

Objections to God's Sovereign Election

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[Sound of Grace](#)

This issue of the *Sound of Grace* deals with some of the arguments used by those who disagree with the historic view of what the Bible teaches about "election." One of the most common of the objections goes something like this:

"I wholeheartedly agree that God `chooses some people to be saved.' However, His choice is based entirely on His foreknowledge. Since God sees into the future and `foreknows' everything that will happen, He clearly foreknows which people will be willing to choose Christ when presented the opportunity. God, on the basis of this `foreknowledge' (prior information), chooses those whom He `foresees' will choose Christ of their own free wills."

It does not take much thinking to see that such an idea totally denies that God, in any sense whatever, sovereignly chooses men unto salvation. Simply stated, such a view is really saying the following:

- (1) Man must be willing of His own nature to choose Christ.
- (2) God looks into the future and sees which people will be willing to "let Christ save them."
- (3) God decides to choose all those individuals who will first choose Him.
- (4) God's electing grace is totally "conditioned" by man's willingness to be saved.
- (5) Our election to salvation is not based on the sovereignty of God but on the sovereignty and power of man's "free will."

In no sense can God be said to "choose" anyone in such a scheme. At most, God merely ratifies man's choice. God is not allowed or able to choose "whom He will." God can only hope that He will "foresee" in the future some people who will decide, with their own free wills, to choose Christ. This view is very acceptable to man's conceited ideas about his total autonomy and the almighty power of his "free will." However, it is a gross distortion of what the Bible clearly teaches on the subject of election.

In the above view, God's "foreknowledge" is a big rug under which men try to sweep and hide the truth of God's sovereign electing grace. However, it leaves an awfully big hump in the rug. As this issue of *Sound of Grace* shows in different articles, the "foreknowledge of God" is an act of God and not merely an attribute of God. It is something that God does, not something He "knows beforehand." God's foreknowledge is really His fore-love or fore-choice of His people. Perhaps it is better stated as God's "fore-choice based on His fore-love."

We will not repeat here what is clearly set forth in other places in this issue of the paper. However, I would like to discuss several key passages that speak of God's "foreknowledge." One of the texts that is used in the vain attempts to prove that God's choice is based on His prior knowledge of man's

willingness is Romans 8:29. However, that text is not talking about what God knows (prior information) but whom (individual people) He foreknows. The text nowhere suggests that God "foreknew before who would be willing to believe." Such a notion cannot be found anywhere in this verse. It says, "those whom He foreknew" and never mentions or implies anything about man's supposed willingness to be chosen. Look at the text:

"For WHOM he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Rom 8:29

The whole context in this section of Romans 8 is laying the theological groundwork that gives a believer the assurance that God is both willing and able to fulfill the great promise given in Romans 8:28. How can we be sure that all things, without a single exception, will positively "work together for good" for the people of God? Verse 29 to the end of the chapter is the theological answer to that question. Rom 8:29 continues with the word "for," the truth set forth in verse 28. The argument proceeds to prove why everything promised in verse 28 must work together for good for every child of God. Paul mentions five things that go together like links in a chain. Each of the five links are integrally connected to both the link that precedes it and the one that follows. Look at these links in the following verses:

"For WHOM he did

[1] foreknow, [them] he also did

[2] predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover WHOM he did predestinate, THEM he also

3] called: and WHOM he called, THEM he also

[4] justified: and WHOM he justified, THEM he also

[5] glorified." Rom 8:29,30

It is easy to see that the five things mentioned in these verses are true of all believers without exception. However, it is essential for us to see that these five things are true only of believers, and only true of them because they are of the elect. The cause of none of these things can be attributed to the free will of man. The "whom" in every case is synonymous with the "them" in the next link of the chain. There is one people (the elect) in view and all five links in the chain are true of each individual in that one group of people. All believers have been:

(1) "foreknown" by God vs 29

(2) "predestinated" by God vs 29

(3) "called" by God vs 30

(4) "justified" by God vs 30

(5) "glorified" by God vs 30

According to the Bible, all those whom God foreknew (vs 29), were also predestinated by Him (vs 29) to be conformed into the image of Christ. All those whom He predestinated, them He also called (vs 30). Notice that all, without exception, who are predestinated are also all, without exception, called just as all, without exception, who were "foreknown" were also predestinated. All of the links form one chain in God's single purpose of grace for His sheep. It should be obvious that the above verses clearly establish the following facts:

ONE: It is impossible to make the verses teach that God first calls all men and then predestinates those whom He "foresees" are willing to respond in faith. The text says that our calling grows out of predestination. We were predestinated before we were called, and we were called only because we had first been predestinated. The text is clear. We are called because we were first foreknown and predestinated. The Arminian reverses the clear order in the text. He makes the effect to be the cause and totally twists and distorts what Paul is saying.

