

Lecture 7 – Election and Foreknowledge; Election and Romans 9:1-24

*All Bible quotes are from NASB unless noted otherwise. All capitalized words in the NASB denote that these are direct quotations from the Old Testament.

Questions we will ponder – Does God elect in eternity past (Eph 1:4) those whom He foreknows will respond out of their own free will to the offer of gospel at a point in time (“foreknowledge view)? Does this reflect the biblical data? If so, how does it reconcile with other verses that show that God’s choosing for salvation is NOT based at all on what He sees in the individual whether good or bad nor ANY human choices or human wills, but on HIS will/choice alone (Rom 9:11, 16-18; John 1:13; Eph 1:4-6; 1 Cor 1:30-31; 2 Thess 2:13; these verses are shown in full at the end of the section on foreknowledge)?

“Foreknowledge” in the New Testament

The noun for “foreknowledge” is *prognosis* in Greek and appears in Acts 2:23 and 1 Peter 1:2. The verb to “foreknow” is *proginosko* and appears in Acts 26:5; Rom 8:29; 11:2; 1 Peter 1:20 and 2 Peter 3:17. The fact that these words appear only in these NT passages allows us to examine them fully in their context.

Scholars (Greek lexicons) note that both of these words have three main nuances to them.

- **The first** is that of “intellectual knowledge/awareness” beforehand or *prescience*.
- **The second** is that of relational knowledge that is intimate and intentional that has its origins in a prior time or context. They come to this conclusion because the word “know” in OT usage often has the sense of a relational/covenant context. For example, “Then Adam **knew** his wife and she conceived” (Gen 4:1). Clearly, the knowing in this context (*yada* in Hebrew) is intimate relations in a covenant context of marriage. Similarly, Amos 3:2 reads, ““You only have I **known** of all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (NKJ). It is obvious that God has intellectual knowledge of all the peoples of the earth so the first nuance doesn’t make sense here. The clear understanding is that God has a special and selective relationship with Israel. This nuance leads most translations to read, “You only I have chosen of all the families of the earth” (NASB, NET, etc.). This nuance of “knowing” in a special, selective, and relational sense comes across in several NT passages seen below (John 10:27 and following).
- **The third** nuance of “foreknowledge” is that of foreordaining or predetermining something.

When examining the nature of *knowing* as in the second nuance above, we can see how it shows through in these verses:

John 10:27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I **know** them, and they follow Me;

1 Corinthians 8:3 but if anyone loves God, he is **known** by Him.

Galatians 4:9 But now that you have come to **know** God, or rather to be **known** by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

Matthew 7:21, 23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven— only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²³ Then I will declare to them, 'I never **knew** you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!' (NET)

- When examining the context of “knowing” in these passages it is clear that it is not simply “intellectual awareness”, but that of a relationship in a covenant sense. Clearly, Jesus has an exhaustive intellectual awareness or knowledge of every single human being (especially at the end of time when He is judging these people), so when He says that He never knew them, He is saying that He never had a covenantal relationship with any of them.

Let’s examine all the passages in the NT dealing with “foreknowledge” or “foreknowing”.

Acts 26:5 since they have **known** about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived *as* a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.

2 Peter 3:17 You therefore, beloved, **knowing this beforehand**, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness,

- In these two passages are two out of 5 instances of the verb to “foreknow” in the NT. It is clear that these refer to *prescience* or knowing something beforehand. It is important to note that this nuance is used here of humans. As we examine the others, it will become evident that these verbs are never used in this sense with God as the subject.

Acts 2:23 this *Man*, delivered over by the **predetermined plan** and **foreknowledge** of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.

- This sermon was preached by Peter and becomes appropriate as a foundation when examining the other uses of these words in his first epistle in reference to God as the subject. In this passage, this is the first of the two noun usages (the other is 1 Peter 1:2). Scholars recognize that the term foreknowledge is grammatically tied together with the previous phrase translated as “predetermined plan”. This grammatical principle is called a hendiadys and links the two word/phrases together not just grammatically (through the use of one article for both nouns), but more importantly thematically. Therefore, of the three nuances, the third is the most likely. Jesus was delivered over by God to death through God’s “predetermined plan” and “foreordination”. In other words, God predestined Jesus’ death. This is consistent with Peter’s words in Acts 4:27-28.

