

# The Foreknowledge of God

By C. D. Cole

*For whom he did foreknow (Greek proginosko) , 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).*

*God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew (Gk. proginosko). Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel (Rom. 11:2).*

*Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before (Gk. proginosko), beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness (II Peter 3:17).*

*Which knew (proginosko) me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee (Acts 26:5).*

*Who verily was foreordained (Gk. proginosko) before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, (I Peter 1:20).*

*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge (Gk. prognosis) of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: (Acts 2:23).*

*Elect according to the foreknowledge (Gk. prognosis) of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied (I Peter 1:2).*

In the foregoing Scriptures we have given every passage in the New Testament where the word "foreknowledge" is used. It will be noted that it is used five times in the verb form and two times in the noun form. In the verb

form it is used three times of God and two times of man. One time when used of God it is translated "foreordain" (I Peter 1:20).

It is our candid judgment that there is hardly any doctrine more generally and more woefully misunderstood than the doctrine now before us. It is well to remember that the meaning of Bible terms is not determined by their current and popular use, or by reference to human dictionaries, but by their usage in the Scriptures. We are apt to assume that we know the meaning of a particular word and fail to test our assumption by the use of the concordance. Ask the average person what the word "flesh" means, and he will be quick to reply that it means the body of man or beast. But the word does not always have that meaning. It often refers to the sinful and fleshly nature.

*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not (Rom. 7:18).*

*But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof (Rom. 13:14).*

*For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3).*

Most people think the word "world" stands for the human race, when, in fact, the word is seldom so employed in the Scriptures.

*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you (John 15:18,19).*

*I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine (John 17:9).*

*And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness (I John 5:19).*

Spurgeon says that the word "world" is used in some seven or eight different senses in the Bible. Again, take the word "immortality." The popular idea is that it refers to the indestructibility of the soul. But the word is never used of the soul; it always refers to the body.

*For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory (I Cor. 15:53,54).*

*But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: (II Tim. 1:10).*

### **FOREKNOWLEDGE A DIVINE ATTRIBUTE**

A fresh study of the subject before us raised the question as to whether "foreknowledge" should be classed as one of the Divine attributes. A Divine attribute is a quality belonging to the nature of God, one of His personal perfections, something which belongs inherently to His character or nature. For example, love, mercy, grace, and wisdom are qualities of the Divine nature, and are therefore attributes. Our conclusion, after further study, is that "foreknowledge" is both an attribute and an act of God. When the word is used in the popular sense, in the sense most people use it, it refers to God's knowledge of events before they actually happen. In this sense "foreknowledge" is one of the Divine attributes like love, mercy, wisdom, grace, etc.

### **FOREKNOWLEDGE A DIVINE ACT**

The word foreknowledge as used in the Bible can hardly be made to refer to a quality or attribute of the Divine nature. It is used in the sense of a Divine act rather than a Divine quality. We would not say that predestination and election are Divine attributes, but rather Divine acts. Foreknowledge, when used of events, is an attribute; when used of persons,

it is an immanent act of God, an act remaining and operating within the divine nature. It is the difference between God's nature and God's activities; between what He is, and what He does. Foreknowledge, when considered as an attribute, is a branch of the Divine omniscience; and when considered as an act it is a branch of the doctrine of the Divine decrees.

After writing the foregoing paragraph, we turned to the article on "Foreknowledge" in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, written by Dr. C. W. Hodge. And he states exactly what we have been trying to say. Let the reader study his statement along with what we have already written. "The word 'foreknowledge' has two meanings. It is a term used in theology to denote the prescience or foresight of God, that is, His knowledge of the entire course of events which are future from the human point of view; and it is also used in AV and RV to translate the Greek words *proginoskein* and *prognosis* in the NT, in which instances the word 'foreknowledge' approaches closely the idea of foreordination. In the sense of prescience foreknowledge is an aspect of God's omniscience. God's knowledge, according to the Scriptures, is perfect, that is, it is omniscience." (C. W. Hodge).

## **FOREKNOWLEDGE AND FOREORDINATION**

When foreknowledge is used as a divine act, it is practically the same as foreordination. Let Dr. Hodge Speak again: "While, therefore, the foreknowledge of God in the sense of prescience is asserted in the New Testament, this is not the meaning of the term when used to translate the Greek words *proginoskein* and *prognosis*. These words which are translated in the AV and RV by the word 'foreknowledge' and once by the word 'foreordain': "Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you " (I Peter 1:20), mean much more than mere intellectual foresight or prescience. Both the verb and the noun approach the idea of foreordination and are closely connected with that idea in the passages where these words occur."

When "foreknowledge" is applied to events, including the free action of men, it means God's foresight or knowledge beforehand. But when it refers to persons it signifies to regard with favour, denoting not mere cognition but an affection for the person in view. The word "foreknowledge" is not in the Old Testament, but the word "know" occurs often, and frequently means to love or choose or ordain.

*They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not: of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off (Hosea 8:4).*

*Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. (Jer. 1:5).*

*You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities (Amos 3:2).*

*For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish (Ps. 1:6).*

In these passages it is not acquaintance but affection or appointment that is meant. And the word "know" is often used in the New Testament in the same sense.

*And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matt. 7:23).*

This means He did not know them savingly.

*I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine (Jn. 10:14).*

*But if any man love God, the same is known of him (I Cor. 8:3).*

And again, *The Lord knoweth them that are his (II Tim. 2:19).*

In these verses the knowledge of Christ is limited to the saved, and therefore, cannot signify an acquaintance with, but rather an affection for.

God is acquainted with everybody; there is no limit to His knowledge about people.

Now, the "foreknowledge of persons" means to foreknow with a benign purpose. It means to know with the intention of blessing. For God to foreknow a person is to regard that person with favor and with a purpose to save. The foreknown are to be finally glorified, because God foreknew them for this purpose. God's first act of benevolence towards sinners was to foreknow them. And His foreknowledge of them is the foundation (historically speaking) of all subsequent blessings. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29).

God looked upon some poor sinners with gracious favor and determined to make them like His glorious Son. "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel" (Rom. 11:2). On this verse Dr. A. T. Robertson, in his Word Pictures, makes this comment: "Probably the Hebrew sense of choice beforehand. The nation of Israel was God's chosen people and so all the individuals in it could not be cast off."

Here Dr. Robertson makes the word "foreknow" mean to choose beforehand. Those whom God looked upon with gracious favor, back in eternity, will not be cast away either in the present or in the future. They are the "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied" (I Peter 1:2). In this verse election is based upon the foreknowledge of God the Father. Those whom the Father looked upon with gracious favor were elected unto the obedience of faith and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. And this obedience is the result of the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. And may the reader note and remember, that while election is unto salvation, this salvation is not without faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. The elect are to be justified, but they are to be justified by faith.

*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: (Rom. 5:1).*

*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:28).*

*But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness (Rom. 4:5), et al.*

To be exact and critical, the writer believes that, although divine foreknowledge is close akin to and associated with such words as election, predestination, and foreordination, it has a distinct meaning of its own. The divine order in "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. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom. 8:29, 30), is foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied" (I Peter 1:2). The order is foreknowledge, election, and sanctification. So the foreknown are elected, predestinated, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified. And since every aspect of salvation is of grace, God's foreknowledge of persons is His gracious regard and love for poor sinners. And because of this gracious regard for them, He chose them unto salvation, predestinated them unto the adoption of sons, calls them by His grace, justifies them by grace through faith in the blood of His Son, sanctifies them by His Spirit, and will glorify them when the Lord comes. May every reader "give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (II Peter 1:10).