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A table of contents for *Caribbean Journal of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

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CONTENTS

Page

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH
Gosnell L. Yorke |
| 16 | PERSONAL PURITY
Samuel Vassel |
| 29 | CELEBRATING JAMAICANS AT HOME AND ABROAD
Carlton Dennis |
| 35 | CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION AND THE CANONICAL NARRATIVE
Ajilon Ferdinand |
| 48 | LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, AND CARIBBEAN THEOLOGY
Erica Campbell |
| 69 | THE MEANING OF FOREKNOWLEDGE
Steven Kyle Rader |
| 94 | CHIASTIC CONTOURS AND THE BOOK OF ACTS
D V Palmer |

THE MEANING OF FOREKNOWLEDGE
IN ROMANS 8:29

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Introduction

Scripture must be the highest court of appeal in all matters of controversy between Christians. Of course it is good to consult what other Christians believe, but ultimately every thought, belief, and theological system must be judged by the criterion of God's Word. If that thought, belief, or theological system fails to be faithful to God's Word, then it must be rejected regardless of the sentiment or tradition that might be attached to it. Yet, while all born-again believers look to the Scriptures as their final rule of authority, differences of interpretation still exist. So perhaps it should be emphasized—especially at the onset of this particular chapter—that the existence of disagreement does not call into question the reliability of the Bible. Instead, it points to the existence of another reality: that there are incorrect interpretations of Scripture. Therefore, every Christian who wants to know divine truth must labor hard in the pages of the Bible, embracing certain biblical claims while at the same time rejecting others.

This article will present five arguments in favor of the Calvinistic sense of foreknowledge in Romans 8:29. These five arguments, when taken cumulatively, show that foreknowledge cannot be understood as foreseen faith. The five arguments are as follows: (1) defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith requires that the concept of prevenient grace be true, which is an idea not substantiated from Scripture; (2) foreseen faith is foreign to the text of Romans 8:29; (3) the verb γινώσκω (*ginōskō*), from which “foreknew” is derived, often connotes love, affection, and relationship; (4) the terms “foreknowledge” and “predestination” are not synonymous; (5) since justification is by faith, and only those who are called are justified, it must be that God's calling produces faith.¹

¹This argument goes beyond the text of Romans 8:29-30. Nevertheless, it is implied in the logical sequence of divine activities and therefore appropriate for discussion.

Foreknowledge in the Calvinistic Sense: Five Arguments

Argument 1: Defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith requires that the concept of prevenient grace be true, which is an idea not substantiated from Scripture. In order to define foreknowledge as foresight of faith, a self-determining will that can freely believe in Christ must be either “natural” to human nature or “restored” to human nature. Because of the overwhelming biblical evidence that testifies to mankind’s spiritual deadness, the majority of Arminians have embraced man’s inability to come to faith of his own volition. Robert Reymond, in responding to the classical Arminian view of predestination in *Perspectives on Election*, presents the case for total depravity very succinctly. He argues that men

by nature *cannot* bring forth good fruit (Matt. 7:18), by nature *cannot* hear Christ’s word that they might have life (John 8:43), by nature *cannot* accept the Spirit of truth (John 14:17), by nature *cannot* be subject to the law of God (Rom. 8:7), by nature *cannot* discern the truths of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14), by nature *cannot* confess from the heart Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), by nature *cannot* inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50), by nature *cannot* control the tongue (James 3:8), and by nature *cannot* come to Christ (John 6:44-45, 65). In order to do any of these things, they must receive powerful aid coming to them *ab extra* [from without]. So there simply is no such thing among men as free will that can always choose the right if it wants to.²

It is nearly impossible (without utterly dismissing the avalanche of scriptural witness) to reach any other conclusion than that man is spiritually dead in his trespasses and sins, enslaved to sin and to Satan, and completely unable and unwilling to come to Christ for salvation. Even Arminius spoke like a Calvinist when it came to the issue of the seriousness of sin and its debilitating effects upon mankind.³ Even so, the unbreakable link between total depravity and unconditional election was proven breakable with the notion of prevenient grace. It is not an overstatement, then, to say that prevenient grace is the citadel of Arminianism. Indeed, it is the very fortress that protects the logic of Arminian soteriology and makes it possible for foreknowledge to be defined as foreseen faith. But does the notion of prevenient grace withstand the rigor of exegetical scrutiny?

