

ROMANS: PART 48

SEPT 8, 1996

The Foreknowing Work Of God In Salvation

Romans 8:29

Context Of Romans 8:28-30

In Romans 8 Paul has finished wrapping up his discourse on progressive sanctification (Rom 6:1-8:30) which is the fruit of justification (Rom 3:21-5:21). He has pointed out that though we are now free from the dominion and bondage of sin (chapter 6), we struggle against that sin which remains (chapter 7). All who are His, painfully await the coming redemption and glory (chapter 8). As we wait for that glory, Paul encourages us that God sovereignly works in our lives to bring about good (Rom 8:28). In order to bolster this in our minds, he bids us to step back and look at life from an eternal perspective. He gives us *mighty* affirmations which are closely knit together and stretch from **eternity -- through time -- to eternity**. *Before the foundation of the world* God fixed His purpose to save us. He brought this to realization in the world when He called and justified us. And He will bring it to consummation in eternity, when He glorifies us. Paul would thus show how everything -- from the eternal election to the final glory -- is utterly in God's hand. There is place for neither chance nor arbitrariness. Thus the foundation of Paul's encouragement (that God will cause all things to work together for our good) is rooted in the fact that His purposes are certain from eternity to eternity. Nothing can stop them, and at the same time God's plan for us is eternal salvation!

What Foreknowledge Does Not Mean In Romans 8:29

Does "whom He foreknew" mean that God foresees *the faith* that certain people will exercise and that He chooses them on that basis? We reject that idea for several reasons:

1. The idea of God foreseeing faith and then responding in "election" is never found in the Bible. Not one text of Scripture (and there are many concerning election) describes God looking ahead to see and responding in election to someone choosing Christ. The reason He doesn't say this is because we're not the electing ones, God is.
2. Importing the words "who would believe" into Rom 8:29 is *forcing* the text and bad exegesis.
3. The actor throughout the passage is God, not us. The idea that something we do is the basis of God's saving work is completely out of harmony with Paul's argument in Rom 8:29-30. God is the one who foreknows, predestines, calls, justifies, & glorifies. Paul encourages us on the basis of *God's* work, not ours. To interject our free will so as to suspend everything on what we, not God, do, is to empty the passage of all its power & God of His glory.
4. God does tell us what the basis of His choice is -- it is His *will* not His foreseeing our choice. He predestined us to adoption *"according to the kind intention of His will"* which He freely bestowed upon us (Eph 1:5,6). The basis is "*His will*" not ours. It could not be "*freely bestowed*" if God were simply ratifying the choice He saw that we'd make (Cf. Rom 9:16).
5. For the sake of argument, let's assume that God did look ahead to foresee faith. How many natural men would He find believing? There are none! God tells us what He finds when He looks down on us, "*God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there is anyone who understands, who seeks after God. Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one*" (Ps 53:2,3). What has God already told us (Rom 1-3) concerning our natural response toward Him? If God elects on the basis of foreseeing faith, then the mansions of heaven are empty!
6. If God's choice was a response to our faith then He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world *because* we would be holy and blameless. Yet Ephesians 1:4 tells us that He chose us in order that we would be holy and blameless. His choice is the procuring cause of our salvation not an effect.
7. If election unto salvation were based upon a person's faith, then the Christian certainly has something about which to boast. The difference between us and those who are lost is *us!*

What Foreknowledge Does Mean In Romans 8:29

There is no need to import foreign terms into the text, such as "whom He foreknew *would believe*," because what is stated in the text needs no interjection. Paul added no qualifying adjunct because his actual terms express his complete thought. The word "proginosko" (προγινώσκω) is self-defining. It includes the prefix, "pro" for "before" and the base word, "ginosko" for "know." This word has a meaning that goes beyond mere cognition especially *when referring to a person*. It does not mean the assimilation of data. It means to *intimately* know, it's practically synonymous with the word "love." Notice how it is used in the Scripture:

- ◆ *Now Adam knew his wife Eve, and she conceived.* Gen 4:1.
- ◆ In Luke 1:34, Mary relates to the angel Gabriel that she has never **known** a man; that is, she has never had sexual intercourse with anyone.
- ◆ *For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.* Ps 1:6.
- ◆ *Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.* Jer 1:5.
- ◆ *You only have I known among all the families of the earth.* Amos 3:2.
- ◆ *And then I will declare to them, "Depart from Me I never knew you."* Mt 7:23.
- ◆ *The Lord knows those who are His.* II Tim 2:19.

