

Foreknowledge

Part 1

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[00:00:01] Some scriptures which have something to say about the purpose of God. Lords, this afternoon we looked at 2 Timothy 1, verses 8 to 12, which give us the balance between the purpose of God and the grace of God. And then last night we looked at that lovely little scripture, Titus 2, verses 11 and 5, when we saw past, present and future manifestations of the grace of God. The exercise is to continue in looking at some of these terms in scripture, like purpose, and to attempt to distinguish things that differ. It has been mentioned already, I'll say it again, that very often the close relation between all these concepts [00:01:04] is given in that in most scriptures where one of them is referred to, others are mentioned as well. Now, this comes out in the hymns that we sing too. In the hymn we sang, 205, As thine thou didst foreknow us, foreknowledge, such was thine election, election, all the church in glory in its predestined station, predestination, and so on. The terms are not the same, they are related, and we need to examine where they are used and how they are used if we are to get help to understand their meaning. Now, tonight's subject is foreknowledge. And I will first of all list the scriptures that I intend to read, [00:02:03] and then we'll start at the beginning again and look at them one by one. The scriptures are Acts 2, verse 23, Acts 26, verse 5, Romans 8, verse 29, Romans 11, verse 2, 1 Peter 1, verse 2, 1 Peter 1, verse 20, 2 Peter, chapter 3, verse 17.

Seven scriptures we hope to look at in some detail. The first of them, Acts 2, verse 23.

In looking at the purpose of God, we took account of the expression in Romans 8, called according to his purpose, followed on by the phrase, for whom he did foreknow.

[00:03:14] So the purpose is the origin of all the blessing that God has in mind. Another expression we get, elect according to the foreknowledge of God.

So again, we are going right back to the beginning. The antecedent of much, if not all, when we think of the term foreknowledge. And that's the word we are going to look at tonight. I want to make a fundamental proposition and then look at these seven scriptures [00:04:03] just to establish that these things are so. My initial proposition is this. Foreknowledge is an attribute of God, as such, because he is God.

And it is linked and is as a result of the omniscience of God.

We start with the basic concept of God, that he is omnipotent, all-powerful.

Omnipresent, there is nowhere beyond the reach of his presence. And he is omniscient, he knows everything.

This is why, in the Gospel by John, emphasising the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, [00:05:02] again and again it is said of the Lord Jesus in manhood, knowing all things. Now that's special to John's Gospel, because that's the Gospel which emphasises his deity. Now, because he knows all things, it is well within the bounds even of natural reason that if he knows all things, that foreknowledge is an attribute of God. It is native to God because of who he is and what he is. It is a quality which is consistent with deity.

Now, I need to say a little bit more about that. One more proposition. The foreknowledge of God relates not only to events, but to persons. We come to a verse, whom he did foreknow.

[00:06:06] Now, of course, because he is omniscient, he knows everything. And because he is eternal, he is not bounded by the circumstances and when a thing happens, because he is eternal. He knows whether a thing is going to happen yesterday, today or tomorrow. He is eternal, he is omniscient. His knowledge is not bounded by time or sense. But I want to propose to you something, I think, which is even further than that. First I will make my statement for you to think about and then I will try to say what I mean by it. [00:07:05] There is a strong causative element in the foreknowledge of God.

What do I mean by that? God knows what is going to happen because he has decided to make it happen. He will cause it to happen and therefore he is assured it is going to happen. The omnipotent God, who is all-powerful, knows what is going to happen because he says, I have purposed it, I will do it. It is a corollary, a follow-on to the purpose of God. Now, here we have in Acts 2, verses which pull together something which is very difficult for the natural mind to accept.

[00:08:07] Again, common phrases, let us say what we mean. Things which seem poles apart the sovereignty of God, the responsibility of man. Seen in a pre-eminent way at the cross of Calvary.

Why did Jesus die? Why did he die?

Men took him and nailed him to the tree, the responsibility of man.

Why did he die?

Delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, the sovereignty of God. Each of them true, standing on their own feet as truths. [00:09:07] Man is responsible to God for the murder of God's son.

