The debate has raged for centuries over the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. This has especially been true in the Church concerning its soteriology. Is God's election to salvation unconditional (Augustinianism, Calvinism) or conditional (semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism)? By "conditional" the Arminian means that God foreknew the fact that the believer would respond positively to the gospel, and thus he chose him as one of his own. The reasoning is based on, and confirmed by, Peter's statement in his first epistle: "elect ... according to the foreknowledge of God" (1:1, 2). This is the translation of the King James Version (KJV) and is the rendering also of the New King James Version (NKJV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the New International Version (NIV).

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), however, following the Revised Standard Version (RSV) before it, reads: "who have been chosen and destined by God the Father." This is the rendering of many Bible exegetes as well, not to mention Calvinistic theologians. We will examine the usage of "foreknowledge" and "foreknow" in the New Testament and see if there is a basis for such a translation.

Our salvation finds its origin in eternity, before the creation of the universe, in the electing grace of the Father.
Ephesians 1:3 documents this: "he [the Father] chose us in him before the foundation of the world." Yet, election is said to be "according to the foreknowledge of God." The word "foreknowledge" has proven to be the much-debated word in this phrase. Is God's election an eternal sovereign choice made out of the good pleasure of his will without consideration of a foreseen positive response in man, or is it a ratification of a human choice made in time, known about ahead of time?

Is man's choice of God a result of God's choice of him, or is God's choice a response to man's choice? Do we owe our faith to our election, or do we owe our election to our faith?

The Calvinistic doctrine of unconditional election states that God's choice was out of his sovereign good pleasure and not based on any "foreseen" faith on man's part. We owe our faith to our election (Acts 13:48).

Opponents cry, "Foreknowledge," when faced with this position. In our day adherents of Free-Will Theism, though rejecting an unconditional election, find the standard Arminian foreknowledge argument inadequate, because it still makes the free choice of the believing sinner certain. It is too deterministic in their thinking. They propose that God does not know beforehand the results of the free choices of moral creatures. He is omniscient with respect to things that can be known, but no one, not even God, can know what man's free will may produce. This is a revival of a Socinian heresy of the Reformation era, espoused by Unitarians since. It denies the orthodox view of omniscience generally held by both Calvinists and Arminians in the past, and goes beyond the view of absolute foreknowledge believed by Arminians.

Based on this translation (RSV), Best writes:

Foreknowledge and the Elect Savior The Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of as an "elect one" (eklekton) in 1 Peter 2:4: "as you come to him, a living stone, rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious." It is through Christ the chosen living stone that his people are "a chosen race" (genos eklekton) as stated in verse 9.

(1) 1 Peter 1:20. 1 Peter 1:20 uses the verb proginosko with reference to the Father's purpose for his Son: "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world." Peter is referring to Christ as the foreordained lamb, whose blood was the ransom price paid for our sins (1:19, 20). "Foreknown" translates prognosmenou, the aorist, passive, participle of proginosko, "having been foreknown, foreordained." The translations "destined" (RSV, NRSV), "foreordained" (KJV, NKJV), or "chosen" denote? The word translates the Greek noun prognosis, which is made up of pro, "before," and gnosis, "knowledge," hence, "foreknowledge." This noun is used in one other place in the New Testament, and that by Peter also (Acts 2:23). The verb form is proginosko, "to know beforehand, to foreknow." It is used five times, twice of men (Acts 26:5; 2 Peter 3:17), where it means prescience, and three times of God (1 Peter 1:20; Romans 8:29; 11:2). Michaels comments on prognosis: "When applied to God's knowledge of persons (whether of Jesus or his people), 'foreknowledge' is more than mere prescience, it involves choice or determination as well."4 As noted above, the RSV and NRSV translate it, "destined by God the Father."
The idea that the Son decided to leave heaven and become a man, live a sinless life, die on the cross, rise from the dead, and ascend back to heaven, and on the basis of the fact that the Father knew ahead of time that he would do these things, decided to choose him as the Savior of mankind, cannot be entertained for an instant. The Son came to perform his mediatorial work, because he was sent by the Father to fulfill his foreordained plan of redemption. Grudem argues for this cogently:

