

GOD'S GRACIOUS FOREKNOWLDGE

May 19, 2019

Romans 8:28-34

“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” Acts 15:18

Mankind suffers the innate deception that he is capable of winning God's favor by his own efforts. This deception is at the core of every false religious system, and opposes the uniform biblical teaching that “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8).

Because man cannot win God's favor by his own merits, that favor must be initiated by God's action. This too is the uniform teaching of Scripture. “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6, 8). “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Jesus said, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit” (John 15:6).

1. Human thought revolts against this truth, for it opposes human pride and self-righteousness (“by grace are ye saved . . . lest any man should boast”). A popular argument against it is that God determines election unto salvation on the basis of His knowing in advance who will believe. This fiction is dispelled by Christ's reaction to Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum (Matthew 11:21-25). He rebuked their stubborn unbelief, was which shown amid the convincing evidence of miracles that confirmed Him as the Son of God. In that rebuke He affirmed, “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 . . . if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.” (11:21, 23). Knowing what would have brought Tyre, Sidon and Sodom unto repentance, He did not provide those works for them. This is much more than simply knowing in advance what would happen.

2. This truth is pervasive throughout Scripture. Biblical characters were chosen by God—they did not choose Him. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Mary, Joseph, the disciples, Paul; yea, all whom Scripture describes as knowing God were chosen by Him. Biblical texts and entire passages teach this (Psalm 65:4; Jeremiah 1:5; John 10:1-17; Acts 9; Romans 8:28-39; Galatians 1:15; Ephesians 1; I Peter 1:2; 2:9). Christ prayed, “not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. (John 17:9). In the Old Testament, God's truth was revealed, not to everyone, but to the people of Israel. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit determined where the gospel would be preached and where it would be withheld (Acts 16:6-10). God alone determines the place of our birth, whether a place where Christ is known, or a place where He is not known.

3. Objections to this truth are more than might be addressed in a single message. One is that God would not choose some and bypass others. Yet Scripture shows that He did exactly that (Abraham, Jeremiah, Paul, to cite a few). Another is that God will not violate man's “free will.”

It is notable that Scripture does not teach that man's will is "free." It teaches the opposite, that man's will is in bondage to his sinful nature. Jesus taught that anyone who sins is enslaved to sin (John 8:34). Scripture explains that we are spiritually dead, "by nature the children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:1-3); that our whole being is in bondage to spiritual death and to sin.

Another objection insists that acceptance of this truth means the predestination of some to hell. It does not. Scripture teaches that predestination is unto spiritual life (Romans 8:28-34), not to damnation; that election is unto salvation, not unto condemnation (John 3:15-21). Yet one who objects on this basis faces the same objection against his own belief. All believers face the mystery set before us by this sequence of questions: 1) Does God create every human being? The answer is, "Yes!" 2) Before God creates a human being, does He know whether that person will believe, or rebel and be damned? Any who believe the biblical teaching regarding what God knows must answer, "Yes." 3) Why, then, does God create those whom He knows will never believe and be saved; whom He knows will be condemned?

No one knows. We must embrace the admission made by the Apostle Paul, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (I Corinthians 13:9, 12). We must accept the biblical teaching, "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). And, we must not reject the biblical teaching on election because of our lack of knowledge on other questions.

4. What must be our response to this truth?

Christ preached, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). "God . . . now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

Believe the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of God's people. The evidence that they are God's people is their faith in Christ. **Jesus said,** "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:17-29). "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:16-18).

We must respond with humble, reverent worship, acknowledging our limitations and God's infinite wisdom. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" (Romans 11:33, 34).

Against objections, the biblical question must be asked, “O man, who art thou that repliest against God?”

“For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?” (Romans 9:15-21).