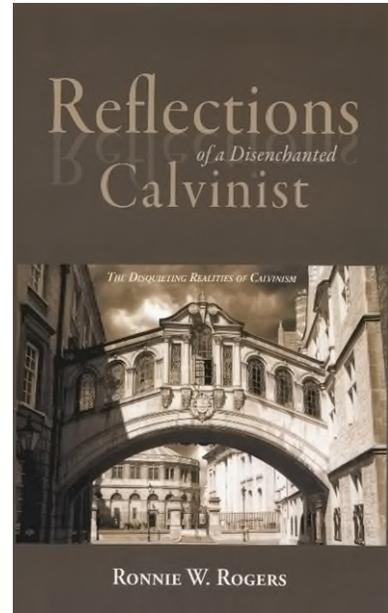


## Predestination and Foreknowledge

1. I affirm that God's predetermination and foreknowledge are coextensive, which is to say that God is essentially omniscient rather than knowing things perceptively. God has always known all contingencies (decisions yet to be actualized) because even though they do not exist external to the mind of God, they have eternally existed in the mind of God by virtue of the nature of His being. Moreover, I affirm that the distinction between predestining something to happen a certain way and predestining to allow some human freedom to determine outcomes are both within the scope of the biblical meaning of predestination and foreknowledge. I further affirm that both understandings of predestination are compatible with and demonstrative of sovereignty so long as He made the decision freely, which He did in fact do, thereby being part of His plan rather than contrary to His plan.



The Calvinist position that God elects to regenerate some, the elect, and all that He regenerates will necessarily believe inescapably leaves God determining to send some to hell who could have been spared that torment if He had chosen for them to be spared because all that He elects to regenerate must believe and all that He chooses not to regenerate cannot believe. This position is in contrast to the position I am advocating, whereby God enables all to have a *real* choice of whether to believe or not, and those who go to hell are there because they rejected a *real* chance to not be there.

I further affirm God's omniscience, which includes perfect, exhaustive knowledge of every actuality, potentiality, contingency, and conditional reality. Thus, God knows everything about the future including every potential and actual choice of every person. He also knows the consequence of every potential and actual choice. God's foreknowledge is in reality just knowledge for God. He has known every future event in an eternal present. W. T. Shedd notes, "Omniscience excludes both foreknowledge and subsequent knowledge."<sup>14</sup> Augustine said, "What is foreknowledge but the knowledge of the future. But what is future to God? For, if the divine knowledge includes all things at one instant, all things are present to him, and there is nothing future; and his knowledge is knowledge, and not foreknowledge."<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the future, or tomorrow for us, has always been known to God. In this sense, there is no future with God, although He differentiates between what is past, present, and yet to sequentially happen. As far as knowledge, He knows the future as well and certain as He knows the past. Charnocke says, "the knowledge of one thing is not, in God, before another; one act of knowledge

doth not beget another. In regard of the objects themselves, one thing is before another; one year before another; one generation of men before another; one is the cause, and the other is the effect; in the creature's mind there is such a succession, and God knows there will be such a succession; but there is no such order in God's knowledge; for he knows all those successions by one glance, without any successions of knowledge in himself."<sup>16</sup> This is what I mean by saying God's predestination and God's foreknowledge are coextensive. God does see the sequence of events, but he does not learn from looking at sequential actions or choices and then choose to act because He sees them all simultaneously.

Shedd says, "God has a knowledge of all things that are possible ....He knows all that he can do ....It is knowledge that... never causes an act of the will....God has knowledge of what is conditionally possible, that is, of those events which have never come to pass, but which might have occurred under certain possible conditions ....For example, God knows that if a certain person should live to middle life, he would become exceedingly vicious and wicked. He prevents this by an early death of the person. Biblical instances are Matthew 11:21-23 (the repentance of Tyre and Sidon; of Sodom and Gomorrah); 1 Samuel 23:5-14; Jeremiah 38:17-20."<sup>17</sup>

So when we speak of God's foreknowledge, it does not convey the idea of learning, or becoming aware, but rather as Shedd notes, "Foreknowledge, strictly taken, implies an interval between the knowledge and the event."<sup>18</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer says, "Omniscience brings everything—past, present, and future—with equal reality before the mind of God."<sup>19</sup> Again, he notes "The omniscience of God comprehends all things—things past, things present, and things future, and the possible as well as the actual."<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, "by divine arrangement, events do follow in sequence or chronological order. Yet, to God, the things of the past are as real as though now present and the things of the future are as real as though past. (Isaiah 46:10; Romans 4:17)"<sup>21</sup> Creation was the omnipotent act of bringing knowledge or the conceptual that had existed eternally in the mind of God into experiential knowledge or reality. God was not surprised or in any sense unaware of the choices of Lucifer or Adam and Eve. Although He abhors sin and is perfectly holy in all of His thoughts and actions, He chose to create man as a free moral agent, with *real* free choice. God never desires sin, but rather He always unwaveringly desires holiness. When time is no more, we will understand more fully how even the evil of man and Lucifer fit into God's plan, which ultimately assures that man created in His image with libertarian freedom will live eternally, freely choosing only righteousness. Chafer notes, "The perfect foreknowledge of God was aware of the fact that sin would call for the greatest sacrifice even God could make—the death of His Son .... God was not overtaken by unforeseen calamity and failure. His purposes are being executed and will be seen in the end to have been holy, just, and good."<sup>22</sup>

