

## Romans 8:28-30b

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Last week we covered the last three points of this outline:

The five link chain of God's method in accomplishing His purpose

Foreknowledge

Predestination

Calling – covered last week

Justification – covered last week

Glorification- covered last week

This week we will cover Foreknowledge and Predestination. I hope to present this in a way that this sermon can be referred to as a simple,

easy to understand,

**reference** for explaining these concepts

and for refuting those who use these passages for other purposes.

Let's start with **foreknowledge**.

The Greek word for foreknowledge is *proginōskō*

It is made of two Greek words. Pro- prior to, in front of or before and Ginosko which means to know.

Now remember that the Greeks had several words for knowing.

There are two major views on the meaning of this passage. The first is absolutely **fundamental** to the Armenian view of salvation. The Armenian view essentially says that **a person is born with the innate capability** of choosing to respond to the Gospel message with self-generated faith. They believe they are born with the capacity to respond to the gospel message just as they are. They believe that it does not take a miracle of regeneration for them to decide for Christ. In essence an Armenian believes that it is their own decision that causes their salvation. The Holy Spirit may have prompted them to decide for Christ, but the essential causal factor was a decision in their will.

The alternative view of the word for foreknown is **essential** to the Calvinist or Sovereign Grace point of view. This view holds that man **is innately unable to initiate their own salvation**. They believe that it is as impossible for a natural

man to respond to God as it is for **a dead man to arise and walk**. And if a dead man rises and walks you can be assured that **the dead man had no part in causing it**. It was **God** who caused the dead man to come back to life and God did it without **any help** from the dead man.

That is the fundamental difference in Armenian and Sovereign Grace thought. The theologies essentially differ on **who** causes salvation and **how** it is caused. Now, the Armenian would say that this verse explains how **their** view is true. They would say God **Foreknows**. What they mean by this is that **God knows things before they happen**. So God can tell who it is that is going to respond to His call. Because God **knows this**, God can treat them like they are His from the beginning of time because **He knows** that **they will be** His one day, because **they will decide to respond** to the gospel sometime in the future. So when they read "God Foreknows" they read it as God knows **the facts about what we will do** ahead of time.

When those with the Sovereign Grace read this passage they interpret it completely differently. And they, too, say that this passage explains their view as well. They would say that God **DECIDED** ahead of time **to destine** some people who were lost people for His salvation. He decided before they ever existed to include them into His family. He essentially chose to have an intimate family relationship with them even before they existed.

Now let's take a look at the word and see which view is most clearly represented. Let's first look at the Armenian view.

There are two major problems I have with using the word foreknow to support a **foreknowledge understanding** that **refutes the concept** that God chooses and predetermines who He will save.

1. The common use of the word know- Ginosko- in the Greek almost always implies close union. It does not usually mean **having simple information about**. If knowing things ahead of time were the **intended** meaning, there are words that would better describe this. The Greek listener would naturally hear the word Ginosko and think of relationship. The Greek word itself is an obstacle to understanding **Foreknow** as meaning **knowing facts ahead of time**.

I borrowed the following quote from something I read. I can't remember the source. **"The Bible uses the word "know" in a very personal and intimate way. It is not the same as acquaintances. It uses the word in intimate ways such as a man "knows his wife". God knows us more than we know ourselves. He knows us intimately because He created us, has a plan for us, and knows our entire life - past present and future."** While God certainly is well informed on every future

detail, there would be better Greek words to convey that idea. The word used here implies known in a relational sense. So the strength of the word is emphasizing, not the facts about the person but the relationship with the person. The ARMENIAN view holds that this verse says that because God knows the facts about all people, (He knows what they **will do**), He can create His plan accordingly. The word chosen in **this passage**, however, would imply that God predestined them as a result of the warmth of his regard toward them. The ARMENIAN view holds that the source of God's action is by man's **causality**. One would think the initial word in that sequence would be a sheerly **objective** one. The ARMENIAN view would hold that, because of knowing ahead of time what a man would do, God will **respond in kind**. The word chosen by Paul for foreknowledge in our text immediately removes God's **objective** evaluation in his choosing. The word chosen implies an **inward** motivation for God to act rather than an **outward** action that He is responding to. It is the difference between selecting one person out of ten for a job when all the people **are strangers** and choosing one out of ten and one is **your best friend**. You would have foreknown your best friend. The word Ginosko removes God's objectivity about his decision.

