

Foreknown

1 Peter 1:20-21

20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:20-21 (ESV))

Here in speaking of the Lord Jesus, the one whose precious blood paid the penalty for our sins and redeemed our souls from eternal punishment, we are told that He was “foreknown”; that before anything was created that was created, before the foundations of the world were laid, and even before time itself began, Jesus Christ existed, and He was “foreknown”.

And then we are told that when the time was “full”, when all things had been set into an exact order and providence by God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, “God the Son”, the Lord Jesus, was then born in the flesh as the “Son of Man” and was “revealed”, “made manifest” to us as the Christ, the One who was able to die and pay the penalty for our sins. Those words in Galatians 4,

4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:4-5 (NASB))

Folks, these are mysterious words that few people understand well. And I am first among those who lack understanding. But I do want very much to know all that these words mean, and I do truly want to know Jesus Christ personally and intimately, to truly comprehend His nature. One of my favorite passages is in Philippians 3 and it speaks of that desire. Listen to verses 10 and 11,

10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:10-11 (NIV))

Jesus, the mysterious eternally existent Son of God, the One who was with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit before the beginning and who, with the breath of His own mouth spoke into existence all things, creating out of nothing everything that was created, whether they be angels, people, the earth, the stars and every other thing that has been created, He is now, through these words and through the unction of the Holy Spirit, being made known to you and me. Those words in John 1,

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:1-3 (NIV))

And verse 14,

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 (NIV))

This is so very important for you and me to understand. It was Jesus, the same One who came 2000 years ago to bring salvation to you and me, was also the very One who, in the beginning, created everything that was created. And now, as our scripture passage for today tells us, He is today being made “known”, “made manifest” to each of us by God’s Holy Spirit who lives within our hearts, speaking to our spirit moment by moment saying, “see His presence and see the testimony of His goodness, His grace and His mercy. And see His hand at work, in all that is taking place on the earth”. That is what the words of our passage here in 1 Peter are telling us.

20 He (Jesus) was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was (and is being) made manifest in the last times (right now) for the sake of you (and me) 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your (and my) faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:20-21 (ESV))

Again, all of this is so very mysterious and completely incomprehensible to our natural minds. But thanks be to God, His Holy Spirit is giving our minds the ability to understand and is making Christ “known” to us.

As this passage tells us, the first part of this mystery has to do with “who Jesus was in the beginning, and then all that He would do when He would come to earth to be our Savior and Lord”. And here, the word “foreknown” is used. And the first question that we should ask is, in this context, what does the word “foreknown” really mean?

At first, the word seems simple to understand. But with its definition left within the hands of men, we quickly find that not to be so. This word is instead steeped in misunderstanding and disagreement, especially within the minds of otherwise very earnest and devout believers in Christ.

Some, primarily our Arminian brethren, the Methodists, some Baptists and others, chose a more direct, but more passive definition of the word, simply that “God, in His omniscience, was, and is, able to know all things ahead of time; and then, with that

foreknowledge, makes His decisions about us based on that knowledge; decisions such as, by knowing who among us will, in our lifetime, choose Christ as Savior and Lord, then predestines and foreordains our salvation. And that sounds like a reasonable definition of the word and a reasonable conclusion regarding it.

But there are others, especially our Presbyterian brethren, that hold to the firm belief that God is far more involved within man's decision making than simply and passively being in possession of "foreknowledge" about the events and the choices of our daily lives and is simply "allowing" events to take place, that God in fact inserts His sovereign hand into many, or all, of the affairs of men and often guides and directs many of their choices, their thoughts, their behaviors and the paths they take.

And many of these scriptures seem to support all of these concepts, both those held by our Arminian brethren and also those held by our Presbyterian brethren, that yes, God does see ahead of today and He sees and "allows" the choices we will make. And then, based on some of those choices that we make, He makes some of His own decisions, some to our pleasant blessing, but other decisions that are not so pleasant to us.

At the heart of the debate about the meaning of this word "foreknowledge" is a question about "when" God gets involved within the hearts and in the affairs of men. Did He involve Himself before even the worlds were created or does He wait to see how we will behave and then get involved, or does He do both?

And again, even deeper within the controversy about this word "foreknowledge" is the extent to which God actually involves Himself. Does the word imply only an intellectual foreknowledge, the simple ability to see the future, or does it imply a caring and a loving, "hands-on" involvement that actually orchestrates many of our circumstances?

And that is where the Calvinists split away from their Arminian brethren. The Calvinist doctrines teach that the words "foreknow" and "foreknowledge" have a deep sense of "love" that fills their every possibility of meaning. In other words, even before the foundations of the world were laid and even before man would ever exist and could sin, God loved us so much that He even then decided to send His only begotten Son into the world to shed His precious blood to redeem us, that the very word itself "foreknew" has the meaning of "love" within its core. We see that implied meaning when we read the passages that tell us that a man "knew" His wife and she bore him a son, as with Adam and Eve.