(Also see Gen 18:19; Ex 2:25; Ps 144:3; Hosea 13:5; I Cor 8:3; Gal 4:9; I Jn 3:1;) Notice what the object of foreknow is in Romans 8:29: "those whom." The object is *people*. This is the same object all through the text of Romans 8:29-30. Thus if "proginosko" means to foreknow or fore-love, and where the object is a person or persons, then God fore loved people! What Romans 8:29 is essentially saying is, "Those (you!) whom He foreloved, He predestined...." See Jer 31:3. In I Peter 1:20 we read, "*For He [Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for your sake.*" Here Christ is depicted as one whom God intimately knew even before creation (and the fall of man), but now He has been fully revealed through His incarnation, substitutionary death, and resurrection. Clearly, the eternal knowledge that the Godhead had of Christ exceeds mere foresight! Indeed, this interpretation is supported elsewhere. Consider those words found in Ephesians 1:4b-5: "*In love He predestined us to adoption as sons.*" Here, as in Romans 8:29, the basis of His predestinating us is His love for us.

Application.

Questions For Discussions (This Evening).

1. Doesn't God love all people alike?
2. What about John 3:16, "God so loved the world"?

[In A Horse and His Boy, C.S. Lewis paints a marvelous picture of how the Lord sovereignly and lovingly works behind **every** event (whether apparently good or bad) to bring about salvation and good for those whom He loves. The Lord is characterized by the lion Aslan. Shasta and Aravis are the young hero and heroine of the story] "I do think," said Shasta, "that I must be the most unfortunate boy that ever lived in the whole world. Everything goes right for everyone except me." ...And being very tired and having nothing [to eat], he felt so sorry for himself that the tears rolled down his cheeks. What put a stop to all this was a sudden fright. Shasta discovered that someone or somebody was walking beside him. It was pitch dark and he could see nothing. And the Thing (or Person) was going so quietly that he could hardly hear any footfalls. What he could hear was breathing. His invisible companion seemed to breathe on a very large scale, and Shasta got the impression that it was a very large creature. And he had come to notice this breathing so gradually that he had really no idea how long it had been there. It was a horrible shock. It darted into his mind that he had heard long ago that there were giants in these Northern countries. He bit his lip in terror. But now that he really had something to cry about, he stopped crying. The Thing (unless it was a Person) went on beside him so very quietly that Shasta began to hope he had only imagined it. But just as he was becoming quite sure of it, there suddenly came a deep, rich sigh out of the darkness

beside him. That couldn't be imagination! Anyway, he had felt the hot breath of that sigh on his left hand. If the horse had been any good -- or if he had known how to get any good out of the horse -- he would have risked everything on a break away and a wild gallop. But he knew he couldn't make that horse gallop. So he went on at a walking pace and the unseen companion walked and breathed beside him. At last he could bear it no longer. "Who are you?" he said, scarcely above a whisper. "One who has waited a long time for you to speak," said the Thing. Its voice was not loud, but very large and deep. "Are you -- are you a giant?" asked Shasta. "You might call me a giant," said the Large Voice. "But I am not like the creatures you call giants." "I can't see you at all," said Shasta, after staring very hard. Then (for an even more terrible idea had come into his head) he said, almost in a scream, "You're not -- not something dead, are you? Oh please -- please do go away. What have I ever done you? Oh, I am the unluckiest person in the whole world." Once more he felt the warm breath of the thing on his hand and face. "There," it said, "that is not the breath of a ghost. Tell me your sorrows." Shasta was a little reassured by the breath: so he told how he had never known his real father or mother and had been brought up sternly by the fisherman. And then he told the story of his escape and how they were chased by lions and forced to swim for their lives; and of all their dangers in Tashbaan and about his night among the Tombs and how the beasts howled at him out in the desert. And he told about the heat and thirst of their desert journey and how they were almost at their goal when another lion chased them and wounded Aravis. And also, how very long it had been since he had had something to eat. "I do not call you unfortunate," said the Large Voice. "Don't you think it was bad luck to meet so many lions?" said Shasta. "There was only one lion," said the Voice. "What on earth do you mean? I've just told you there were at least two the first night, and...." "There was only one: but he was swift of foot." "How do you know?" "I was the lion." And as Shasta gaped with open mouth and said nothing, the Voice continued. "I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you would reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat...to receive you." ... "Who are you?" asked Shasta. "Myself," said the Voice, very deep and low so that the earth shook: and again "Myself," loud and clear and gay: and then a third time "Myself," whispered so softly you could hardly hear it, and yet it seemed to come from all round you as if the leaves rustled with it [An allusion to the Trinity]. Shasta was no longer afraid that the Voice belonged to something that would eat him, nor that it was the voice of a ghost. But a new and different sort of trembling came over him. Yet he felt glad too. The mist was turning from black to gray and gray to white. This must have begun to happen some time ago, but while he had been talking to the Thing he had not been noticing anything else. Now, the whiteness around him became a shining whiteness; his eyes began to blink....He turned and saw, pacing beside him, taller than the horse, a Lion....He knew nothing of the stories about Aslan, the great Lion, the son of the Emperor-over-sea, the King above all High Kings. But after one glance at the Lions' face he slipped out of the saddle and fell at its feet. He couldn't say anything but then he didn't want to say anything, and he knew he needn't say anything. The High King above all kings stooped towards him...It touched his forehead with its tongue. He lifted his face and their eyes met. Then instantly the pale brightness of the mist and the fiery brightness of the Lion rolled themselves together into a swirling glory and gathered themselves up and disappeared. He was alone with the horse on a grassy hillside under a blue sky. And there were birds singing.

