

Election and God's Foreknowledge

Introduction:

What does God's foreknowledge mean in relation to man's "free will?" Does man have a "free will?" Or are we simply puppets on a string being controlled by a higher power?

Election is Scriptural, but how does it work? And how does God's foreknowledge relate to election? Theologians have debated that questions for centuries.

God's Foreknowledge: What does God know and how does He know it? We are biting off more than we can chew!

Does God know the future?

Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, "My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure." (Isa 46:9-10)

Yes. But how does He know the future?

Theologians tells us the God knows the future through an attribute called "foreknowledge." What is "foreknowledge?"

What is foreknowledge?

What does foreknowledge/foreknow mean?

Extreme Calvinists say that it means to fore-love, fore-ordain, for-choose; fore-elect, predetermine. According to them, it does not mean "to know beforehand."

However, The Greek word (πρόγνωσις; prognôsis) means foreknowledge or forethought. "To know before" (pro, "before," ginosko, "to know").

It's where we get our English word "prognosis (synonyms: forecast, prediction, projection, prospectus)." Since man is finite, the idea of any "prognosis" is "speculation based on known facts." Because God is omniscient there is no guesswork involved.

Vine's Expository Dictionary: "Foreknowledge" is one aspect of omniscience. God's "foreknowledge" involves His electing grace, but this does not preclude human will. He "foreknows" the exercise of faith which brings salvation.

Theologians have different ideas about God's knowledge of the future. Most believe that God does know the future. But they have different views on how He knows the future. This morning we will examine some of those views.

How can God know the future? A reasonable explanation is that He exists outside of time.

The Timeless View of Election

God existed before time:

Col 1:17 And He is before all things... (NKJV)

2Ti 1:9 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*. (NKJV)

Titus 1:2 in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised *before time began*. (NKJV)

God brought time into being:

Heb 1:2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds (αιωνας; lit. ages). (NKJV)

Heb 1:2 has at the end of these days spoken to us through a Son, who is the pre-destined Lord of the universe, and through whom He made the Ages (Wey).

Thayer Definition:

G165; αιων; aion

- 1) forever, an unbroken age, perpetuity of time, eternity
- 2) the worlds, universe
- 3) period of time, age

This is where we get our word “eon” or age.

As a finite human being, I am locked into a linear time frame. I see events happening at various intervals. God is outside that linear time frame. In fact, He created time itself. From His perspective (the frame of reference of eternity) these events may appear to be simultaneous.

What is time?

That begs the question: What is time?

Einstein said, “Time is God’s way of keeping everything from happening at once.”

To put it simply, time is duration. Our clocks mark change. They are benchmarks that indicate the passage of time.

According to the science of physics, time is a property that results from the existence of matter. As such, time exists when matter exists. God created matter when He created the universe. Therefore, time began when God created the universe. Before that, God was simply existing. Since there was no matter, time did not exist either.

Scripture depicts God as being in time, and yet somehow beyond time. God is not constrained by time the way we are.

2 Pet. 3:8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

It’s all a matter of perspective

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Train illustration

Our view of time is like being at a train station watching the cars pass by one at a time.

God's view of time is like watching the whole train from the top of a mountain.

Rev 22:13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.”

Norman Geisler: “Nothing is future to God. If God is beyond time, then all time is spread before Him in one eternal now. He sees the way a man on the top of the hill sees the whole train at once, while the man in the tunnel below sees only one car going by at a time, noticing neither the one already past nor the one yet to come. God is not standing on one day of the calendar of time, looking back at the days past and forward to the days to come. Rather, He is looking down on the whole calendar, seeing all the days at once (cf. 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2).”

Election and foreknowledge work together

Since our finite view of time is so limited, it is hard to be 100% dogmatic about how God's foreknowledge relates to election. We might say that God's election and foreknowledge work together. Or as scripture put it, we are “elect *according to* (κατά) the foreknowledge of God” (1 Pet. 1:2).

