

Does God Elect Persons Based on Their Foreseen Faith?

By John Hendryx

The Scripture teaches that everything related to the gospel is designed to glorify Christ and abase man's pride in thinking he can save himself. So it follows that anything that diminishes Christ's glory is inconsistent with the true gospel. So my purpose in raising this issue is not to be contentious but to glorify God by aligning our thoughts with His. This short essay is meant to challenge the unbiblical position that some modern evangelicals hold regarding "**foreseen faith**". Specifically, I would like to confront the position, held by some, which believes that God looks down the corridors of time to see who will believe and then "predestines" them based on the exercise of their autonomous free will to choose Him. I do understand that one of the main purposes that some Christians believe this concept is that they wish to preserve God's indiscriminate love to all and can't imagine a God whom would "arbitrarily" choose some and condemn the rest. If unconditional election were true, they reason, then why doesn't God save everyone? Wouldn't choosing some and leaving others make God arbitrary in His choice? These are understandable objections that I hope to address in what follows:

If I understand the "**foreseen faith**" position correctly, the following three ideas express the central concepts that this position holds:

- 1. The salvation of individuals is ultimately the result of their choice rather than divine appointment (alone).*
- 2. Election is based upon God foreseeing the faith of certain individuals rather than only being in accordance with His pleasure and merciful will.*
- 3. Election is conditional, based upon the acceptance of Jesus Christ and not the determination of God, even though God's grace is certainly involved in this process.*

Before we enter a discussion of the merits of the reasoning (logic) itself we should first consider that Christianity is not something we derive from mere speculative philosophy. God has indeed given us reasoning faculties and the tools of logic, but as Christians, these are always to be used within the biblical framework He has graciously given us. To think Christainty is to recognize that we can only know God as He has revealed Himself to us in the Scriptures, and the Scriptures themselves give no evidence of the "foreseen faith" position. So to base ones theology on unaided human reason alone is no less than deriving the deepest held presuppositions of our faith from extra-biblical sources.

Biblical View of Knowledge

*While the Scriptures, in fact, do say, "... **those whom He foreknew, He also predestined**" (Rom 8:29) it would be poor exegesis to conclude that this must mean "foreseen faith". It*

*is a stretch well beyond what the text actually says and plainly a reading of one's theological presuppositions into the Text. Even those of the foreseen faith position will admit that it is placing an additional concept in the verse that is just not there. In fact the text in question does not say that God foresees some event (our faith) or action people perform, but rather, says "**those** He foreknew..." In other words Paul communicates that God foreknows **people**. In the Scriptures whenever it speaks of God "knowing" people it refers to those objects He has set His personal affection on. It expresses the intimacy of personal knowledge within the framework of the covenantal relationship between God and His people. The relationship implies a commitment on God's part. There are many instances in the Scriptures where this kind of covenantal commitment is expressed by the word "knowledge". An example of this can be found in Daniel 11:32:*

*"By smooth words he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but the **people who know their God** will display strength and take action. Daniel 11:32*

Here in Daniel those who broke covenant are set in direct contrast to "*the people who **know** their God*". In other words, the concept of knowing God in biblical terms is to keep covenant with God. God has an oath-bound commitment to His people, so "to know" is obviously a great deal more than an intellectual awareness of impersonal data about a person.

The same concept is also carried over to the New Testament. Jesus tells certain individuals that He never knew them (Matt 7:23). When speaking of not knowing them, Jesus is clearly referring to the idea that some are outside His covenant and He therefore has no commitment to them. Romans 11:1-2 gives further proof that foreknow really means "previous covenantal commitment" rather than an historical event. Here it reads, "God has not rejected His people **whom He foreknew**". The obvious issue raised here is that God has not cast aside the previous covenantal commitment (those He foreknew) He made with Israel.

*The Lord also says to Jeremiah, ""Before I formed you in the womb I **knew** you." God has determined beforehand to affectionately set apart certain people, but not as a result of their decisions (Amos 3:2; Mt. 7:23; John 10:14; Eph. 1:4, 5). In fact the Bible teaches that God's grace in choosing us is free, based on His gracious will alone and not influenced by the innate capacities, spiritual desire (ROM 9:16, John 1:13), religious merit, or the foreseen faith of the people He sets apart as His own (Eph 1:5, 2:5,8). Rather, God acts in accordance with his highest purpose, which is His own glory.*

*Everyone who is called by My name,
And whom I have created for My glory,
Whom I have formed, even whom I have made..." Isaiah 43:7*