1 Peter 1:1-2 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are **chosen [elect]** ² **according to the foreknowledge of God** the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

This is the second of two instances of the noun foreknowledge in the NT (the other is Acts 2:23). It says clearly that we are chosen or elect according the foreknowledge of God. All nuances should be determined by context, but unfortunately the context doesn’t provide much help or a decisive understanding. If it means “foreseeing” (nuance #1) in the sense that our eternal election before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4) is based on the foreseen choice that we make, then we have to go back and reconcile the other verses mentioned that it’s not based on our choice, but God’s alone (see above). Additionally, no mention is made here of any choice on man’s part. It simply says according to God’s foreknowledge. In other words, based on nuance #1 it could read, “we are chosen according to God’s intellectual awareness”. The Arminian perspective sees here that our election is based on God’s intellectual awareness of our free will choice in the future. It is possible (but not likely) in this narrow context to mean this, but has its own problems as just stated. Nuance #2 (relational/covenantal) or nuance #3 (predetermination) both provide no problems and also fit nicely with Peter’s further comments in 1:18 concerning the additional facet of our salvation in being rooted in our connection with Jesus’ death being predestined prior to the world. It also would be consistent with Peter’s theology and sermon in Acts 2:23 and 4:27-28. See next section.

1 Peter 1:18-20 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood of Christ*. ²⁰ For He was **foreknown** before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you.

- This is a verb and of the three nuances, which makes the most sense? In number 1, are we to imagine that God was simply “foreseeing” Jesus’ offering up His spotless blood? That Peter’s point here is that God has *prescience* or simple “intellectual awareness” of Jesus death? This is not likely in that there is no need for God to foresee His own actions in the future, because He, Himself, has decreed His own actions. He already knows His own plan and to “foresee” them would be illogically redundant. Number two is more likely than number 1 in that it is true that Father had a covenant relationship with the Son before the foundation of the world (John 17:4). This has merit, but the most likely in the context is that Peter is reminding his readers that our redemption is rooted in the death of Jesus and that it was “foreordained” before the foundation of the world.

Romans 11:1 I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected His **people whom He foreknew**. Or do you not know what the

Scripture says in *the passage about* Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? ³ "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." ⁴ But what is the divine response to him? "**I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL.**" ⁵ In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a **remnant according to God's gracious choice**. ⁶ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. ⁷ What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, **but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;**

- Nuance #1 doesn't make much sense here. Of course, God has intellectual awareness of His people. No mention of a foreseen choice is evident and actually contradicts 11:5 where it's God's choice mentioned. Nuance #2 and #3 both could work, but #2 fits the best. Amos 3:2 and other passages show that God made special and eternal promises to Israel and God has not rejected His people due to those promises. God is shown as the active subject in keeping/reserving for Himself a remnant numbering 7,000. It is the same in the present time, says Paul, in that there is a remnant of Jewish people following Jesus based on **God's gracious choice** (v. 5).

Romans 8:28-33 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His purpose*. ²⁹For **those whom He foreknew**, He also **predestined to become** conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He **predestined**, He also **called**; and these whom He called, He also **justified**; and these whom He justified, He also **glorified**. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's **elect**? God is the one who justifies;

- Nuance #1 has trouble in that it doesn't say that God "foresaw" a future choice, but instead God "foreknew" a people (like Rom 11:2). It's not a "what", but a "whom" that God foreknew. Is it simple intellectual awareness of a people and their free will choice that God is "foreseeing"? Not likely based on having to reconcile with the verses below.
- The confidence that we have from the promise of Rom 8:28 is confirmed in that it's not based on something that God sees in us down the corridors of time, but the promises are true because God has predetermined to have a covenantal relationship with us that leads to the golden chain of our predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. A chain that has absolutely no gaps nor failures, but is guaranteed to success personally because of God's choice.

