

1 Peter 1 – Part G

1Pe 1:1 (NKJV) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

In this part of our study we want to take a very close look at the word “**foreknowledge**”. Of all of the terms that we study doctrinally, this is one of the most frequently misunderstood, and probably one of the most difficult to understand. The non-reformed position teaches that God foreknows and foresees what choice people are going to make relative to believing in Christ and then God bases His election on that prior knowledge. In this view, God’s choice is not a sovereign choice, but rather is predicated and based on what the sinner will do and not on what God chooses to do. In this theological scenario, God does not technically choose someone independent of what they choose to do, so the term “election” becomes a moot point. God’s choice is completely dependent and conditioned on what the sinner chooses to do, thus the term “conditional election”. Think of it this way. In this view, God could not make His choice until **AFTER** He knew what choice the sinner would make, and if the sinner did choose Christ, then God **HAD** to choose them. Stated another way, God’s decision becomes subservient to the sinner’s decision. God the Father becomes a servant to the sinner.

The reformed theologian differs greatly and teaches that God chooses people according to His good pleasure and will completely independent of anything that the individual may do. [Ephesians 1:5](#) says,

Eph 1:5 (NKJV) having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

This view is called unconditional election, and means that God chose individuals completely independent of anything that they would or would not do. He chose them “**according to the good pleasure of His will**”. He was **not** subservient to anyone, nor has He ever been. The issue is simple: which comes first? Does God choose the sinner or does the sinner choose God? The non-reformed position states that men choose God and because of their choice, God chooses them. In reality, the sovereignty of God has no bearing on anything in that position. The reformed position states that God sovereignly chose the sinner and because of that choice that God has foreordained and predestined that that sinner will choose God. These are completely opposite positions and are defined by the theological terms “conditional election” (non-reformed position) and “unconditional election” (reformed position). These two terms define the two major doctrinal lines that divide most theologians, and it is a very big division.

Now, before we get into the actual definition of the word “**foreknowledge**” itself, it is important to make some observations regarding God and His omniscience – which is different from His “**foreknowledge**”. The proper understanding of how to handle the word theologically is to place God’s “**foreknowledge**” within the attribute of God’s omniscience. Everything past, present, or future, and everything external or internal, and everything material, intellectual, moral, or spiritual are fully open to God and are fully known by God. We can correctly say that God has fully foreordained how things will be. There is literally nothing that is not known to God in every way conceivable. [Hebrews 4:13](#) says,

Heb 4:13 (NKJV) **And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give account.***

God knows exactly what is yet to take place. He knows every detail of the future. There is not one iota of information that escapes Him. In the same way, there has never been a time when God did not know something about someone. God has always had a perfect knowledge of all things.¹ He not only knows what will happen, but what could happen. He not only knows what man will do, but what he could do. He has known everything eternally without any limitations. So, when Peter says that we as believers are “**elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father**”, it is Peter’s way of saying that God has always known that we would be saved. So, the question that arises is whether or not God took that “**foreknowledge**” or His fore knowing into account in election and in His choosing those of us who are saved. That is the question that has to be addressed. Before looking at the actual details of the definition of “**foreknowledge**” or the verb to “**foreknow**”, it is important to appreciate that the technical definition of the term “**election**” does **not** include the idea of God choosing us **because** He knew that one day we would come to Him. Technically, God’s election of someone was a sovereign choice completely independent of anything that anyone would do.

God’s “**foreknowledge**” is a word that is directly related to both His will and His power to bring about what He wills. In other words, God knows what He is going to do and He has the power to do exactly what He chooses to do. If we can understand it this way, God is not a “spectator” in salvation.² What He knows and foreknows is not just mere information that is independent of what He wants to happen. If that were the case, then God would simply be a “spectator” in salvation even though it was His plan and it was His Son that paid the price for sin. I hope that none of us would ever think that God is somehow just hoping that things work out the way that He wants them to work out. Absolutely nothing could be further from the truth than that way of thinking. Nothing that we do surprises God or catches Him off guard, and by the same token, nothing that we do imposes conditions on God. God has never been, is not now, and will never be subservient to anything that we may or may not do. God is sovereign over all things good or bad. If God was just hoping for things to work out in a certain way, then that would mean that God was not and is not sovereign. If you take that thought to its logical conclusion, then we cannot be sure about anything related to our future. If God is not sovereign in all things, to include salvation, then our salvation is not secure. Listen to what God said in [Isaiah 46:9-10](#),

Isa 46:9 (NKJV) **Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me,¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,'**

This is exactly why we are constantly affirming that salvation is all of God. It always has been and always will be a work of God completely dependent on His good pleasure. Many believers are not satisfied with God’s sovereignty and want to take that sovereignty away from Him and claim that they somehow were responsible for their salvation because of some decision that they personally made. Unfortunately, that is a very critical misinterpretation of God’s work of salvation in our life.

In the biblical sense, to “**foreknow**” someone is to know them as part of a meaningful relationship that you have with them. In the case of the word “**foreknow**”, it is specifically talking about the relationship that God would have with those He chose and then called. The Father knew whom He had chosen, he

foreknew that they would be His, and so He placed His love on them before they were ever born. We do this same thing all the time. When you were married, you foreknew that at some point in your marriage that you would have children. So before you ever even knew the children that you would have, you already had a love and an affection for them. You knew that they would be yours and that you would have a unique relationship with them, and so you placed your love on them before they were ever born. I grew up without a father, and one of the goals that I had growing up was that I wanted to be a great dad and really love my children. It was something that often times consumed my thought life – being a loving father to my children and giving them what I never had.

Just to emphasize the relationship aspect of the word “foreknow”, we need to look at two (2) passages – [Matthew 7:23](#) and [John 10:14](#). In [Matthew 7:23](#), Jesus is condemning some specific individuals for their hypocrisy.

Mt 7:23 (NKJV) **And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'**

Obviously, Jesus fully knew that these people existed, but what He is saying is that He never knew them in a saving relationship. However, in [John 10:14](#), we see Jesus talking to those with whom He did have a saving relationship.

Jn 10:14 (NKJV) **I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.**

Jesus is not saying here that He just knew someone, but rather that He knew them in a saving relationship. He knows all the sheep and He fully knows all of the goats – but the goats do not have a saving relationship with Him. The very clear issue with “foreknowledge” is not that God knew facts, but rather that God knew people in a saving way before they ever existed.³ It was part of His sovereignty and His omniscience. It is important that we keep that controlling nuance of the meaning in mind as we go through this. So, when we come to the actual definition of “foreknowledge”, it will be very similar to the idea of knowing someone in the same sense as we read in our example in [John 10:14](#). It is an intimate knowledge of someone that is the driving force behind the word “foreknowledge”.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Elwell, 458.

² Elwell, 458.

³ Peterson, 111.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Elwell, Walter. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. 2. Edited by Walter Elwell. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1984.

Peterson, Robert A. *Election and Free will: God's Gracious Choice and Our Responsibility*. Edited by Robert Peterson. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2007.