

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Weekly Edition – May 8, 2015

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Life Through the Spirit (con't again!)

²⁶ *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.*

²⁸ *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

More Than Conquerors

³¹ *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:*

*"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

³⁷ *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Foreknew, Predestined, Called, Justified, Glorified

- 1) This week we will endeavor to comprehend the powerful promises of God spoken by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by Paul in Romans 8:28-30.
- 2) We will begin with an in-depth probe of God's foreknowledge and what Holy Scripture has to say about it in relation to us, namely:
 - a) God desires the salvation of all, not only the salvation of the "elect."

Outline of Romans

1. **Paul's credentials**
(1:1-1:18)
2. **Justification by Faith (1:18-11:36)**
 - a. **Sin – the "need" for Salvation**
 - 1) of Gentiles (1:18-2:16)
 - 2) of Jews (2:17-3:8)
 - 3) universal need for Salvation (3:9-20)
 - b. **Justification by Faith - the "Provision" made for Salvation**
 - 1) God's Righteousness through Faith (3:21-31)
 - 2) Abraham as an Example (4:1-25)
 - c. **Freedom - the "Result" of Salvation**
 - 1) Freedom from Wrath (5:1-21)
 - 2) Freedom from Sin (6:1-23)
 - 3) Freedom from The Law (7:1-25)
 - 4) Freedom from Death (8:1-39)
 - d. **Jew and Gentile - The "Scope" of Salvation**
 - 1) God chooses to save Believers (9:1-33)
 - 2) Israel trusted their own Righteousness (10:1-21)
 - 3) Jew and Gentile can have Salvation through Faith (11:1-36)
3. **The Transformed Life (12:1-15:13)**
 - a. In relation to overall conduct (12:1-21)
 - b. In relation to civil authority (13:1-7)
 - c. In relation to fellow man (13:8-14)
 - d. In relation to weak brethren in the Body of Christ (14:1-15:13)
4. **Concluding remarks, instructions and benediction (15:14-16:27)**

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- b) God's sovereignty includes free will, but does not determine it for you or me.
- c) God provides grace to all, though not all accept it.
- d) The elect are those who persevere to the end; those who stand in "grace" can freely sin and lose grace, hence men and women merit hell by their own wickedness.

The Meaning of God's Foreknowledge

- 1) The words "know" – *ginōskō* in Greek, and "foreknow" – *proginōskō* in Greek and *yada* in Hebrew commonly mean "choose" or "set favor upon" or "acknowledge." It is used throughout the Old and New Testaments to indicate those whom God *chose* or *set His favor upon*.
- 2) In His omniscience God knows what the future holds both for individuals and for nations. He knows and sees everything in advance and His will is carried out in accord with His plans and purposes.
- 3) As the all-knowing One, God knows everything about us, including:
 - a) *All the days ordained for me before one of them came to be.* (Psalm 139:16)
 - b) God knows our thoughts and words even before they are expressed. (Psalm 139:4; Matthew 26:34)
 - c) God can determine our life's work before we are born. For example, Jeremiah was set apart in the womb to be a prophet, chosen to minister to the nations. (Jeremiah 1:5)
- 4) In the call of Abraham to be the founder of God's covenant nation Israel, God says "*I have chosen him.*" The verb is literally "*I knew him.*" (Genesis 18:19)
- 5) The same is true of Amos's description of Israel, "*You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth.*" (Amos 3:2) The verb is once again "*yada*" – i.e. – "known."
- 6) God's sovereign choice of Israel established a unique relationship with a particular people.
- 7) In the New Testament God's foreknowledge is clearly linked to the death of Christ and to the salvation of the "elect."
 - a) "*Before the creation of the world*" Christ was "chosen" or "foreknown" to be the Redeemer (1 Peter 1:20), a clear indication that God knew from the beginning that mankind would fall into sin and further proof that it was God that subjected His creation to "futility." (see Romans 8:20 – and the April 24 study notes)
 - b) On the day of Pentecost the apostle Peter denounced the wicked men who put Christ to death, but he acknowledged that they had acted in accord with "*God's set purpose and foreknowledge.*" (Acts 2:23)
 - c) Evil rulers conspired to kill the Son of God, but yet His death was something that God "*had decided beforehand should happen.*" (Acts 4:28)

Foreknowledge and Our Election

- 1) The same juxtaposition of foreknowledge, election, and predestination also applies to individual salvation.
- 2) We, too, were chosen "*before the creation of the world,*" in accordance with the foreknowledge of God. (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:2)
- 3) The apostle Paul tells us that "those God foreknow" were also predestined and called to be justified by faith. (Romans 8:29-30)
- 4) In each case foreknowledge precedes election and is intricately linked with God's will and purpose.