Romans 9:11 for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls,

Ephesians 1:4-6 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He **predestined** us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the **kind intention of His will**.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has **chosen you from the beginning for salvation** through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

James 1:18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

Romans 9:16-18 So then it *does not depend* on the **man who wills** or the man who runs, **but on God** who has mercy. ¹⁷For the scripture says to Pharaoh: "For this **very purpose I have raised you up**, that I may **demonstrate my power** in you, and that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth." ¹⁸ So then, God has mercy on whom he chooses to have mercy, and he hardens whom he chooses to harden.

John 1:13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh **nor of the will of man, but of God**.

1 Corinthians 1:30-31 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, **BOAST IN THE LORD.**"

Exposition of Romans 9:1-24

The main thrust of Paul's explanation of the **God's purpose in election** (Rom 9:11) is in verses 1-24. There are several questions that Paul answers and it will be helpful as we go through the text to put these questions up front and then observe the answer Paul outlines.

The background of all of Romans 8, especially verses 28-39 provide incredible hope, confidence, and assurance in the unfathomable promises that God has made (cf. 11:33). However, can we be sure that God will keep these promises to us? Didn't God also make amazing promises to Israel and yet very few of them are saved? Should that cause us to doubt God's promises to us?

What is the main characteristic of God's principle in salvation promises (Rom 9:1-5)?

Romans 9:1-5

¹I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit,

² that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.

³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,

⁴ who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises,

⁵ whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

- Paul has great sorrow over the fact that many/most of his physically ethnic Jewish **individual** kinsmen are separated from Christ and are accursed (Geek *anathema* meaning unsaved). V. 3.
- What makes it even more intense for Paul ("unceasing grief") is that his kinsmen have great privileges and promises that were given to them corporately starting with the patriarch fathers and ultimately the Messiah. V.4-5
- Even though these promises are incredible and provide some advantages by having access to the Scripture, the Jews are no different than Gentiles in that they are declared sinners and in need of a Savior (see Rom 3:1-9).
- The national and corporate promises were never meant to guarantee salvation to every last individual which is demonstrated in that Paul has grief for those Jewish kinsmen which currently are unsaved.
- This truth tells us that there is another principle at work in the salvation of the Jewish people because Paul proclaims that many are not saved. Why are they unsaved? Aren't all the promises enough to guarantee salvation? Paul brings up in seed form here the **principle of the remnant** that he brings up again in Romans 11:1-10, 14.
- Even though there are corporate elements in Romans 9-11, Paul is concerned about **individuals** who are accursed. He is not weeping over the loss of corporate promises, but over individuals. We will see that the calling and election to salvation that God did for individuals within corporate Israel in the remaining verses shows that it is not simply a calling to theocratic privileges because at the time of Paul writing Romans, all Israel still enjoyed these corporately.

Since there are only some Jews being saved, has the Word of God (all promises) fallen/failed (Rom 9:6-13)?

Romans 9:6-13

6a But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed [fallen].

6b For **all the ones from Israel**, these are not [the true] Israel; (translation by John Piper for this line)

7a nor are **they all children** [just] **because they are Abraham's descendants**,

7b but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS (SEED) WILL BE NAMED (CALLED)." [Gen 21:12]

8a that is, it is **not the children of the flesh** who are children of God,

8b **but the children of the promise** are regarded as descendants.

9a For this is the **word of promise**: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, [Gen 18:10]

9b AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON." [Gen 18:14]

10a And not only [did Abraham receive a promise],

10b but there was Rebekah also [who received a promise],

10c when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac;
 11a for though *the twins* were **not yet born**
 11b and **had not done anything good or bad,**
 11c so that God's **purpose** according to *His* choice [election] would stand [not fall],
 11d **not because of works**
 11e **but because of Him who calls,**
 12 it was said to her, "**THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER.**" [Gen 25:23]
 13a Just as it is written, "**JACOB I LOVED,**
 13b **BUT ESAU I HATED.**" [Malachi 1:2]