Logical Inconsistencies

But aside from the lack of biblical evidence by the "foreseen faith" camp I also wish to point out the fatal flaw and inconsistent logic of the unbiblical presupposition itself. While some portray "foreseen faith" as giving great liberty to every man's free choice, upon greater reflection, this idea turns out to give no real freedom to man at all. For if God can **look into the future** and see that **person #1** will come to Christ and that **person #2** will not come to faith in Christ, then those facts are already fixed, they are already determined. God's foresight of believers' faith and repentance implies the certainty, or "moral necessity" of these acts, just as much as a sovereign decree. "For that which is certainly foreseen must be certain." (R.L.Dabney) If we assume that God's knowledge of the future is true (which evangelicals all agree upon), then it is absolutely certain that **person #1** will believe and **person #2** will not. There is no way their lives could turn out differently than this. Therefore it is more than fair to say that their destinies are still determined, for they could not be otherwise. The question is, **by what** are their destinies determined? If God Himself determines them then we no longer have election based on foreseen faith, but rather on God's sovereign will. But if God does not determine their destinies then **who or what** determines them? Of course no Christian would say that there is some powerful being other than God controlling people's destinies. Therefore the only possible alternative is to say they are determined by some impersonal force, some kind of fate, operative in the universe, making things turn out as they do. But of what benefit is this? We have then sacrificed election in love by a personal and compassionate God for a kind of determinism by an impersonal force and God is no longer to be given the ultimate credit for our salvation. (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology)

Furthermore, no one could then consistently hold that God **foreknew who would believe and be saved** and then **also** preach that God is **trying to save every man**. If God knows who will be saved, then it would be absurd for Him to reason within Himself that more persons might be saved than the original persons He knew would choose Him. It would be inconsistent to assert that God is trying to do something which He already knew could never be accomplished. Likewise no one could consistently say that God foreknew who would be saved and then turn around and teach that the Holy Spirit does all He can do to save every man in the world. In this scheme, The Holy Spirit would be wasting time and effort to endeavor to convert a man who He knew from the beginning would not choose Him. The unbiblical system collapses in on itself.

Some will answer that it is **neither election not foreseen faith but somewhere in the middle**. But this option is excluded, by definition, unless you believe that God is somehow ignorant of the future. In other words, the only way the "middle position" could be true in this case is if you limit God's omniscience (an impossibility). Either God knows and decrees the future or He does not. If God knows the future and your position of foreseen faith is true, then God has left us in the hands of impersonal fate. Our choice would then be prearranged by an impersonal determinism. Your

“middle ground” position could theoretically be true only if you fastened ignorance on God about the future, but then God would not know who would choose Him and your whole theory would break down since it was based on foreseen faith to begin with. To conclude, unless you are willing to believe that an impersonal force determines our salvation, and that God does not know the future (the Open Theism heresy), the foreseen faith position is both biblically and logically impossible. In order to honor God we must, at this point, derive our authority from the Scriptures and be careful not rely merely on what we have been taught at our church.

Is God Arbitrary

First I would challenge you to wrestle with the following verse. Paul encountered the very same argument against election; that it would make God unjust and arbitrary.

Romans 9:18-23

18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

19 **You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"**

20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?

21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

23 And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,

To begin with, Paul would not ask this hypothetical question unless He believed the ultimate determination of one's salvation to be in the hands of God alone. Paul is saying that God has the sovereign right to do with us whatever He wants. Will you deny Him this right? Furthermore, since we know the character of God we must not think that, on His side, God had no reasons or causes for saving some and not others -- "since the divine purpose always conspires with His wisdom and does nothing without reason or rashly; although these reasons and causes have not been revealed to us. In His counsels and works no cause is apparent, it is yet hidden with Him, so that He has decreed nothing except justly and wisely according to His good pleasure founded on His gracious love towards us." (Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics) **Just because we don't know why He chooses some to faith and not others is not reason enough to reject it.** In the absence of relevant data, we, therefore, have no reason whatsoever to assume the worse, so there are no legitimate grounds for doubting the goodness of God here. Therefore, to doubt that God can choose us based solely on his good pleasure, is to doubt the goodness of God. The "foreseen faith" people are, in effect, saying that they cannot trust God in making this choice and prefer it to be left up to the fallen individual, as if he would make a better choice than God. Let's summarize then the response to the charge of God being arbitrary:

"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." Deuteronomy 29: 29

1. Election is grounded in God's moral character (i.e., goodness, compassion, empathy, integrity, non-duplicity, non-favoritism, justice, etc.)
2. God does have "causes and reasons" for His choices, though these are "internal" to God (i.e., not found in the creature). We know He is good and therefore can trust that He would make a better choice than we would.
3. He 'does NOTHING without reason' --- He 'does NOTHING rashly'. He has simply not revealed these reasons and causes to us--although they certainly exist. Since they haven't been revealed, we cannot try to figure them out but since we know the trustworthiness of God we can rejoice in His wisdom. God does not 'lack just reasons' for His actions. These 'just reasons' are merely hidden from us.
4. Salvation is not conditioned upon anything that God sees in us that makes us worthy of His choosing us. NONE of His decrees were done except justly and wisely".

We must always keep in mind that God is obligated to save no one and that we all justly deserve His wrath. Therefore, if God saves anyone, it is purely an act of His mercy. All evangelicals agree that it would have been just of God to wipe out all mankind in judgment, so why, then, would it be unjust for Him to judge some and have mercy on the rest. If six people owe me a debt, for example, and I forgive four of them their debt but still require the remaining two to pay up, I am totally within my right. How much more so God? (Read *The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard: Matt 20:1-16*)

"It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (ROM 9:16).