2. I disaffirm that God's infallible foreknowledge or predetermination caused man to sin or spend eternity in hell, and further, that foreknowledge or predetermination eliminates *real* free choices of man in salvation and the first sin. I also disaffirm that God's foreknowledge of events, which makes certain their coming to pass, means that He was the efficient cause or in any way the direct cause of every event that comes to pass. He is the ultimate cause of all good, the direct (efficient) cause of many things, but other events (sin) happen because He sovereignly and freely created *efficient causes*, e.g., man and his ability to choose.

Further, I disaffirm that foreknowledge is the same as causation because epistemology (study of knowledge) deals with foreknowledge and etiology (study of cause) deals with causation, and to conflate the two is a fallacious confusion of categories. I am not saying that *all* knowledgeable Calvinists do this, but it is a common mistake among young Calvinists, as well as many others who label themselves as Calvinist. In fact, the Scripture ties salvation to God's foreknowledge on more than one occasion (Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 1:2). Foreknowledge is not the same as predestination; the very sentence before us distinguishes the two. "His foreknowledge marks out the persons; His predestination determines His purposes and acts on their behalf."<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, I disaffirm that God's absolute foreknowledge of future events or choices necessitates or often even includes, in any sense, that God determined those events or choices in such a way that man did not make an actual free choice, although at times, God certainly does intervene, and has every right to do so. In particular, God's foreknowledge of a person's choice regarding the gospel does not cause the choice. Many often conclude that foreknowledge is causal and therefore there is not a *real* choice between two actual alternatives, e.g. to accept or reject the gospel. Chafer notes, "Divine prescience of itself implies no element of necessity or determination, though it does imply certainty."<sup>24</sup>

What God knows will certainly come to pass, but that certainty is not causality. God's foreknowledge and man's ability to choose are both presented in the Scripture with clarity and frequency. Chafer says of this, "On the one hand, revelation presents God as foreknowing all things including the actions of human agents, and apart from such knowledge God would be ignorant and to that degree imperfect. On the other hand, revelation appeals to the wills of men with the evident assumption that man is capable of a free choice—'whosoever will may come.'"<sup>25</sup> Needless to say, I am disaffirming that the plea of Scripture "whosoever will may come" cannot be answered by grace enabled faith. According to Calvinism, this plea is true, but equally true is that no one will come until God selectively regenerates him, and then he will most certainly come. This belief transforms this beautiful plea of the Savior into a recitation of brute facts. Of course, consistent Calvinism asserts, "whosoever can come", but the unspoken counterpart of Calvinism is that whosoever really does not mean anyone because only some of the "whosoever" will be selected to come; the unselected *cannot* come. This is a disquieting reality.

Some ask, would God be wrong, and therefore not perfect, if He knew Adam would sin, and Adam chose at the last moment to not sin? The answer is no. Because if Adam's real free choice would have resulted in Adam choosing not to sin, God would have eternally known that. Chafer says concerning this, "If the question be asked whether the moral agent has freedom to act otherwise than as God foresees he will act, it may be replied that the human will because of its inherent freedom of choice is capable of electing the opposite course to that divinely foreknown; but he will not do so. If he did so, that would be the thing which God foreknew. The divine foreknowledge does not coerce; it merely knows what the human choice will be."<sup>26</sup> Therefore, contrary to Calvinism, foreknowledge establishes certainty but not causation.

Although all human examples of God's foreknowledge seem to break down at some point, e.g. humans never can know the future perfectly; the following illustrates the difference between foreknowing and causing even though the foreknowledge is not absolute. I tell people that I know whom Gina (my wife for over 41 years) will vote for when she goes into the voting booth. I know this with mathematical certainty. I can tell you whom she voted for before I ever see her or talk with her after casting her vote. Why? Is it because I forced her, I coerced her, or that I somehow rigged the booth to cause her to vote a certain way? Absolutely not! I know how she will vote because I know her intimately. My knowledge of how she would vote actually has no bearing on her choice of whom to vote for, but rather I know because I know her. Therefore, knowledge and causation of certain actions are not synonymous.

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14 William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2<sup>n</sup>d ed., vol. 1 (n.d., reprint with introduction by Edward E. Hindson, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), 355.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 355-356.

18. Ibid., 355.

19. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*. vol. I, 192.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 197.

23. Collected Writings of W.E. Vine, (Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1996 Logos electronic version), Romans 8:29.

24. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*. vol. I, 194.

25. Ibid., 194-195.

26. Ibid., 196.