God, soul of the world, that he gave his only son. We need never be disturbed. At an apparent conflict, there is none, between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. And this verse, Acts 2, 23, is perhaps one of the best in the Bible to show the relation between them. Verse 22 says, This wasn't done in a corner. You know all about it, Peter says, preaching at Pentecost. You Jews out of every nation, he says, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Him, Jesus, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

[00:10:09] God was not taken by surprise. God had predetermined, God knew in advance, because it was his way for his own claims to be met, his own glory to be maintained, his standards to be met,

and blessing made available to sinners. God knew in advance because it was part of his master plan.

It is true as a statement in itself that God knew in advance that Christ would die at Calvary because God had determined that it should be so.

[00:11:03] It doesn't lessen in any way the responsibility of man, ignorant of the foreknowledge of God, but to suit their purpose, to pursue their case, they took him and cruelly maltreated him and nailed him to the tree.

The sovereignty of God, the responsibility of man. And in this context, about God not being taken unawares, it is the word that is used that he foreknew it in advance, delivered by the determinate counsel, there's another word, significant word, and foreknowledge of God. We'll leave the scripture for the moment, but just put this in our minds. Christ died at Calvary according to the foreknowledge of God.

[00:12:07] It was God's way of salvation.

Christ died at Calvary because God knew in advance that his son would be there because God had provided him as the saviour. Chapter 26, verse 4.

When the term foreknowledge is used in the sense of knowing it would happen because he would cause it to happen, that is when the foreknowledge is of God, not the foreknowledge of man. Men haven't the power to bring their plans into fruition. They'd like to think they could. Very often their plans come unstuck. But the term is used here, Paul, in speaking to King Agrippa, Paul says, [00:13:03] why should all these Jews be so surprised? They knew in advance the kind of person that I am and because they knew in advance, they knew the course that my life would take. I lived in good conscience before God and when I thought something was right before God, I would pursue it at whatever personal cost. They've known me so long, they should have known.

It was inevitable that this would take place. Again, it's speaking of a prior knowledge and what happens at a later date takes character and is in line with the knowledge that was there in advance. Not like the foreknowledge of God, not causing it to happen, but being aware in advance of what would take place. [00:14:06] Now, the next one is Romans 8.

Purpose, foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, glorification. We haven't time for all of them.

This scripture makes valid the statement that foreknowledge is not only of events, foreknowledge is of persons whom he did foreknow.

Now, I'm going to be bold and make another statement. Test it against the plumb line of scripture.

[00:15:02] If I'm saved, all the credit belongs to God.

If I'm lost, all the blame lies at my door.

Those who don't read the scriptures at all or read scriptures superficially sometimes think that they

can blame God for everything.

Oh, God chooses some for blessing, therefore, by man's logic, he chooses the rest for judgment. Not at all.

If I'm damned, it's because I'm a sinner by nature and by practice.

[00:16:03] I never could be said to earn or deserve salvation by believing the gospel.

Do you accept that?

Oh, but you say, we are exalted to trust the saviour. Well, we might.

Sometimes said, well, of course, God knew in advance that I would believe the gospel and therefore, he's chosen me. That puts the credit or the onus on me.

Yes, of course, as a sinner, I must needs believe that I deserve nothing but destruction.

Again, none of my works, not even my belief on Jesus in itself qualifies for salvation.

[00:17:11] In my responsible life, I need to repent of my sins and cast myself upon the mercy of God, the responsibility of man.

The foreknowledge of God, again, let me say, has a strongly causative element. God chooses to bless and I could never deserve it.

It's all due to the goodness of God. Now, it is true, patent in scripture, that there is a person in responsibility, a person trusts the saviour, the responsibility of man. There's a person who is foreknown by God, chosen for blessing. [00:18:03] God says, I'm setting my blessing upon him or her. Praise be to God, it's the same person. There's no confusion. There's no manipulation.

Both things are true. Think back to Acts 2.23.

God didn't make men crucify his son. He knew that they would.

But God sent his son by his determinate counsel and foreknowledge. Man in responsibility took him and crucified him.

I'm thankful to God that my blessing doesn't depend upon anything that I've ever done. Doesn't even depend on my having the faith to trust the saviour. Read carefully Ephesians 2, 8 and 9.