There is also a problem with the sentence structure- The essence of the verse is "Whom he foreknew he predestined for salvation" or you could restate it "God predestined for salvation whom he foreknew". Ok, so Foreknow is the word in the ARMENIAN view where God makes the decision. It is all based on foreknowing what that human will do. So in order to choose **some**, He would need to **foreknow all**. Doesn't that make sense? Doesn't His Sovereignty demand that. God must know ahead of time the facts of every person's life if He is to be Sovereign. If God were to choose **some**, he would need to know the information about **all people** to determine which ones would chose Him and which ones would not. Yet this verse says only the ones **He foreknows** He chooses. That leaves us with a logical problem. There are three options as I see it.

Option 1. There are missing words. It should say "whom God foreknew to be future believers, he predestined to be saved". I would guess that is what the ARMENIAN view would say. Our current text is missing words.

Option 2. Not all are foreknown and those not foreknown are unsaved. That creates a huge problem with God's omniscience if this word is referring to having information in order to make a judgment. Basically it is saying that God **doesn't know the future** of all those that will not decide for Him. So God is no longer really all knowing. That is a problem.

Option 3. All are foreknown and all are saved. That creates another problem with the theology of universalism.

The Sovereign Grace VIEW has a **much easier** time with this verse. It makes **perfect sense** that God would regard warmly those He chose to love. So God chooses first **to foreknow** His children, to regard them relationally. Then God chooses **to predestine** them to salvation. What else **would** he do? I think we've got to grant that this verse is much easier for the Sovereign Grace view.

Let's look at another scripture where this Greek word Proginosko is used.

**1 Peter 1:19-21 (NKJV)**

**19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.**

**20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you**

**21 who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.**

Here we see that this word Proginosko was applied to Christ and it was translated foreordained instead of foreknown. But it is the same word. We would never think that there was **any doubt** that Christ would do His Father's will and decide to obey His Father. When Christ was **foreknown** to be the Savior He was **foreordained** to be the Savior. God **purposed** it and it would be carried out. The point of this text is to show that God had this plan from the beginning and it was a certainty that it would be carried out. Paul in Romans is giving us the same degree of certainty in our salvation. It is not something that was determined **by us**. It was determined **by God** and **we**, by His will and calling, responded to Him. A derivative of the word ProGinosko- ProGnosis is used in Acts 2:23

**Acts 2:22-24 (NKJV)**

**22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know--**

**23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;**

**24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.**

Would we think to apply this passage in such a way that God knew what **might** happen and responded accordingly? I don't think this passage would allow for that. This shows that **God has a purpose** and that purpose will be carried out. Everything will submit to His purpose. He is not at all **reacting**. God is **acting** according to His purpose. The writer of Acts is **not saying** that God **knew** that Christ would die. That would serve no purpose in this text. No, the writer is showing God's intention. **God willed** that Christ would die under these circumstances. And that is the same word Paul uses to refer to God's intention for us.

Let's look at another verse.

**Romans 11:2-5 (NKJV)**

**2 God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying,**  
**3 "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"?**

**4 But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."**

**5 Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.**

Look at this text this week and ask yourself, what is the point of the text? How can the idea that **God knew what would happen** before it happened help us understand the text at all? I think it would do damage to the text. The intention here is that it would be absurd and impossible that God would abandon those that he had predetermined by His will to be His.

So I reject the Armenian view of foreknowledge for the reasons we have covered. First I reject it because of the **meaning and the common usage** for the Greek word for foreknowledge. The word is not normally referring to a simple **knowledge of facts a head of time**.