God's election is *in accord with* His foreknowledge. God's election is not *based on* His foreknowledge of how men will freely choose. Nor is His election *independent of* His foreknowledge of how men will choose. There is no chronological or logical priority of election and foreknowledge.

The Greek word translated “according to” (κατά) could also be translated: “in accordance with” or “in harmony with”. It's as if election and foreknowledge are working hand in hand; or working together with each other. Each are equal and neither one has preeminence above the other.

John Walvoord: “The whole process of the divine purpose, election, and foreknowledge are all eternal. God did not arrive at His decisions after long pondering the difficulties of each plan. In other words ... all aspects of the eternal purpose of God are equally timeless. While there are serious problems in human comprehension of this doctrine, one should submit to divine revelation even if he cannot completely understand it.”

Norman Geisler: “All aspects of the eternal purpose of God are equally timeless. Whatever God knows, He determines. And whatever He determines, He knows. Whatever God fore-chooses cannot be based on what He foreknows. Nor can what He foreknows be based on what He fore-chose. Both must be simultaneous, free, and God determined that they would be such. God is totally sovereign in the sense of actually determining what occurs, and yet man is completely free and responsible for what he chooses.”

Norman Geisler: “There is no contradiction in God knowingly predetermining and predeterminately knowing from all eternity precisely what we would do with our free acts. For God determined that moral creatures would do things freely. He did not determine that they would be forced to perform free acts. What is forced is not free, and what is free is not forced. In brief, we are chosen but free.”

Norman Geisler: “God's predestination and human free choice are a mystery, but not a contradiction. They go beyond reason, but not against reason. That is, they are not incongruous, but neither can we see exactly how they are complementary. We apprehend each as true, but we do not comprehend how both are true.”

The timeless view of election one possible explanation. Let's consider some other theories.

The Calvinistic View of Election: God's foreknowledge is based upon His predetermination. God knows what will happen in the future because He has already predetermined it.

God's choices are made with total disregard for the choices of mortal men. God determines to save whomever He wishes whether they chose to believe or not. In fact, mankind is so depraved that they are incapable of believing. Because human beings are dead in sin God has to first regenerate them BEFORE they can believe. God chooses with irresistible grace (power) and forces men to believe against (in spite of) their depraved will.

Problems:

- It denies that man has free will.
- It results in fatalism.
- Irresistible grace is a violation of free choice.
- God is love. True love never forces itself on anyone. "Forced love" is a contradiction in terms.
- God ends up loving **ONLY** the elect (limited atonement). How can God be all-loving?

Dr. E. Y. Mullins [Baptist]:

Does God's election coerce man's will, or does it leave it free? The answer is emphatically that the will of man is not coerced, but is left free. In his free act in accepting Christ and His salvation man is self-determined. He would not have made the choice if left to himself without the aid of God's grace. But when he chooses, it is his own free act.... Grace does not become effective until men freely respond to it.

C. L. Daniel [Baptist]:

The doctrine of unconditional election does indeed make God a respecter of persons. In fact it is ... a tenet quite foreign to the Holy Writ. It takes one of the Lord's sweetest and most gracious teachings and turns it into the most heartless and tyrannical, by making God Himself directly responsible for the doom of every lost sinner.

Open Theism: God's foreknowledge is incomplete.

Illus: Driving down a foggy road. God can see into the future, but does not know everything that will happen.

You might be wondering how Bible believing Christians could come up with anything so bizzare. Actually, there is some method to their madness.

We are told that God is:

- All powerful—Omnipotent
- All knowing—Omniscient
- All loving—Omnibenevolent

If that is the case, the how do we account for pain and suffering in this world?

The Open Theist reasons that one of those attributes must not be true. But which one?

If God is all powerful and all knowing, then He cannot be all loving because He allows His creatures that He loves to suffer when He could have prevented it. That certainly is not an option.

If God is all knowing and all loving then He cannot be all powerful or He would prevent pain and suffering. That is not an option either.

Therefore, God must not be all knowing and those events that cause pain and suffering are just as much a surprise to Him as they are to us.

However, this deduction is based on human reasoning and not on the Word of God.