[00:19:01] Good Bible reading question. Which is the gift of God?

The grace, the faith or the salvation?

You may well come to the conclusion all three are the gift of God. God never forces someone to believe the gospel against their response.

Again, God never prevents from believing anyone who trusts the saviour. They go along in tandem, in parallel. The responsibility of man and the sovereignty of God. There's no confusion at all. It is a matter of great assurance to know that all the blessing comes to you in the goodness of God. Doesn't depend upon you at all in any way. [00:20:03] Oh yes, having received the gift, we are responsible to grow in the knowledge and the enjoyment and appreciation of it. But however well we respond, we never deserve the blessing that's been freely given to us by the grace of God. And here in this lovely sequence, we read whom he did foreknow. And I would suggest again, that's stronger than saying God knew in advance that you would trust the saviour. Therefore, he's put his label of ownership on you and says, I know he's going to believe. Therefore, I know it in advance. He is marked out for blessing. That's not what scripture says. Scripture says, God has foreknown the person.

[00:21:01] And this link of blessing is attributed to those who are the fruit of the purpose of God and the foreknowledge of God. Not an easy thing to accept. It's against natural reasoning. Best to keep the things distinct and say how wonderful. All the blessing is due to God.

I can enjoy it because God has made it freely available. And as far as my responsibility is concerned, I've turned my back upon my sins. And I'm going to avail myself of the blessing that God alone can bestow. Chapter 11 and verse 2.

It's that introduction to verse 2 which concerns us for the moment. As with the purpose of God, mentioned in chapter 11, so with the foreknowledge of God. [00:22:05] The foreknowledge of God is related to persons, individuals, Christians. It's also related to the nation of Israel. Verse 8 says, Because the blessing was promised, before even they were born.

I'm thinking of chapter 9 verse 11. The purpose of God singled out the nation of Israel before they were even born. So the blessing cannot be determined, conditioned or altered in any way by things that happen in the lifetime of the children of Israel. [00:23:02] As to purpose, so with foreknowledge. The doubt arises.

Israel in disobedience turned away from God. Making a larger blessing.

A higher blessing. A deeper blessing. An eternal blessing. A heavenly blessing. Available to whosoever will. The question arises, has God changed his mind? Has he abandoned his earthly people? Will they now forfeit their blessing forever, because God has turned for the moment away from Israel, preaching the gospel to whosoever will, Jew or Gentile. The apostle says no.

God has not abandoned them. Not only is blessing for Israel as a nation, [00:24:02] marked out in advance as the fruit of the purpose of God, they themselves as a nation are the fruit of the foreknowledge of God. As with individual believers in this dispensation, so as to the nation of Israel, the scripture says, God hath not cast away his people whom he foreknew. With our finite creature minds, we tend to relate knowledge mainly to things.

Although, of course, we know people. But the foreknowledge of God, and the fact that there are those individuals and the nation of Israel, [00:25:01] for whom blessing is marked out, is attributed to the foreknowledge of God. Israel will be blessed because God has decided that they will be blessed. God is true to himself.

And in advance of the time, even of the people being born into the world, before their first responsible

deed, the foreknowledge of God determined that the nation of Israel would be blessed when the time is ripe. And prophecy tells us when that will be. 1 Peter 1, verse 2.

Must be an important subject.

All persons of the Godhead involved. God the Father.

The foreknowledge of God the Father. [00:26:03] Sanctification of the Spirit. The blood of Jesus Christ. Have you noticed? In all important matters relating to our salvation, the Godhead is at one in its achievement.

Father, Son and Spirit.

Sometimes you have to look for it.

Spread out throughout the pages of scripture. Here the Lord is kind and they are all put in the same verse. And while there is that particular work attributed to the appropriate divine person, here it is said that those who are blessed now [00:27:01] in this dispensation are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Very often when the persons of the Godhead are spoken of in relation to a work or a blessing, very often the Father is seen to be the source, the Son is seen to be the means and the Spirit is seen to be the power. Follow that through.

And here consistent with that, that which is attributed to the Father is that which goes right back to the origin of the blessing. Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

By the way, [00:28:01] those who consider these things superficially try to find fault with what scripture presents. Very often the word that people fight against because they don't see how it's used in scripture is the word predestination.