He was destined as a translation for proginōskō follows the RSV's translation of the cognate noun prognōsis as "destined" in verse 2. Although the word in ordinary usage simply means "known beforehand" (see its use in Acts 26:5 and 2 Peter 3:17), here in verse 20 most versions translate it with some word implying predestination: "foreordained" (AV); "predestined" (NEB); "chosen" (NIV). This is because of (1) a sense that when God knows anything beforehand it is certain that that event will occur, and assuming the event is therefore ordained by God seems to be the only alternative to the non-Christian idea of a certainty of events brought about by impersonal, mechanistic fate; (2) the fact that the use of the word when applied to God is found in contexts that suggest predestination (Acts 2:23; Romans 8:29; 11:2); (3) a realization that in this context it would make little sense for Peter merely to say that God the Father knew Christ before the foundation of the world—Rather, the immediate preceding context with its emphasis on Christ's redeeming death suggests that it is as a suffering savior that God "foreknew" or thought of the Son before the foundation of the world. These considerations combine to indicate that the "foreknowledge" was really an act of God in eternity past whereby he determined that his Son would come as the Savior of mankind.6

Thus the one decreed to be "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8, KJV) has secured the salvation of a host of people, whose names have "been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 17:8).

(2) Acts 2:23. We now look at Peter's other use of the noun prognōsis. In his sermon at Pentecost Peter made reference to the eternal purpose of the Godhead to send the Son to be crucified by wicked men. "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."

"Foreknowledge" is our noun prognōsis. It is coupled with "definite plan," which translates the noun boulē, meaning, "counsel, plan," modified by the perfect participle of the verb ħōrizō, "to mark out, to determine" (we get our word horizon from it). The Son was "delivered over by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God" (NKJV). The perfect tense made it a "definite plan."

Wuest writes that boulē was used in classical Greek of a council convened for the purpose of administering the affairs of government, such as the Roman Senate, or of the camp-fire council of Xenophon and his officers on their march back to Greece. Out from the deliberations of this latter council, for instance, would come counsel, a predetermined course of action that would best meet the circumstances they had to face on the march.8

Thus out of a council would come counsel, "a purpose, resolution, determination, plan."

In the New Testament boulē can refer to "consultation leading to a plan" (cf. Acts 27:12, "decided," 42, "plan") and especially God's "counsel" or "purpose," which is all encompassing (Ephesians 1:11) and immutable (Hebrews 6:17).9

Boulē is modified by the perfect participle of ħōrizō, which Wuest says means

"to mark out the boundaries or limits" of any place or thing, "to determine or appoint." This verb tells us that these deliberations were for the purpose of determining something, and the fact that it is in the perfect tense shows that these deliberations had reached a successful conclusion and the counsel of the council was fixed and unchangeable.10
Jesus was delivered up to be crucified by God's "predetermined plan" (NASB), or "set purpose" (NIV).

In the Greek there is an article before "definite plan" (hōrismenēi boulētē) and not before "foreknowledge" (prognōsēi), the two nouns connected by the conjunction "and" (kai). Wuest writes that this is a construction coming under Granville Sharp's rule of the article, which would make "foreknowledge" equal to "definite plan." Others deny that this fulfills all the conditions of Granville Sharp's rule, because they are not personal nouns. Yet, as Wallace notes: "The grammars are agreed that even when two entirely distinct groups are in view, the fact that the article precedes only the first-named-group indicates that they are united somehow." Thus "definite plan" and "foreknowledge" are vitally connected in the divinely decreed purpose for the Son to be the Lamb of sacrifice. The sovereign choice of the Son to be crucified by wicked men included God's will (boulē and knowledge [prognōsis]). So Wuest still is right when he states:

That means that boulē and prognōsis refer to the same thing, the act of selecting the One out of the Persons of the Godhead who would be the Lamb slain as the sacrifice for sin. The word prognōsis therefore means more here than mere previous knowledge, even though that knowledge be part of the omniscience of God. It partakes of the nature of boulē and is part and parcel of the same act. It means "foreordination." Furthermore, "foreknowledge" is in the Instrumental (Dative) Case, prognōsēi (as is "plan"), denoting means. Of this construction James asks:

Now the question is: Was it possible for Christ to be delivered over to His enemies "by the foreknowledge [prescience] of God?" Certainly foreknowledge knows, but it does not perform an act like the delivering of Jesus to His enemies. Are not those who contend otherwise reading something more than the English meaning of foreknowledge into this passage? However, if we translate that Christ was delivered over by the determinate counsel and forethought of God, that is, by His decision reached in eternity, then we have a thought which is both intelligible and satisfying. Thus it is that "determinate counsel and forethought" are synonymous expressions, both describing one and the same act, one stressing the element of will, and the other of knowledge.

We make this comment in our discussion of the Father's sovereign purpose. Note that though the Son was the foreordained sacrifice, still the "lawless men," who put him to death were responsible for their actions: "you crucified and killed." Divine sovereignty does not negate human responsibility.

It is enlightening that in Acts 4:28 the Jerusalem church acknowledged in their prayer that Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and Israel gathered "to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." The noun "plan" is boulē, and the verb "predestined" is proorizō. The passage has two of the three words used in 2:23 (proorizō a compound of hōrīzō), and concerns the crucifixion of Christ, thus it adds to the view that prognōsis in 2:23 has the sense of foreordination.

What we have seen up to now is that when proginosko and prognōsis are used of humans, they mean prescience, but when of God's foreknowledge of people they denote: "chosen, determined, foreordained." He knows them to be a certain thing, his chosen Son/saints.

**FOREKNOWLEDGE AND THE ELECT SAINTS**

The elect Savior was foreordained to save an elect people. "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:3).

(1) 1 Peter 1:2. Back to 1 Peter 1:2 we see the same thought in Peter's use of prognōsis: "elect according to the forethought of God." To say that their election was just known about ahead of time would be superfluous. It would be more likely that Peter would use the word the same way in this passage as he did in Acts 2:23. After all, the Son is said to have shed his blood, and the Holy Spirit sets the elect apart to obedience to the gospel, both actively doing something: why
would the Father alone be just knowing what would happen? Simple knowledge of the elect does not cause anything to happen. More than knowing about is in view. Prognōsis is also a causal force.

We have noted already that Peter uses proginōskō in 1:20 in the sense of “foreordained,” so the same thought is certainly the meaning of the noun in 1:2. The RSV and NRSV translate it “chosen and destined,” and James observes that Arndt and Gingrich translate this as “according to the predestination of God the Father.” Thayer renders it as “forethought, pre-arranged.” Moffatt translates: “Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the exiles of the Dispersion . . . whom God the Father has predestined and chosen.”

A strong case is therefore made for unconditional election by the Father.

(2) Romans 11:2. Romans 11:2 uses the verb proginōskō with reference to Israel and thus ties the word with the Old Testament usage of God’s knowledge of his people. Paul writes: “God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.” It is evident that Paul is not just saying that God knew about Israel beforehand, for he knew about Egypt, Babylon, Syria, Yugoslavia, the United States, etc. in his omniscience, yet they have no guarantee of not being cast off permanently for their sins on the basis of God’s prescience. But Israel does, because they are a preordained people in God’s plan for history.

This is seen from the Old Testament. Note these examples:

Amos 3:2: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” The Hebrew word is yādaʿ, “to know,” and in this verse means “chosen” (cf. Exodus 33:12,17; Deuteronomy 34:10; 2 Samuel 7:20). It is so rendered in the NIV and NASB.

Genesis 18:19: “For I have chosen [yādaʿ] him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.” The NKJV translates: “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children . . .” Thus “know” means “chosen,” and is translated in the NASB and NIV: “I have chosen him, so that . . .”.

Nelson’s Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament has this to say about yādaʿ:

In Genesis 18:19 God says He “knows” Abraham; He cared for him in the sense that He chose him from among other men and saw to it that certain things happened to him. The emphasis is upon the fact that God “knew” him intimately and personally. In fact, it is parallel in concept to “sanctified” (cf. Jeremiah 1:5).