- The Word of God has not fallen because the principle that God is using to keep His Word from falling/failing is due to His purposes according to HIS CHOICE (election) being at work in history. Even from the beginning (V. 6a, 11c).
- From the beginning of God's corporate promises to Israel, everyone within corporate Israel are not automatically the true Israel (saved) just because they are a descendant of Abraham or Isaac. Repentance and a new heart (circumcision of the heart) has always been the requirement (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; Matt 3:9). A truly saved (spiritual) Israelite is one who is both a physical Jew and a spiritual Jew (born again spiritually-circumcised of heart). Paul brought this out already in Romans 2:28-29. ²⁸*For the real Jew is not merely Jewish outwardly: true circumcision is not only external and physical.* ²⁹*On the contrary, the real Jew is one inwardly; and true circumcision is of the heart, spiritual not literal; so that his praise comes not from other people but from God* (CJB).
- God's overarching principle and purpose in election to salvation is shown in giving His calling (including individual salvation) not through physical ancestry (6b; 7a; 8a; cf. John 1:13, "blood") nor based on anyone's good or bad decisions (11b; cf. John 1:13), nor because of anyone's works (actions/decisions, 11d; cf. Eph 2:8-9), but through God's calling (7b; 11e), God's action in "coming" (9a), and God's own purpose and choice (11c; cf. John 1:13; 1 Cor 1:30-31, etc.).
- The ones saved within corporate Israel are the true spiritually saved Israel (6b- not accursed nor separated, 9:3), children (7a), children of God and children of promise (8a-8b) who are the called ones (7b) based on God's choice (11c; 11e). They are called and chosen to be loved (13a; cf. Eph 1:4-5; Jer 31:3). The green colors show the consistency of various phrases used to describe those saved and/or called by God in His election process. The red color shows the corporate nature of the groups/individuals not automatically reflecting salvation/calling.
- God's calling came to Isaac over Ishmael, but in case someone might say that Isaac was chosen because he was not Egyptian, God then calls Jacob over Esau. These were conceived from the same parents (10c), and had the same mother, same womb, and born at the same time. Jacob was chosen before having done any good nor evil (11b; 11d). Therefore, this clearly shows that God's choice of Jacob over Esau was based on God's choice alone (11c; 11e) and was not based on any difference between them. God does not choose based on any distinctions between individuals.
- Even though most of corporate Israel is unsaved, the Word of God has not failed because some Jewish people (like Peter, Paul, etc.) are being saved. This is consistent with God keeping all His promises through the principle of God's purpose in election that He was using even in OT times (8a-8b, 11a; 11c; Rom 11:1-10, 14).
- Understanding human depravity and sinfulness of all people, we should not be shocked that God chose to hate Esau (cf. Psalm 11:5; 5:5), but instead be amazed that God chose to set His mercy, grace, and love on Jacob who was also a sinner.

Since God is selective and His purposes in election are based on His choices alone, is He unrighteous (Rom 9:14-18)?

Romans 9:14-18

14a What shall we say then?
 14b There is no injustice [literally, unrighteousness] with God, is there?
 14c May it never be!
 15a For He says to Moses, "**I WILL MERCY ON WHOM I MERCY,** (literal translation of Greek)
 15b **AND I WILL COMPASSION ON WHOM I COMPASSION.**" (literal translation of Greek)
 16a So then it *does not depend on the man who wills* or *the man who runs,*

16b **but on God** who mercies. (literal translation).
 17a For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "**FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP,**
 17b **TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU,**
 17c **AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH.**"
 18a So then He has **mercy** on whom **He desires** (wills),
 18b and He **hardens** whom **He desires** (wills).