Man has a tendency to put God into his theological box. He does not fit!

The Arminian View of Election:

Open Theism is the Extreme Arminian view of election. In contrast, Simple foreknowledge is the classical or moderate Arminian view of election.

God's predetermination is *based on* His foreknowledge.

God knows in advance (by His omniscience) what choices everyone will make. His election is based upon whether or not men will accept or reject salvation.

Problems:

- Scripture indicates that God actually determines outcomes beforehand. He does not simply know what will happen in the future.
- A sovereign God is not dependent upon or limited to anything that happens in His created universe.
- The idea that there is a chronological sequence to the thought process of God is highly problematic. God is not some cosmic computer that goes through a sequence of permutations before determining an outcome.

Middle Knowledge:

This view allows God to arrange for a person to carry out a specific act, without overriding their free will.

A chess game is a poor illustration of middle knowledge, but it may help. A chess player has to anticipate the possible moves of his opponent. If I move my knight here, he will move his bishop there. The game is built on counterfactuals. The chess player who can best anticipate the probable moves of his opponent will win. Since God is omniscient, He knows all the possible counterfactuals of every situation that could possibly occur. Therefore, God can manipulate history so that His will is carried out without the coercion of mankind. By virtue of middle knowledge God can work out His plan of redemption without being a puppeteer, pulling the strings.

Some Examples of Counterfactuals in Scripture:

1 Sam. 23:9-13 When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." Then David said, "O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant."

And the LORD said, "He will come down." Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?"

And the LORD said, “They will deliver you.” So David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah and went wherever they could go. Then it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah; so he halted the expedition.

Mat 11:20-21 Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

An Evaluation of Middle Knowledge:

- Middle Knowledge is a reasonable explanation that balances God’s Sovereignty with Man’s Free Will.
- Middle Knowledge has some support in Scripture.
- Middle Knowledge is only a theory just as Divine Determinism, Simple Foreknowledge and Open Theism are only theories.

Conclusion:

Fact: Humans are finite and exist inside this thing that we call time. God is infinite and is the One who created time. Can we really understand everything about election and foreknowledge when we really do not understand time?

I don’t fully understand Einstein’s theory of relativity. I don’t understand time dilation. I don’t understand how gravity affects time. Why do atomic clocks run faster at higher altitudes? I don’t understand the A theory of time versus the B theory of time.

Mankind has problems understanding even the concept of time, yet theologians claim that they have God, who exists outside of time, all figured out.

- There is a tendency for finite man to bring the infinite God down to his own level.
- Let’s be careful not to cram God into our theological box.
- We should realize that we are finite human beings attempting to describe an infinite God. These various views on how a God who exists outside of time are simply theories. We should be careful not to be overly dogmatic in asserting which view is correct.

This morning we looked at various views of election as it relates to salvation.

- The Calvinistic View of Election
- The Arminian View of Election
- Open Theism’s View of Election
- The Timeless View of Election
- The Middle Knowledge View of Election

All of these are just theories.

Some of these have major problems.

The Calvinistic View of Election denies that man has free will. It results in fatalism. Irresistible grace is a violation of free choice. God is love. True love never forces itself on anyone. “Forced love” is a contradiction in terms. God ends up loving ONLY the elect (limited atonement). How can God be all-loving?

The Arminian View of Election says that God simply knows what will happen in the future. However, Scripture indicates that God actually determines outcomes beforehand. He does not simply know what will happen in the future.

Open Theism says that God's foreknowledge is incomplete. God is surprised by future events.

The Timeless View of Election and Middle Knowledge seem to be more reasonable explanations. However, they are based on the assumption that in eternity past God chose certain individuals to be saved. But what if that assumption is wrong? What if God did not choose individuals for salvation in eternity past? Then these theories are all out the window. None of them are correct.

Are these the only possibilities? Are there other options? Does election always relate to salvation? Have theologians misunderstood what the Bible says about election? That is exactly what many sound Bible scholars have proposed. Stay tuned. The next time we will explore an option that blows all of these theories out of the water.