A similar use of this word relates to God’s relationship to Israel as a chosen and elect nation (Amos 3:2).16

Romans 11:2 is therefore a New Testament counterpart to this Old Testament concept of God’s knowing/chosing of Israel. “God has not cast away his people, whom he elected.” Edgar James observes:

Now it is quite impossible in this context to make this mean that God had a mere prescience or prevision of some quality in Israel which determined His choice of them. Such a view would be in direct opposition to what the apostle teaches in Romans 9. There he points out that God’s selection of Israel is not according to natural generation (9:7-9) or human merit (9:10-13) but rather according to His mercy (9:14-18) and power (9:19-24). . . . Verse 2 is the reason why God has not cast them away. It is because He proginōskō them. Certainly if this means only a prevision here, then in view of their unfaithfulness this would be reason for God to discontinue His promises not to continue them.17

(3) Romans 8:29. The final reference in the New Testament to God’s “foreknowledge” is Romans 8:29: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” If the other references to “foreknowledge” meant “forethought, foreordination,” etc., it must be
the same here, unless there is compelling reason to think otherwise. There is no such indication here.

Verse 29 extends the thought of verse 28: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are the called according to his purpose." The believer has been "called" and made a lover of God, not by his own initiative, but according to God's purpose (Romans 9:11; Ephesians 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:9). "Purpose" translates prothesis, "a plan," which one has a resolve of will to fulfill.¹⁸

The reason we know all things work together for good to those who love God is that God has purposed their final glorification, i.e., to be conformed to the image of Christ (verses 29-30). His "purpose" includes "foreknowledge," "predestination," "calling," "justification," and "glorification." All this flows out of his great love, from which the Christian can never be separated (verses 31-39).

This is why the verb "foreknow" fits so well in this passage. "To know" is often used in the Scriptures for an intimate and affectionate knowledge, used, for instance, for the sexual union in marriage (Genesis 4:1; Matthew 1:25), and can be said to be a synonym for "love." (Consider these verses which have the Hebrew and Greek verbs for "know": Genesis 18:19; Exodus 2:25; Psalm 1:6; 144:3; Jeremiah 1:5; Amos 3:2; Hosea 13:5; Matthew 7:23; 1 Corinthians 8:3; Galatians 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:19; 1 John 3:1.) God's electing love is seen in "foreknow": God setting his love upon a people beforehand.

Note it is "whom he foreknew" (verse 29), not what (faith, works, etc.). God in his omniscience knows everyone, yet this use of proginōsko distinguishes the object from others. Connecting the Scriptural use of "know" with the New Testament "foreknow" Murray gives this conclusion:

There is no reason why this import of the word "know" should not be applied to "foreknow" in this passage, as also 11:2 where it also occurs in the same kind of construction and where the thought of election is patently present (cf. 11:5, 6). When the import is appreciated, then there is no reason for adding any qualifying notion and "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 is virtually equivalent to "whom he foreloved." This interpretation, furthermore, is in agreement with the efficient and determining action which is so conspicuous in every link in the chain. It is God who predestinates, it is God who calls, it is God who justifies, and it is he who glorifies. Foresight of faith would be out of accord with the determinative action which is predicated of God in these other instances and would constitute a weakening of the total emphasis at the point where we should least expect it. Foresight has too little of the active to do justice to the divine monergism upon which the whole emphasis falls. It is not the foresight of difference but the foreknowledge that makes the difference to exist, not a foresight that recognizes existence but the foreknowledge that determines existence. It is sovereign distinguishing love.¹⁹

The text goes on to say: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." It is argued that the point we are making would make no difference in meaning between "foreknow" and "predestinate" (prodrizō, "to mark off before, to predetermine, to decide beforehand, to foreordain, to predestinate"),²⁰ making "foreknow" superfluous. To this Murray answers:

"Foreknew" focuses attention upon the distinguishing love of God whereby the sons of God are elected. But it does not inform us of the destination to which those thus elected are appointed. It is precisely that information that "he also foreordained" supplies, and it is by no means superfluous. When we consider the 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 determinately to nothing less than the highest goal conceivable for his adopted children, conformity to the image of the only-begotten Son.²¹
If one argues that "foreknow" in this passage means God's knowledge ahead of time that we would believe, that is, respond by faith to the call, we have this order of things: those whom God knows beforehand will respond to the call, he predetermines to conform to the image of his Son. The problem with this is that verse 30 states that "those whom he predestined he also called; those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified." Note the order in reverse: the glorified are those justified, the justified are those called, the called are those predestined. In the order of salvation (ordo salutis) predestination comes before calling. It is thus foreknowledge (election), predestination, calling, justification, glorification, all settled in the divine mind and purpose. So it is not the called who are predestined, but the predestined who are called. Thus "foreknowledge" and "predestination" are related and yet distinct in God's eternal plan in eternity past, that is worked out in time in our calling and justification, culminated in eternity future in glorification.

SUMMARY

Our title asks: "Foreknowledge: Prescience or Predestination?" In both the unconditional and conditional views of election God knows beforehand who will believe.

The difference is the relation of foreknowledge to the divine decree. Of the five passages we examined, three place the two divine activities together: 1 Peter 1:2 and Romans 8:29 place foreknowledge first, while Acts 2:23 has the divine decree first. The other two passages include the idea of foreordination/election in the word "foreknow" (1 Peter 1:20; Romans 11:2). God in his omniscience knows all things possible. Foreknowledge is his knowledge of all things that will actually come to pass. That which makes anything certain in time is the divine will, thus foreknowledge and foreordination (predestination) are inseparable.

Thus the Biblical meaning of foreknowledge is equivalent to foreordination, both describing the same act, one stressing the element of knowledge and the other of will. To say that God made a decision based on His prevision would mean that there was a time of indecision. This, of course, would be contrary to the nature of God and the Biblical fact that the decree is eternal. Thus, God's decree is from eternity past and the product of His knowledge and will.

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Notes

1. Acts 13:48c reads: "And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." "Were appointed" translates a construction called a periphrastic pluperfect, which combines the imperfect verb san ("were") with tetagmenoi, the perfect, passive participle of tass, "to appoint, to decree" (Joseph H. Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. Reprint of 1896 edition [Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1996], 615), hence, literally, "all who (hosi) were, having been appointed." The construction intensifies the completed action in the past of the perfect tense (H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament [New York: Macmillan, 1955], 232), so the action in the participle was completed before the time of action in the main verb episteusan, "believed." Thus it translates: "As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" (NKJV, NASB). The KJV has, "were ordained," and the NIV reads, "all who were appointed."

2. In the book, The Grace of God and the Will of Man (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989), edited by Clark H. Pinnock, Jack W. Cottrell argues for the Arminian view of God's absolute foreknowledge in, "The Nature of Divine Sovereignty" (97-119), while Richard Rice counters with "Divine Foreknowledge and Free-Will Theism" (121-39). In his "Introduction," Pinnock relates why Rice seeks to get away from Cottrell's view of God's exhaustive foreknowledge, for "if everything were foreknown by God in exhaustive detail, then everything would be as fixed and necessary as if it were actually predetermined" (xii). Interestingly, this has also been an argument Calvinists have used against classic Arminianism's conditional election. See Wayne A. Grudem's comments to follow.

15. James, "Is Foreknowledge Equivalent to Foreordination?", 219.
17. James, "Is Foreknowledge Equivalent to Foreordination?", 220.
20. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon, 541.
22. Boettner quotes Augustus Strong to illustrate the relationship: "When I say, 'I know what I will do,' it is evident that I have determined already, and that my knowledge does not precede determination, but follows it, and is based upon it." (Reformed Doctrine, 45). We add this thought (another study, but vitally linked to this issue), that the natural condition of fallen man in his depraved state means that he will not seek God (Romans 3:11) or come to him apart from efficacious grace (John 6:44, 65); therefore, there would never be a foreseen faith for God to respond while the sinner is left to himself. As Lewis Sperry Chafer notes: "It would therefore be folly to expect that God would foresee in men what could never exist. Doubtless multitudes of people cling to conditional election lest they be forced to recognize the depravity of man" ("Soteriology," Bibliotheca Sacra 104, No. 416 [October 1947]: 406).
23. James, "Is Foreknowledge Equivalent to Foreordination?", 220.