TWO: All of the predestinated, but only the predestinated, are called, and they are called only because God has first foreknown (foreloved) and predestinated them. I repeat, the Bible is clear as crystal if we will just let it mean what it says.

THREE: The "called" in verse 30 are the same people that are said to be "the called" in verse 28. We are called "according to His purpose" and that stated purpose is to conform us into the image of Christ. The first step God takes in fulfilling that purpose is to call us out of death into life by regenerating our dead hearts and giving us faith to believe the gospel. "Calling" in these verses can be nothing less than effectual calling or regeneration.

FOUR: The promise of verse 28 is to those that "love God" or those who have been "called according to His purpose." Paul is describing the same people two different ways. Who would dare say that the reason we are predestinated to be conformed to Christ is because we "love God?" No, my friend, we love God only because we were first loved by Him in electing grace. We were then predestinated because of that love. Look carefully at the argument in the texts. Those who have been predestinated are those who have been foreknown or fore-loved by God. Those who "love God" are those who were first loved and chosen by Him in sovereign grace. "Free will" cannot be forced into this context with a sledge hammer. All of the links in this chain were forged in eternity on the anvil of sovereign grace. Nothing in this chain depends on the mud links made up of man's fickle and sinful will.

Let us continue with Paul's argument in these texts in Romans 8. We are up to the third link, or calling, in the chain. All those, without exception, who are "called" are also all, without exception, "justified." The Bible is clear.

"Whom (the ones He had fore-loved and predestinated) he called, them (only them and all of them) He also justified. Now if words mean what they say, then everyone that is "called by God" must also be "justified by God." You cannot separate these two links. It is impossible to get the Arminian concept of free will into this text. We cannot possibly believe that God "calls" (in the sense Paul is using the word here) all men, and then justifies only those who are willing to answer the call. Such an idea forces the text to say the exact opposite of what it actually says. The following things are explicit in the text:

A. Our calling grows out of, and is caused by, our predestination and not the other way around.

B. Everyone who is called is assured of being justified, and everyone who is predestinated is assured of being called. Paul is here talking about God's Effectual Call and not the universal call.

FIVE: The fifth and last link in the chain is "glorification." Again, all, without exception, who are justified will also all, without exception, make it to heaven in ultimate glorification. It is interesting that the Apostle uses the past tense. In the mind and purpose of God's unchanging decrees, all five of these things are settled and secure. We are already "glorified" in the mind and purpose of God. This last point helps us to understand why this is the only place in the NT Scriptures that Paul jumps from justification to glorification without mentioning sanctification. It is not that Paul has rejected the truth of the necessity of the Perseverance of the Saints, but in this context Paul is dealing with the workings of God based on His own sovereign purposes of electing grace. God's power will accomplish all that He purposes. Sanctification is guaranteed in this chain because the law is written on every justified heart and the Holy Spirit is given as the new Pedagogue to every called person. Grace actually reigns in every believer because sin has been slain and the full claims of the law have been met.

One of the best ways to understand both the five links in Romans 8:29-31 and the argument Paul is setting forth is to go backward.

(1) "Who is the man that will ultimately be glorified in heaven?" Ans: All those who have been justified by God's grace.

(2) "Who are those that will surely be justified by God's grace?" Ans: All those who have been sovereignly and effectually called by the Holy Spirit through the gospel.

(3) "Who are those that are certain of being effectually called?" Ans: All those who have been predestinated by God."

(4) "Who are those that must be predestinated by God?" All those who have been chosen (foreknown, or fore-loved) by God in sovereign electing grace.