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not that I found, O Saviour true;
No, I was found of Thee....
'Twas not so much that I on Thee took hold,

As Thou, dear Lord, on me.
I find, I walk, I love; but O the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee!
For Thou wert long beforehand with my soul;
Always, Thou lovedst me.

Irenaeus

God hath completed the number which He before determined with Himself, all those who are written, or ordained unto eternal life....Being predestined indeed according to the love of the Father that we would belong to Him forever. (198 AD)

James Montgomery Boice

The word foreknowledge itself is never used in reference to events or actions -- that is, as advance knowledge of what one would or might do -- but always of persons, whose lives are affected by that foreknowledge rather than the other way around. (Foundations of the Christian Faith).

Augustine

[Against God foreseeing faith] Here certainly, there is no place for the vain argument of those who defend the foreknowledge of God against the grace of God, and accordingly maintain that we were elected before the foundation of the world because God foreknew that we would be good, not that He Himself would make us good. This is not the language of Him who said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you" (Jn 15:16). (380 AD).

Thomas Watson

It is absurd to think that anything in us could have the least influence upon our election. Some say that God did foresee that such persons would believe, and therefore did choose them; so they would make the business of salvation to depend upon something in us. Whereas God does not choose us FOR faith, but TO faith. *"He hath chosen us, that we should be holy,"* (Ephesians 1:4), not because we would be holy, but that we might be holy. We are elected to holiness, not for it.

Lorraine Boettner

God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation, before the foundation of the world, rested solely on His own sovereign will. His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected. These acts are the result, not the cause, of God's choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man. Those whom God sovereignly elected He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ. Thus, God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice of Christ, is the ultimate cause of salvation. (The Reformed Faith).

John Benton and John Peet

Scripture does not teach that God foresees who will believe on Christ and then choose them. The New Testament does not use the word "foresee" but the word "foreknow." He foreknows, not people's actions, but the people themselves. For God to foreknow people is for God to set His love upon them, for no reason in them, from before the beginning of time. (God's Riches).

Charles Horne

"Whom He foreknew" may best be taken to mean, "whom He set regard upon" or "whom He knew from eternity with distinguishing affection and delight" and is virtually equivalent to "whom He foreloved." (The Doctrine of Salvation).

Kenneth Talbot and W. Gary Crampton

[Some] teach that it is man, not God who chooses in the matter of salvation. They maintain, in effect, that God elects those who elect Him. God ratifies the choices of men; His election is conditional....Election does not mean "to ratify"...rather, it means "to select or choose out of." Thus, when we speak of election in relation to God and salvation, we speak of that which God is doing, not man....[Those who hold to the doctrines of grace,] on the other hand, claim that election is unconditional. It is based on nothing "foreseen" in man. It is one hundred percent the work of God....God chooses His "elect" out of the fallen mass of mankind. All men are worthy of death, God elects a certain number unto salvation. (Calvinism, Hyper-Calvinism and Arminianism).

'Tis not that I did choose Thee,
For, Lord, that could not be;
This heart would still refuse Thee,
Hadst Thou not chosen me.

