

1 Peter 1 – Part H

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.

It is very interesting how quickly a word that leads to a doctrine can become distorted if the word is misdefined. If a word is misdefined, then it is virtually impossible to come to the correct meaning and significance of that word. Every major theological word has important implications that must be understood, but if the word itself has been given the wrong definition, then those implications will be lost. When that happens, the doctrine that is being taught becomes misapplied, misunderstood, and ultimately misleading. The word “**foreknowledge**” is one of those words that has not been handled properly and has led to much confusion relative to the issue of election. The issue, both in election and in “**foreknowledge**”, is who is the determining factor in salvation? Is it God or is it man? As has been previously discussed, every person born into the world is born spiritually dead and without any spiritual ability to comprehend and respond to the truth of God regarding salvation. A supernatural work of God called “**regeneration**” or “**being born again**” is required if anyone is ever going to believe in Christ. Because man is spiritually dead and does not have any innate spiritual abilities that would naturally lead Him to Christ, the ultimate decision for salvation rests with God and not with man. A dead man has no ability and no possibility of doing anything for himself. However, man is so arrogant in his fallen nature that he believes that ultimately he is the deciding factor in salvation. So, he works hard at finding ways to take all of the credit for salvation, when in reality he is spiritually dead.

The fundamental misunderstanding of the word “**foreknowledge**” has been that it is an attribute of God that He used in eternity past to determine which individuals would decide to receive Christ when presented with the gospel. In that scenario, God chooses us because He foreknows that when given the choice that we will choose Him. So, once God determined through His “**foreknowledge**” who those individuals would be, He then chose them to be one of what is known as “**the elect**”. In this application of the word, God’s election of someone was contingent on the actual choice that the individual would make when presented with the gospel. Stated another way, God’s choice was based on the sinner’s choice. His choice was contingent on their choice and conditioned on their choice. If the individual did not want to receive Christ, then God was handcuffed and would not be able to choose them. The individual’s choice became the governing factor in election, not God’s choice. Now, it is at that very point that the word “**foreknowledge**” comes into play.

Because the noun “**foreknowledge**” is only used twice in the New Testament, it becomes critical to have a firm grasp on its meaning and definition. The verb form for the word is “**foreknow**” or “**foreknew**” and it is only used five (5) times. So, this is one word that must be properly defined, and the only way to do that is to see how the word is used in the other New Testament passages. “**Foreknowledge**” is the Greek word “*prognosis*” which comes from two Greek words – “*pro*” – before, and “*ginosko*” – to know. If it was taken literally, it would simply mean “to know before”. However, it must be remembered that only God has “**foreknowledge**”, and it is a very defined attribute of His omniscience.¹

The only other place that the noun form of “*prognosis*” is utilized is in [Acts 2:23](#) which says,

Ac 2:23 (NKJV) **Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;**

The phrase “**the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God**” is in a Greek construction governed by what is known as the Granville-Sharp rule. That grammatical rule makes the words “**determined purpose**” and “**foreknowledge**” refer to the same act. The rule states that when two nouns are joined by the word “**and**”, and the first noun has the article “**the**” in front of it and the second noun does not, then both nouns refer to the same thing.² So, in [Acts 2:23](#) the act of God referred to in this phrase has two specific aspects - God’s “**determined purpose**” and God’s “**foreknowledge**”. The NASB translation calls it a “**predetermined plan**”. So, God’s “**foreknowledge**” is directly linked to His “**predetermined plan**”. The word for “**determined**” or “**predetermined**” is the Greek word “*horizo*” and means to declare and to ordain.³ What is very important about this word is that it is in the perfect tense which means that it was an act that was completed in the past that still has an ongoing effect. God decreed, declared, and appointed certain things according to His purpose, according to His predetermined plan. In the case of [Acts 2:23](#) and Christ, God clearly had a purpose, and that purpose was ordained and bounded by what God wanted to happen and not what men would actually do to Christ. In other words, God predetermined what would happen to Christ - when He would be born, how He would die, who would betray Him, where He would be buried, and when He would present His blood at the heavenly altar. It was a predetermined plan that no one or no circumstance could prevent from happening.