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Not Fatalistic Determination

- 1) God's foreknowledge in the life of an individual man or woman does *NOT* mean that God foresaw certain people would believe in faith, and these God predestinated to salvation as a result of their faith.
 - a) Such a statement turns things completely upside down, for in saying God foresaw certain sinners would believe in Christ, and that because of this, He predestinated them to salvation, is the very reverse of Scriptural truth.
 - b) God did not elect any sinner because He foresaw that he or she would believe, for the simple reason that no sinner ever does believe until God gives him/her faith.
 - c) Faith is God's gift (Ephesians 1:8-9) – the gift is the *cause*; believing is the *consequence* of using His gift.
 - d) Furthermore, if it were true that God had elected certain people to be saved because in time they would believe, then that would make believing a *meritorious* act, and in that event the saved sinner would have ground for "boasting," which Scripture emphatically denies. (Ephesians 2:9)
 - e) By extension, it would also mean that there would be no way for you and I to *NOT be* saved, since God had predetermined that we would be saved. This would deny free will and the choice we have to accept or reject God's gift of grace.
- 2) You and I believe because God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), and chose not because He foresaw you and I would believe, but chose simply because it pleased Him to choose.
- 3) God chose you and I notwithstanding our natural unbelief. So all the glory and praise belongs to Him. You and I have no ground for taking any credit for our belief. We have "*believed through grace*" (Acts 18:27), and that, because our very election was "of grace" – a free gift from God. (Romans 11:5)
- 4) God does not force anyone to become a believer but works in each person's heart so that the individual freely chooses to receive Christ as Savior (or not).
 - a) When Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt, it appeared that he had no choice – no free will in the matter – because God would harden his heart. (Exodus 4:21)
 - b) Yet pay attention to the words of Holy Scripture. It wasn't until the *sixth* plague that the text says that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. (Exodus 9:12)
 - c) During the first five plagues Pharaoh hardened his own heart, refusing to listen to Moses and Aaron; from the sixth plague onward the Lord simply confirmed Pharaoh in his hardened-heart condition. (Exodus 7:13-14; Exodus 8:15; Exodus 8:19; and Exodus 8:32)
- 5) God's foreknowledge is not opposed to free will, but is the essence of it. Our only work is to choose to cooperate with God's Spirit working in and through our lives. Even that work of "our choice" is first begun in God.
- 6) No one can choose God unless God first makes belief possible, and the possibility of belief is there for everyone – even Pharaoh. It is offered to all men and women of every nation and religion.
 - a) Pharaoh had five opportunities to accept God's movement and invitation which he rejected by free will.
 - b) Jesus affirmed the role of our free will choice often:
 - i) *Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me.* (Mark 8:3) If predestination meant predetermination, Jesus would have foreknown which one's would do this and which one's would not, and there would be nothing for us to do in response to the invitation – no denying oneself, no taking up of crosses.

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- ii) *When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* (John 8:12) Our Lord's words again imply a choice – to follow or not to follow.
- c) Likewise Stephen in his speech before the Sanhedrin, said "*You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!*" (Acts 7:51) The Holy Spirit was present in the lives of these stiff-necked people and it was their choice to resist and reject the Holy Spirit or to accept the Holy Spirit's divine nudges and repent of their ways. Again Holy Scripture affirms the role of our free will to choose to accept or reject the gift of faith, the grace of fellowship with the Living God.
- d) This is not something new as in New Testament revelation, but was there from the beginning:
 - i) *This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.* (Deuteronomy 30:19) There would be no point in choosing life or death if the foreknowledge of God had predetermined the outcome for me or you.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Through the lens of Holy Scripture, how is *foreknowledge* (to know in advance) different from *predetermination* (to settle or decide in advance)?
- 2) In this we have hope: that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him.
 - a) What are some of my strengths and weaknesses with regards to the gift and virtue of hope?
 - b) How do I balance the two deficiencies related to hope – on the one hand *presumption* (that cocksure attitude that heaven is in my back pocket on account of my merits) and, on the other hand, *despair* (the anxiety or out-right terror that I will never make it even with God's grace)?
- 3) How do personal or natural disasters work for the good of those who love God? What prevents them from being a setback for both faith and hope?

Human Nature

*From the Book of Common Prayer
Episcopal Catechism
Page 845*

- Q. What are we by nature?
- A. *We are part of God's creation, made in the image of God.*
- Q. What does it mean to be created in the image of God?
- A. *It means that we are free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God.*
- Q. Why then do we live apart from God and out of harmony with creation?
- A. *From the beginning, human beings have misused their freedom and made wrong choices.*
- Q. Why do we not use our freedom as we should?
- A. *Because we rebel against God, and we put ourselves in the place of God.*
- Q. What help is there for us?
- A. *Our help is in God.*
- Q. How did God first help us?
- A. *God first helped us by revealing himself and his will, through nature and history, through many seers and saints, and especially the prophets of Israel.*