

Knowing the Great Counselor:
The Attributes of God in Biblical Soul Care
~ God's Foreknowledge* ~
September 6th, 2020

I. Introduction

a. The Attributes of God and Soul Care

Prov. 9:10 says, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*"

1. According to this verse, what are the benefits of knowing God? (see also vv. 11-12; Prov. 1:1-7)

2. What biblical counseling principle can be drawn from this verse?

Since the LORD is the Wonderful Counselor (Is. 9:6), our knowledge of Him and our relationship with Him will correlate with our own spiritual health and our ability to minister and counsel others.

b. Omniscience Revisited

*God's foreknowledge is not necessarily a stand-alone attribute or perfection. It is best understood as part of God's omniscience – or better yet, an effect or consequence of God's omniscience. God's omniscience means He "perfectly knows Himself and all things outside of Himself, and all things that do not become reality in one eternal and simple (not having parts but having distinctions) act (exertion of energy)."¹

Further clarification regarding God's knowledge is important for understanding foreknowledge and are as follows:

- i. God's knowledge is eternal and proceeds from Him as the cause and source (Jn. 14:6)
- ii. God's knowledge is perfect and never increasing (Is. 40:13-14)
- iii. God's knowledge is an ever-present reality, not in the sense of time since God is without succession of moments, but in the sense that God consciously and eternally perceives all things (Heb. 4:13; 1 Jn. 3:20)
- iv. God's knowledge is eternally active and always produces effects (e.g. creation of time, space, and the physical world, the formation of the church, all of God's actions in time, the application of salvation, and evoking worship from man).

¹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 174-75.

- v. God knows only actual things, not possible things. “He does know what would have occurred if circumstances had been different, but since in his mind and plan they never would occur, they are not ‘possibilities.’ Only what is in God’s plan is ‘possible,’ because only that could ever become reality in time.”² (Is. 46:9-12)³
- vi. God’s knowledge covers all things in (1) a general sense before they become actual in time and space (e.g. all of creation and actions and events – e.g. predictive prophecy) and (2) in an intimate sense with relation to select people (e.g. foreknowledge).

II. Definition

a. Foreknowledge⁴

- i. God’s free, sovereign choice to set His love on someone in eternity past despite merit.
- ii. “God’s perfectly purposed relational knowledge of everyone who is in his redemptive plan before they exist in time and space.”⁵
 - 1. “Foreknowledge” is a compound word in the English and Greek. In the Greek it consists of a prefix *προ* [*prō*] and the main verb which is *γινώσκω* [*ginōskō*]. The verb by itself means “to know” information but it can also carry an additional figurative sense in certain contexts. The OT equivalent of the term and the NT usage can be used figuratively of knowing someone intimately/relationally (Gen. 4:1; 18:19; Matt. 1:25; Matt. 7:23; John 10:14). In contexts regarding salvation, the term emphasizes God’s discriminating, undeserved, and amazing love.⁶ The prefix “fore” (*προ* in the Greek) not only means that it occurs before we know of God, but before the world and time were created (2 Tim. 1:9). God’s foreknowledge is the reason why election/predestination to salvation occurs (Eph. 1:4b-5).

b. Predestination/Election

- i. God’s sovereign choice to mark out or ordain someone for salvation despite merit before time began. This term emphasizes His decree to do so (cf. 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:11). Predestination/election is continued effect/consequence of God’s knowledge.

² Ibid., 175.

³ Scriptures that indicate possible contingencies are only contingent from a human perspective (e.g. 1 Sam. 23:10-13; Jer. 26:2-7; Ps. 81:12-16; Matt. 11:21)

⁴ Note: depending on the context, the term can refer to “foresight” (Acts 26:5; 2 Pet. 3:17) or “foreordination” (Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:29; 11:2). Foreknowledge in the latter context is not a reference to “what” God knows, but rather “whom” God knows.

⁵ Ibid., 177.

⁶ MacArthur & Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 493.

III. Key Verses

“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. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

(Romans 8:29–30 ESV)

“22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

(Acts 2:22–23 ESV)

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.”