Let us compare some other verses that speak of God's "foreknowledge" and see what the word really means. I Peter 1:1,2 is a parallel passage to Romans 8:29. It speaks of the "elect" being chosen by God "according to the foreknowledge" of God:

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect . . . who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood . . ." I Peter 1:1,2

Several verses later Peter uses the same word and tells us that the death of Christ was "foreknown" by God. In whatever sense God knew for sure that Christ would come and die on the cross, in that same sense God "foreknew" that the elect would be saved. It is interesting that the KJV translates the word "foreordained" and the NIV translates it "chosen." The context is talking about the death of Christ for our sins:

"Who verily was foreordained (foreknown) before the foundation of the world . . ." 1 Peter 1:20 KJV

"He was chosen (foreknown) before the creation of the world . . ." 1 Peter 1:20 NIV

It would be ridiculous to say that God decided to send Christ into the world because He "foresaw" that Christ would come into the world and die. God did not "choose" to send Christ because He "foresaw" that sinners would put Him to death. God sovereignly purposed to send Christ and God Himself was the

author of the death of Christ. In this very same sense God sovereignly purposed the individual salvation of the elect and He alone is the sole author and finisher of our individual salvation. God foreordained my salvation in exactly the same sense that He foreordained the death of Christ.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter was explaining the meaning and cause of the events of that day. Notice that Peter uses this same word when he refers to the death of Christ:

"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge . . ." Acts 2:23 NIV

"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God . . ." Acts 2:23 KJV

It was "God's set purpose and foreknowledge" to have Christ crucified in the identical sense that we were "foreknown" to be saved. We were delivered unto salvation by the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" in exactly the same sense that Christ was delivered up to the cross. That is exactly what the Bible is saying. No amount of juggling can change the meaning of God's Word.

We could demonstrate the same facts with the nation of Israel. In whatever sense God "chose" the nation of Israel to special national privileges, in the same sense He chose us unto personal salvation. Who would dare suggest that God "chose" Israel because He "foresaw" that they would be "willing to be chosen." Such an idea is totally contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture. If we will accept the words of the Holy Spirit without trying to twist them to mean something other than what they actually say then we must reject the Arminian notion about foreknowledge when speaking of our election unto salvation.

We are not suggesting that foreknowledge cannot include prior information and may, in some instances, mean that. We are saying that in the verses discussed, the word can only mean foreordination. In these verses of Scripture it must be seen as an act of God and not just the ability to see into the future. Perhaps an illustration will help. An architect has perfect "foreknowledge" of every building that he designs. He "foreknows" exactly how big it will be, how many windows and doors it will have, and every other detail. He knows the brand of locks that will be used, and he even knows the color of the tile on the floors. Now how does the architect "foreknow" all of these for certain before the work even begins? According to our Arminian friends, the architect has the ability to look into the future. He "foresees" which contractor will win the bid to build the building. He also foresees what kind of windows that particular contractor will use when presented the various options. On the basis of the "foreknowledge" the architect "chooses" to put that kind of window into his plans. The same is true for the rest of the building. Because the architect's "foreknowledge" includes everything in the building, he is able to incorporate into the blue prints all the things that he "foresees" the various sub-contractors will "choose" to do.

Any thinking person will smile at such an idea and say, "John, such a notion is utter nonsense." Of course it is. However, it is no more nonsensical than the Arminian's attempt to deny Biblical election by saying that God chose us because he foresaw that we would believe. We all know that the architect's foreknowledge of what the building is going to look like is based on his plans and purposes. If we are at all honest with the Scriptures, we know that God's foreknowledge of who will believe is based entirely on His plans and purposes, and not prior information about man's will.

A comparison of two verses of Scripture will clearly prove what has just been said. Both verses use the word "chose." In the first verse, David "chooses" some stones and the second verse God "chooses" some people. Here are the two texts:

"And he [David] took his staff in his hand, and CHOSE him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had . . ." I Sam 17:40

"According as he [God] hath CHOSEN us in him before the foundation of the world . . ." Eph 1:4

Can anyone possibly believe that the five stones were chosen by David because they had somehow communicated to David they were "willing to be chosen"? Of course not! Every person, without a single exception, would read I Sam 17:40 and see David, for reasons known only to himself, choosing the specific stones that he wanted to use. Why will people not allow the word "chose" to mean exactly the same thing when referring to God choosing sinners? Our hearts were just as hard and dead as those stones in the brook. God sovereignly chose us individually according to His good pleasure in the very same sense that David chose those five stones. God no more saw a "willingness" in us than David saw a "willingness" in those stones. It is amazing how clear the Bible is in its teaching about election if we will just let it mean what it says.