♦
In the delightful musical The Sound Of Music there is a scene where Maria and Captain Von Trapp first express their love for each other. Maria sings these words:

There you are loving me, whether or not you should,
somewhere in my youth or childhood
I must have done something good.

Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could,
somewhere in my youth or childhood
I must have done something good.

What she said was that the explanation for your love, must be found in the record of my life -- I merited it because of something I did. Unfortunately, that is what many Christians think happened with God: He loves me and chose me because of something He saw in my record. However we put it, whether it was our faith or something else, we are saying we *merited* God's love. Or as the popular commercial says, "We got it the old fashioned way, we earned it."

Clement of Rome

[He chose us in Christ] *Let us therefore approach Him in holiness of soul, lifting up pure and undefiled hands unto Him, with love towards our gentle and compassionate Father because He made us an elect portion unto Himself....There was given a declaration of blessedness upon them that have been elected by God through Jesus Christ our Lord....Creator, guard intact unto the end the number that hath been numbered of Thine elect throughout the whole world, through Your beloved Son Jesus Christ...For you chose the Lord Jesus Christ, and you chose us through Him for a peculiar people. (69 AD).*

Thomas Watson.

Let us then ascribe the whole work of grace to the pleasure of God's will. God did not choose us because we were worthy, but by choosing us he makes us worthy.

Charles H. Spurgeon

*In the very beginning, when this great universe lay in the mind of God, like unborn forests in the acorn cup; long ere the echoes awoke the solitudes; before the mountains were brought forth; and long ere the light flashed through the sky, God loved His chosen creatures. Before there was any created being -- when the ether was not fanned by an angel's wing, when space itself had not an existence, when there was nothing save God alone -- even then, in the loneliness of Deity, and in that deep quiet and profundity, He felt a deep love for His chosen. Their names were written on His heart, and then were they dear to His soul. Jesus loved His people before the foundation of the world -- even from eternity! And when He called me by His grace, He said to me, "I have loved **thee** with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.*

(Autobiography, Vol. 1.).

Pause, my soul! adore, and wonder!
Ask, "Oh, why such love to me?"
Grace hath put me in the number
Of the Saviour's family:
Hallelujah!
Thanks, eternal thanks, to Thee!

5. DOESN'T GOD LOVE ALL PEOPLE ALIKE?

He does have a general love for all His creatures by virtue of His role as the Creator. For example, Jesus felt a love for the rich young ruler (Mk 10:21. Cf. Mt 23:37; Lk 19:41). He tells us to *"love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous"* (Mt 5:44-45). He has a love for His creatures as creatures. However, He has a different love for His people -- His bride -- His children. This latter type of love is His covenantal electing sacrificial love. This is the love that the Scripture primarily has in mind when it refers to the love of God. Because He loves certain people, He has chosen them, sacrificially died for them, and will certainly draw them (Rom 8:29-39; Eph 4b-5; 5:25-27; Mal 1:2,3; Rom 9:11-13). This should come as no surprise. Every married man is called to sacrificially love His wife (Eph 5:25f). Is a husband called to love all women in the same manner as he does his wife? Of course not! He is called to have a deeper love for her because he is in covenant with her. Furthermore, as Christians we are called to do good to all men, especially those who are of the

household of the faith (Gal 6:10). We have different types or levels of love. The same is true with God. Consider the following texts:

For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives (Heb 12:6).

He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father and I will love him and disclose Myself to him (Jn 14:21).

I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek Me (Prov 8:17).

Why say these things if God loves all individuals in the same manner? On the other hand compare the above texts with the passages below:

Thou hatest all workers of iniquity (Ps 5:5).

Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated (Rom 9:13).

Also remember how God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Rom 9:17), and called for the destruction of the Amalekites, Canaanites, the Ammonites and Moabites (Ex 17:14; Deut 20:16; 23:3). Clearly, God does not love all people with the same love. [A.W Pink](#) provides some insightful words:

*God's love for all His creatures is the fundamental and favorite tenet of Universalists, Unitarians, Theosophists, Christian Scientists, Spiritualists, Russellites, etc. So widely has this dogma been proclaimed, and so **comforting** is it to the heart which is at enmity with God, we have little hope of convincing many of their error. That God loves everybody, is, we may say, quite a **modern** belief. The writings of the Church-fathers, the Reformers or the Puritans will (we believe) be searched in vain for any such concept" ([The Sovereignty of God](#). Emphasis his).*