(1 Peter 1:1–2 ESV)

“He [Jesus] was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you”

(1 Peter 1:20 ESV)

3. How is this doctrine portrayed by those who don't like it or find it difficult? How does the New Testament portray the teaching of God's foreknowledge?

4. In 2 Peter 1:10, Paul commands believers to ***“be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.”*** According to this verse, how should Christians respond to learning about God's foreknowledge and election?

5. How can Christians confirm God's foreknowledge and their election? (c.f. 2 Peter 1:3-10; Rom. 8:29-30)

God's foreknowledge manifests itself during our existence on earth. It's not something we have to wait until we enter heaven before we say "I guess God really did love me in eternity past." The effective call is evidence of God's foreknowledge. It issues forth through someone sharing the gospel with you (e.g. pastor, friend, family, stranger) which God providentially arranged. Regeneration awoke your spirit and illuminated your understanding of God's truth. Then God declared you innocent and righteous. God freed you from the power of sin. Finally, God is continually at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure. The Spirit is testifying with your spirit as you are continually transformed to be like Christ from one degree to another.

IV. Application

Scenario #1

1. How would God's foreknowledge encourage someone who is struggling with lack of assurance of salvation on account of their sinfulness? (c.f. Phil. 1:6; Rom. 8:29-30, 33ff.; 1 Thess. 5:14-22, 23-24)
2. What pitfalls should you avoid when encouraging someone who lacks assurance of salvation? (c.f. 2 Peter 1:10; Matt. 7:21-23, 24-27)
3. What are some data collecting questions you might ask the person to help guide your counsel?

When someone has come to Christ in repentant faith they are assured of unfailing love for them that stretches back into eternity past when God set his electing love on them. Heath Lambert encouragingly reminds us that they have "been elected before the foundations of the earth means that a wise, loving, and sovereign God has determined to devote himself to her into eternity future, ensuring that she will ultimately be glorified with him in heaven forever. Worry is shattered when believers come to know that God has been planning their good since before he made the world and guarantees their good forever after this current world is renewed. Worry is actually a very rational response to trouble when these things are not true for a person or when they do not know they are true for them. When believers are convinced about these doctrines of salvation, worry stops making sense."⁷

⁷ Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 297-98.

Scenario #2

4. Greg's grandfather, who was an unbeliever, has just died. Greg was really close to his grandfather and has taken this really hard. Upon seeing Greg share his sorrow on social media, and out of love for your brother-in-Christ, you make a point to see him at church on Sunday and see how he is doing and offer condolences. Greg shares with you how hard it has been, but he also shares with you an additional weight of conviction that he has been carrying – he feels partly responsible for his grandfather's lack of salvation due to missed opportunities for sharing the gospel. He says he was able to share the gospel once, but he regrets not following up and doing it more. How would God's foreknowledge be an encouragement to Greg?
5. Is there any merit to Greg's guilty conscience on account of not taking opportunities to share the gospel? Why?
6. What questions would you want to ask Greg to understand his heart behind not sharing?
7. How would your counsel change if the situation were different and Greg had never shared the gospel with his grandfather due to fear of man?

Scenario #3

8. During church potluck you are fellowshiping with a college student and some other adults. The topic of evangelism comes up and the college student mentions how they don't share the gospel as often as they would like because they are afraid of getting into a situation where they don't have all the answers. Some of the adults echo a similar sentiment. How would you be able to stir your brothers and sisters up to love and good deeds based on God's foreknowledge? (2 Tim. 2:10; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; 2 Cor. 4:3-6)
9. Since God's foreknowledge is perfect and doesn't change, what motivation do Christians have for evangelism? (c.f. Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Cor. 2:14-17; 5:17-21)
10. BONUS: Many people struggle with the idea that God foreknows certain individuals but not others. They feel that the doctrine makes God seem capricious and unfair. How can you show them that God's foreknowledge actually magnifies His character rather than diminishes His fairness and grace? (**note:** keep in mind 1 Thess. 5:14 in your response to the person)