Second- because the sentence doesn't make **logical sense** if taken in that view. It requires logical implications of God that **cannot** be true.

Third- because scripture uses the word differently in other texts.

You see, our text is not at all hard to understand if understood exactly as it is translated. The problem isn't in understanding it. The problem is in liking it. If God chooses which people he will save, prior to them ever doing anything good or evil, as Romans 9 discusses in verse 11 where it says

**(for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),**

If that is how God does things, how are we going to **explain this**? How can we explain that there are some that God does **not choose**? Doesn't this seem too **unfair** for a God we seek to represent? That is a hard stance to do good public relations for. We think, "wouldn't it **be better** if everyone had an equal shake at salvation?" It would be easier to represent a God like this.

Well, that might be true. It might be easier. But it would not be true. Our God is a sovereign God. He doesn't need more friends. He doesn't need easier votes. He could care less about **His standing** on any poll taken by man. He **is** and He has **always been**. He never changes. He is the definition of security. God has not given us the job to be his **public relations advisors**. He has given us the job to be His **ambassadors**. That means we approach those around us representing God's **interests**. If they do not like our king, that does not change our position or God's. Our job is to reflect our king accurately. We are to call everyone externally with the Gospel. Some will like it. Some will hate it. That is not our concern.

We might ask, but how can it be a person's fault if they reject Christ? If God chooses people for Himself and there is **someone who He has not chosen**, how can that person be held accountable for not coming to Christ? I don't think we will ever have the full answer to that in our lifetimes here on earth. But this was Paul's response.

**Romans 9:19-24 (NKJV)**

**19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?"** (In other words, if a man is not chosen, how could he resist God and get chosen.)

**20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?"**

**21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?**

**22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,**

**23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,**

**24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?**

One thing is for sure. You will never find a human who desperately longs to be chosen but has not been. And all those who will be damned **deserve** to be damned, just as we did apart from Christ. In fact, when you give them the chance to serve Christ, a **hatred** of God will display itself over time. And they are fully responsible for their condition.

I cannot answer the question of how man can be held responsible if it is **God** that chooses. All I can know is that **God is just** and it is God who holds every man responsible. And that is good enough for me. Paul does not give us the answer to that question.

I was once told by a person that this person fully understood the answer to this riddle. I told Mike about the conversation and he simply said as only Mike would have, "Congratulations are in order." Theologians have wrestled over this riddle for centuries.

And think about it. If the answer to the riddle of man's responsibility were as simple as saying that every man is capable of deciding for or against Christ, isn't this where Paul would have stated that idea? After Paul states the objection regarding God's choosing and man's responsibility, why not just say, Hey, it isn't God's problem. That person had the capacity to decide and they decided. End of story. It is the human's responsibility and it is in **their capacity** to respond. That person **chose** damnation.

But that is **NOT** what Paul said. Paul **couldn't** say it. Because it would be **a lie**. It is more complicated than that. So Paul had to give the answer he did. And his answer does not directly meet the stated objection. His answer is more like saying that we don't have the right **to ask the question**. Paul's response in 9:20 is the most convincing evidence of the truth of the Sovereign Grace position in all of scripture. If ever there was an opportunity to lay out an Armenian understanding of salvation **it was here**. But Paul **didn't** because he **couldn't**. It is not true.

So our verse this morning is not hard to **understand**. The real question is, will we believe what our Sovereign God says about the implications of His sovereignty? Or will we try to **change it** to fit more into what we like and understand?

Now let's look at the word Predestined.

Proorizō (sounds like) pro oridzo This word, too, is made up of 2 Greek words. Pro and Orizo Pro means prior to, in front of or before Orizo means to mark out or bound ("horizon"), determine, limit, ordain. We get our word for Horizon from this word. It is the limit of our viewable world.

