or feelings but in God's desire to give his Son a redeemed humanity that will love, serve, and worship him forever. Evangelism, as well, takes on a new zeal and urgency. We are not reaching out indiscriminately to the lost but to our own brothers and sisters who desperately need to be reunited with their family and their Father.

Finally, embracing every elect individual as a love gift from God the Father to God the Son transforms pastoral ministry in that it, too, takes on a new gravitas. In light of the value of those whom God has entrusted to the care of a pastor, his leadership, oversight, and pulpit ministry are elevated to a higher plane. However, none of this is

possible unless foreknowledge is defined as God's covenantal commitment to those individuals he set his love upon before the foundation of the world. Let us, then, herald this glorious truth to every church and every Christian generation: "For those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom 8:29-30).

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## ABSTRACT

### THE MEANING OF FOREKNOWLEDGE IN ROMANS 8:29 AND ITS ECCLESIASTICAL IMPLICATIONS

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This thesis examines the relationship between foreknowledge and election in Romans 8:29 and its implications for the church. Chapter 1 gives a brief historical sketch of the controversy over free will, outlining theology's three major historical peaks: Augustinianism and Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Calvinism and Arminianism.

Chapter 2 presents foreknowledge as foreseen faith. According to Arminianism, God's foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 refers to his foresight of those men and women who throughout time would come to believe in his Son, thus resulting in their election.

Chapter 3 mirrors chapter two in structure and content but from the Calvinist perspective. Foreknowledge does not mean foresight of faith; instead, it refers to God's covenantal commitment to individuals he set his love upon before the creation of the world.

Chapter 4 defends the Hebraic understanding of *foreknew* by giving five lines of argument for defining προέγνω as "foreloved." The five arguments are (1) Defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith requires that the concept of prevenient grace be true, which is an idea not substantiated from Scripture. (2) Foreseen faith is foreign to the text

of Romans 8:29. (3) The verb γινώσκω, from which “foreknew” is derived, often connotes love, affection, and relationship. (4) The terms “foreknowledge” and “predestination” are not synonymous. (5) Since justification is by faith, and only those who are called are justified, it must be that God’s calling produces faith.

Chapter 5 contends that the Calvinistic view of foreknowledge makes a significant difference in the practical outworking of life and faith over and above the Arminian view. It addresses three areas of ecclesiastical life: personal assurance, evangelism, and pastoral ministry.

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