If the Lord will, we'll hope to look at that one of the succeeding evenings.

But what men, many believers, not well instructed in scripture, what men put against the word predestination, really they should be putting against the word election or choice. We'll come to predestination if the Lord will.

Peter, writing to those who'd been scattered abroad, [00:29:06] living in difficult days, they needed an anchor for the soul. And Peter goes right back to the source of the blessing and he says, now look, the end is sure. You've got nothing to worry about. You've been chosen in advance.

God has put the seal on you that he foreknows you. He knows you as one of those that he has chosen for blessing. Let me say again, it is doing no disservice to your faith in saying your faith has not wrought the blessing. Your faith may well enjoy the blessing. That is your responsible entrance into the blessing. Oh, but it doesn't depend upon you or anything that you have done. [00:30:04] You are elect according to the foreknowledge of God. God in his foreknowledge has singled you out. You then get on to more responsible elements like obedience of faith, the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ and so on. But, Peter says, your blessing rests on a firm foundation, the foundation of the foreknowledge of God. God has singled you out, has known you in advance as one of his own. That does not do away in any way with the responsibility of man. It shows that the golden chain of blessing

hasn't one weak link. If any of the blessing depended upon me or my response, [00:31:03] there'd be a very weak link in the chain and the chain wouldn't stand the smallest test. Look on to verse 20 of the same chapter. Sir, to get your concordance out, and you'll find that the word foreordained in verse 20 is the same word which is usually translated foreknowledge. Now, the word is not used very often. Get your concordance out. I'll be surprised if you find more than these seven instances I've read. If there are more, I'm sure they're along the same line. Peter says, you know, you know, you weren't redeemed with corruptible things. He says, you know that.

But oh, he says, [00:32:02] redemption depends upon a greater knowledge than yours. Thank God that you know that you are not redeemed with corruptible things but with the precious, precious blood of Christ. But Peter says, the real knowledge, the important knowledge, was the foreknowledge of God that Christ would come into the world and substitute himself as the Lamb of God that God's righteous claims might be met.

God knew in advance that Christ would so come and so suffer and so die because God had decided that that would be the way. [00:33:03] The foreknowledge of God has this strong causative element. He knows things will happen because he has chosen to make them happen. For ordained before the foundation of the world he knew the world eternally. But of course, it came to light in time, manifested in these last times for you. The last example, 2 Peter 3, verse 17.

Ye know these things before. Same word.

You foreknow.

Now, consider what Peter is saying to Christian believers, to you and me. He says, you've been brought into blessing as a result of the foreknowledge of God. [00:34:06] God knew what was going to happen because he was going to make it happen. He says, now you owe to God a response for that. Peter says, I've opened your eyes. I've drawn aside the veil. I've given you a bit of prophecy. I've told you what God is going to do in the future. And he says, with this foreknowledge, knowing what God is going to do in the future, that should affect the way that you live now. Now notice the difference. With the foreknowledge of God, God's foreknowledge, God acts now in the light of what he's going to do in the future. [00:35:01] Christian foreknowledge acts now in the light of what God is going to do in the future. I will do no more than read these verses again. See if that's the implication that you read into this. I think it's perfectly plain. God has made plain in advance how he will head all things up in Christ for the glory of God and the blessing of man. Those who in their responsibility spurn the claims of God are going headlong for destruction. Peter says, I've told you and you know it.

Now you know what God's going to do then. Surely that should make a difference to the way you live now. Act upon the foreknowledge that God has given you. Same principle, knowledge of the future affects conduct and actions [00:36:03] at the present time. I'll read these verses again and we must finish. Ye therefore beloved seeing ye know these things before beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked fall from your own steadfastness but grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to him be glory both now and forever. Amen. Now our closing hymn is 337.

If you look at verse 2 foreknowledge choice all these terms come in again. As thine thou didst foreknow us from all eternity thy chosen loved ones ever [00:37:02] keep present to thine eye and when was come the moment thou calling by thy grace didst gently firmly draw us each from his hiding

place. 337. . . .