The **Greek** word for predestined means very much the same as our **English** word. It means to be limited or ordained ahead of time. When combined with foreknowledge we get a very full picture of how our **God orders** the formation of His family. It is very **purposed**. It is very **planned**. It is very determined. There is nothing shaky about it. First God **loves ahead of time** those who He will chose. He foreknows them. That is the beginning. Then He predestinates them. He ordains 2 things. He determines their horizon. He puts a ring around them and He puts a ring around what He will do for them.

When I go on a fishing trip I take a walk out to my shed. I think about the type of fishing I am going to do. And then I select the lures and equipment that I think will best suit the fishing that I will be doing. I fore ordain the equipment that I will use and I fore ordain how I will use it. That is very similar to what God does for us and to us.

Remember that all of this is referring to what **God** is doing. It is not referring to what **man** is doing. We may not like it that we have no part at all in this predetermination. We cannot **merit** it. We cannot have an attribute so **likeable** that God must respond to it. No. We have done nothing good or bad when God makes His decision. It is He alone that formulates the future. It is He alone who choses who He will fill his family with. It is hard on our pride, but even our decision to follow Christ is not an action, but a reaction. We are loving Him because He first loved us. We are seeing because he cured our blindness. We are moving because he rose us from the dead. What a truly gracious God we have that He would chose people like us.

I would like to, at this point, borrow some material from John Stott. He mentions in his book on Romans the objections that so many have to this wonderful doctrine and he explains how the objections are unfounded.

First the accusation is that predestination will foster arrogance. Mr Stott makes the point that arrogance is actually excluded. For after all, we did nothing, absolutely nothing to be chosen by God. We live with a wide eyed astonishment that God would chose a person like us to fill His family.

Second the fear is that predestination will produce an anxiety about the state of one's salvation. The fear is that one will forever wonder whether one is chosen or not. But this is an unfounded fear because the rest of scripture about evidences regarding one's salvation are still true. If we show the attributes of a Christian we can be assured that it is Christ who has saved us. And if it is His work, we can be even more certain that our salvation is secure as it rests on God's shoulders and not ours.



The third concern is that predestination will foster apathy. After all, if it is God who chooses, there is really nothing we can do. But scripture makes abundantly clear that we do not lose our responsibility based on true doctrine. Scripture maintains every man's responsibility before God. Christ laid at our feet the responsibility to preach the gospel and to make disciples. It is not for us to figure out who might come, or to leave the work of evangelism to God. We are to spread the net. We are to proclaim the Gospel. And God will use that gospel in those that He chooses to call to Himself. We have a job to do since we are not God and we are God's ambassadors.

The fourth fear is that predestination will breed complacency. They argue that if God has done all the choosing, what does it matter what we do in this life? Paul answered this question by essentially saying that if God has started this new life in you, you simply cannot live in a deliberately rebellious state of being. You must submit to His Lordship and put to death the deeds of the body. In fact if Christ is in you His purpose is that you take on Christlikeness in this life and an uncanny resemblance in eternity.

The fifth fear is that predestination will foster narrow-mindedness. It is feared that the elect children of God will become absorbed only in their own company. But God chose His people to bring a light to the nations. If the Holy Spirit is truly in us we will continually be challenged to bring that light to all our neighbors and fellow workers.

The fears of what the doctrine of predestination will foster are based on a mindset of doctrine without Spirit. When a person is truly born again, there is a driving force in that person that goes beyond mere doctrine, much as when there is life in a baby it goes beyond his mere biology. There is something in that baby that will direct what kind of person it will become. That is also true of a believer. There is new life in a believer that will not allow him or her to be satisfied with anything but what God has for him or her. There will be a fight. But in the end there will be victory. And that is why the true doctrine of predestination can be proclaimed without fear that a believer will live an antinomian lifestyle.

We don't need to shy away from foreknowledge and predestination. Paul proclaimed it clearly and boldly to believers. And in it we find the most solid source of assurance of our salvation that can be found.

Let's close with a text that is one of the best examples of weaving this true doctrine into the life of a believer.

Ephesians 1: 3Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

7In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. 11In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

13In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

How very much we have to praise God about this morning. And how very many reasons we have to live for Him this week.