So, when biblically defining God’s “**foreknowledge**”, we cannot just casually leave out the idea of God’s purpose and God’s actual plan. To the contrary, those attributes are what actually give biblical definition to God’s “**foreknowledge**” and provide it with its meaning and substance. God’s “**foreknowledge**” is much more than God simply knowing something beforehand. Rather, it is God having a predetermined purpose, a predestined objective, and a foreordained plan for what was going to take place. In the AMP Bible, [Acts 2:23](#) reads “**according to the definite and fixed purpose and settled plan...**” Therefore, the word “**foreknowledge**” is directly linked to God’s “**determined purpose**”. In other words, God’s “**foreknowledge**” cannot be divorced from God’s “**determined purpose**” or His “**predetermined plan**”. This is a critical element of the word “**foreknowledge**” that must be understood. If we simply state that it is God knowing something before it happens, then we have misdefined the meaning of the word. Please appreciate that the context in which a word is used is the major determining factor of how that word is defined. So, when Peter uses the word “**foreknowledge**” in [1 Peter 1:2](#), the meaning is tied directly to election and God’s purpose in election – which was to provide His Son with a bride. Please appreciate that this was not something that God was going to leave up to people who did not love Him and who were spiritually dead and without any desire to even know Him. That is why there is election and that is why God’s “**foreknowledge**” includes God’s determined purpose and His predetermined plan that no could prevent from happening. No one can frustrate His plan, spoil His plan, stop His plan or hinder its being accomplished in any way.

To put it another way, God’s “**foreknowledge**” does not simply mean to know something beforehand.⁴ Does God know everything before it happens? Absolutely! However, the biblical word that addresses that attribute of God is the word “omniscience” and not the word “**foreknowledge**”. “Omniscience” is the technical term for God knowing all things – past, present, future. “**Foreknowledge**” is the word that speaks of God’s purpose and plan in doing something. Whenever the word “**foreknowledge**” is used,

its meaning clearly includes the idea that God made a very deliberate judgment and had a very definitive plan. He had a very definitive purpose. As a part of that, God in His “**foreknowledge**” knew exactly what He was going to do and how all that He planned would be executed and performed. In the case of [Acts 2:23](#), God made a deliberate judgment that Christ would be delivered into the hands of sinful men to be crucified. That was God’s predetermined decision, His planned purpose, and His sovereign plan, and nothing would be able to thwart that purpose – nothing and no one. In accordance with [1 Peter 1:20](#), that deliberate decision was “**foreordained before the foundation of the world**”.⁵ All of this refers to the idea that Christ was predestined by God before the foundation of the world to a specific work and nothing could stop that from happening.⁶ [2 Timothy 1:9](#) speaks of this particular aspect when it says,

2Ti 1:9 (NKJV) who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,

What God planned and decreed is the ground of His “**foreknowledge**”. In the case of Christ, He was delivered by “**the (1) determined purpose and (2) foreknowledge of God...**” What God predetermined to happen was the basis of His foreknowledge. God knows exactly what will be because He has decreed what shall be. God does not “**elect**” someone because He foreknows what decision they will make, but He “**foreknows**” because He has predetermined and decreed what will happen. Your election is completely an act of God’s sovereign will. In eternity past, God sovereignly purposed and decreed to elect a certain people, not because of anything good or meritorious in how they lived or some choice that they would make, but solely because of His good pleasure.⁷ We do not know and cannot know why God chose the people that He did. We do not know. [2 Thessalonians 2:13](#) says,

2Th 2:13 (NKJV) But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth,

“**Because God...**” is all that we can say. Men want to say “Because I...”, but the Bible declares “**Because God...**” It must always be understood that God does not elect or chose someone because He foresaw that the individual would actually believe in His Son. Please appreciate that no one can believe until God regenerates them and gives them the actual faith to believe. [Ephesians 2:8-9](#) clearly states that saving faith is a gift that God gives to the individual, not a choice that they make because of some innate quality that they have apart from God. Salvation is all of God so that God can be fully glorified. He receives both the credit and the glory for everything that takes place in salvation. We have no ground whatsoever for boasting of this great salvation that has been given to us.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Vine, 449.

² Precept, foreknowledge, ep.

³ Strong, 1273.

⁴ Wuest, 15-16.

⁵ Wuest, 16.

⁶ Balz, *ginosko*, ep.

⁷ Pink, ep.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Balz, Horst, and Gerhard Schneider, . *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. 3 vols. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.

Pink, Arthur W. *The Attributes of God*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1975.

Precept Austin. n.d. http://www.preceptaustin.org/1_peter_12#foreknowledge_prognosis.

Strong, James. *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001.

Vine, W.E. *The Expanded Vine's: Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. A Special Edition. Edited by John R. Kohlenberger III. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1984.

Wuest, Kenneth S. *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*. Vols. 2, The Exegesis of 1 Peter. 3 vols. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1973.