1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.
(Genesis 4:1 (ESV))

And that meaning of “intimate, adoring love” within the word “knew” is repeated throughout the scriptures!

So then, the question left to our minds is, “Is God simply looking ahead and passively “allowing” each person to behave in the way that we do and then responding to each of us with His provisions or His discipline? Or is His foreknowledge instead filled with loving plans and purposes for us, plans in which He reaches His loving hand into the circumstances of our daily lives and “foreordains”, “orchestrates” some, or even many of the things that take place?

And may I quickly remind us that it really does not matter what we want to believe is taking place, God’s sovereignty is actually independent of our opinions about Him. And His sovereignty supersedes our thoughts and our desires. He is God, the Almighty, the omnipotent and omniscient God over everything that exists. He is good and He does good, and He is worthy of being able to make any and all decisions and choices He might make, and the outcome will always be “good”.

But still, there are those who would contend on this matter. Their own personal opinion is so very important to them. And those people in contention are not just unbelievers, and not even unlearned believers, but are often those who are well-educated in the scriptures.

In most any group of believers, you are likely to hear some argue the point that if God has every moment and behavior and response planned out for us, where then is “free will”? And I agree with them! “Free will” is just as valid a doctrine as “foreordained foreknowledge”. And so, I personally must agree with both, that in some mysterious way, God has made a provision for both “free will” and “foreordination” to take place, and neither to the absolute exclusion of the other. And that is why I preach both doctrines to you.

Our passage again . . .

20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:20-21 (ESV))

So then, may we again think through these words, may we reason together about them, but only to the extent that God’s Holy Spirit will give us reason.

These words speak specifically about the Lord Jesus Himself being “foreknown” before the foundation of the world, and then about Him being made “manifest”, “revealed” to us in the last times.

It is obvious that God is not saying to us that He, God the Father, simply “knew” about Jesus, His Son and that He “foreknew” that Jesus would be born a babe in a manger, would preach and teach for a while and then be crucified to bring redemption to the unsaved souls of men.

No, God did not just know about Jesus. Jesus, as God the Son was actually there with God the Father, was One with Him, in the beginning, before the foundations of the world were laid. And so was the Holy Spirit. All three were there, before time and before anything came into existence, and all three involved in the decision making.

Again, these are mysterious concepts for our meager minds to contemplate. A. W. Tozer pondered the question, “Was God doing anything before time began?” And He answered, “Yes, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were always busily at work making plans, plans that they would foreordain to take place”. We know that to be true because of all the many references where we read about that taking place. One of my favorites is found in Ephesians chapter 1. Listen!

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved (the Lord Jesus). 7 In him we have redemption through his blood. (Ephesians 1:3-7 (ESV))

In my “graphic” form of thinking, I can imagine God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in their eternal existence, before there was a sun, moon or stars, before there was an earth, before there were angels or people. And in their conversation, them saying, “We are love! Let us create an existence to receive and be blessed by our love. Let us create earth and the heavens. And let us create man to live there. And let us make all sorts of plans and provisions for him, but let us also give him free will. And with that free will let us give him the freedom to love us as he should, but also let us give him the freedom to reject us, because that is what real love requires, a freedom and a free will.

And for all of those who would desire to love us, let us create a covenant with them, a “Covenant of Grace”. And let us give them help, real help, to love Us in return, and to

also love other people even as we love them. And when they sin, let us provide redemption through the sacrifice of the Son of God, and let us provide continual help from the Holy Spirit to guide each person to salvation and into all truth.

Now yes, all those thoughts are from my imagination. But all those plans and provisions are actually revealed and are proven out in the scriptures, so I believe that I can feel comfortable with such thoughts. As in the words of Jeremiah 29:11,

11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NIV))

So then, our passage again,

20 He (Jesus) was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:20-21 (ESV))

Folks, Jesus truly was "foreknown" before the foundations of the world, because He was there, as part of the "Three-In-One" Trinity of God, taking a full part in all of the decisions that were being made. Jesus was the "love" that God the Father experienced and foreordained for our salvation. Jesus was the "love" that God "so loved" as He sent Jesus to be born, to live, to die and to be resurrected so that you and I could have life. Praise be to God for His indescribable free gift!

One final consideration before we close . . . as God does in so many of His covenants, even this "Covenant of Grace", some things still are required of you and me. In this covenant, you and I are required to believe in Him and to receive Him as our Savior and Lord. John 1,

12 . . . to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:12-13 (NIV))

You and I must not only know Him and believe in Him, we must also personally receive Him as our Savior and Lord. That is our "free will" part in this blessed "Covenant of Grace" that God offers to each of us. I'll close with those words from Philippians 3,

10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:10-11 (NIV))