- The main issue is how we define injustice (unrighteousness). Piper notes two possibilities of the definition. The first is one that the objector raises (9:14b), "Therefore, the view of divine righteousness which the objection presupposed is that a righteous God must elect persons on the basis of their real and valuable distinctives, whether racial (Jewishness) or moral (keepers of the law). On this assumption God would indeed be unrighteous to elect Jacob over Esau before they were born or had done anything good or evil" (p. 93).
- The second definition of righteousness that takes into consideration this entire section (9:14-18) and the context of the quotes from the OT (Exodus 33:19 quoted in Rom 9:15; Exodus 9:16 quoted in Rom 9:17) is summarized by Piper, "If we paraphrase and bring out the implicit understanding of righteousness, the argument runs like this: since God's *righteousness* consists basically in his acting unswervingly for his own glory, and since his glory consists basically in his *sovereign freedom* in the bestowal and withholding of mercy, there is no unrighteousness with God (Rom 9:11ff). On the contrary, he must pursue his "electing purpose" apart from man's "willing and running," for only in his sovereign, free bestowal of mercy on whomever he will is God acting out of a full allegiance to his name and esteem for his glory" (p. 122).
- For God to be God, He must decisively and unapologetically protect His own glory/honor. If God does not protect His own glory, He will show Himself to be unrighteous. One aspect of His attributes that He must demonstrate is His sovereignty in distributing His mercy and grace as He chooses out of His own will. No one can possibly or even potentially lay claim or take credit that they received His mercy because of them (even out of their own free will). If they want to credit anyone (boast/brag), it is that they know the Lord and the Lord chose them not based on their own anything, but simply because God chose to do this (Jer 9:23-24; 1 Cor 1:30-31).
- We must always remember that God owes all people wrath and mercy/grace is never owed, deserved, earned or received based on the human will. Mercy/grace is only received by the creature because God chose it to be (Rom 11:6; 4:4; 2 Tim 1:9).
- The text is not saying that God's act of hardening is creating fresh evil in the heart of Pharaoh because we know that Pharaoh is a sinner worthy of death and is already a sinful lump of clay (cf. Rom 9:21). Additionally, we should not read into the text that God hardened Pharaoh because he was already hard hearted (see Ex 4:21 where God was the first to mention hardening). Further, we need to recognize that Pharaoh's hardening was God's initiative for the sovereign purpose of showing God's own glory and making His name great (Ex 14:3-4, 17-18) which according to the previous bullet points is an act of righteousness by God.
- Once again, Paul is showing that the principle of God's purposes according to election is evident. Pharaoh is in the same unchosen line as Ishmael, Esau, and other Jewish individual kinsmen of Paul who are not saved. We will see that just as God's choosing for mercy or hardening is not limited to any specific ethnic group or individuals based on works, it does include individuals of Jews and Gentiles both (Rom 9:24, 30; 11:5, 14, 29-32).

This principle that you, Paul, are showing is ridiculous because how can God find fault and hold us accountable when we can't resist His will anyway?

Romans 9:19-24

19a You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault?"

19b For who resists His will?"

20a On the contrary, who are you, **O man**, who answers back to **God**?

20b The thing **molded** will not say to the **molder**, "Why did you make me like this," will it?

21 Or does not the **potter** have a right over the **clay**, to make from the **same lump** one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

22a What if God, although willing to demonstrate **His wrath**
 22b and to make **His power known**,
 22c endured with much patience **vessels of wrath prepared for destruction**?
 23 And *He did so* to make known the **riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy**, which He prepared beforehand **for glory**,
 24 **even us, whom He also called**, not from among **Jews** only, but also from among **Gentiles**.

- The language of 20a “answers back” in Greek is not a humble request for clarification, but a declaration of rejection of the evidence that God has a sovereign right to mercy and harden as He chooses.
- Paul responds by saying that any creature has no right (nor knowledge) to question God (the creator/potter/molder). This is consistent with the book of Job where God finally questions Job’s accusations of unfairness, etc. and God calls Job ignorant (38:2) and foolish to argue with the Almighty’s decisions and ways (40:2, 8; cf. Isaiah 55:8-9).
- God is neither embarrassed nor ashamed to vigorously demonstrate His wrath, power, mercy, grace (and His other attributes) in order to magnify His own glory. God prepares vessels of wrath and mercy from the **same lump** in order to demonstrate the riches of His glory upon the vessels of mercy. He does this through **His calling of us** who are from all people groups (Jews and Gentiles).

For more detail on the various viewpoints:

Basinger, David & Randall. *Predestination & Free Will (Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom)*

Jowers, Dennis. *Divine Providence (Four Views)*

Pinnock, Clark. *Grace Unlimited*

Pinnock, Clark. *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*

Piper, John. *The Justification of God*

Schreiner, Thomas. *Romans* (Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament)

Schreiner, Thomas & Bruce Ware, eds. *Still Sovereign*