The judicial argument for prevenient grace maintains that such enablement is primarily a result of God’s justice. It would be unjust of God to sentence people to an eternal punishment when they are not able to decide against that punishment and for a

²Robert L. Reymond, “Responses to Jack W. Cottrell,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 136-37.

³James Arminius, *Public Disputations of James Arminius*, in *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 1:526. Disputation 11 is titled “On the Free Will of Man and Its Powers.”

loving Savior. Prevenient grace, as an act of fairness on God's part, restores man's free will so that he is able to come to Christ if he so chooses. Olson states that this "is necessary to protect God's reputation."⁴ Arguing from the vantage point of God's justice, however, fails on the grounds that it does not take human depravity seriously enough. Scripture teaches that although believers know God's eternal power and his divine nature through the creation that they enjoy, they willingly live lives that neither honor God nor give thanks to him (Rom 1:19-20). In fact, they live the entirety of their existence following the course of this evil age, reveling in the passions of their flesh, and carrying out the desires of their body and mind, and, as a result, God's wrath naturally rests upon them (Eph 2:1-3). By sentencing sinners to eschatological punishment, God is not treating them unfairly. He is (1) giving them what we want, which is a life without him, and (2) giving them what they deserve, an eternity separated from his loving presence.

Furthermore, God does not need his creatures to protect his reputation: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen 18:25) And whatever punishment God brings is right and just: "You are just in these judgments, O Holy One" (Rev 16:5). "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments" (Rev 16:7). Whatever God's actions may be and whatever God's punishment may be, his ethic of fairness, rightness, and justice cannot be called into doubt. Suppose for a moment that God has not granted universal enabling grace, and suppose for a moment that he does set his electing love upon some while passing over others. That scenario does not entail injustice being performed. It is often assumed that the opposite of justice is mercy, but it is not. The opposite of justice is non-justice. Thus, there is justice and there is non-justice, but within the category of non-justice resides both mercy and injustice. If God sets his saving love upon David (who does not deserve it) but not upon John (who likewise does not deserve it), David has received "mercy" while John has received "justice," but neither has received "injustice."⁵ Therefore, the judicial argument for prevenient grace, while logically and emotionally attractive, must be rejected on the basis that it fails to agree with what the Scriptures say about God's holy and righteous character: in all matters God is fair and just.

A second argument for prevenient grace is fundamentally Christological. Appeal is made to grace given in the atonement and Christ's death for all as an indication of prevenient grace. Pinnock, for example, when discussing his theological pilgrimage from Augustinianism to Arminianism, explains, "Christ's death on behalf of the [human] race evidently did not automatically secure for anyone an actual reconciled relationship

⁴Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 98.

⁵This illustration was adapted from R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1986), 26.

with God, but made it possible for people to enter into such a relationship by faith.”⁶ Later in the same volume, Miethe argues in similar fashion. He asks:

What is the nature of God and the nature of man as created in God’s image? Does the Bible teach that Jesus died for the sins of mankind? Does the Bible teach that man, created in God’s image, can [i.e., is free to] and must respond to God’s free gracious offer of salvation? I answer that the Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus died for the sins of all people, and man can and must respond to the free offer of salvation.⁷

John 12:32 is cited frequently to support the universal power of the atonement: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” Of course Jesus is referring to his approaching death, resurrection, and ascension, when he will be lifted up on a cross, then lifted up from the grave, and finally lifted up to heaven. Further, Jesus tells us that his “lifting up” will result in all people being drawn to him. This drawing, Arminians suggest, does not ensure that all people will come to Jesus for salvation but does enable them to do so. Whether they come fully and finally for forgiveness of sins and eternal life is entirely their choice.

This is not the first usage of the verb ἐλκυο (*helkuō*, “to draw”), however, in the Gospel of John. In the Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44).⁸ Jesus is teaching that no one has the ability to believe in him for salvation unless, first, the Father draws him—and this drawing is inextricably linked to his Father giving certain individuals to him. “All that the Father gives me will come to me,” Jesus proclaims, “and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” So God “giving” certain persons to Jesus results in them being “drawn” to him, which is equivalent to coming to faith in him.

That this is an inevitable drawing is seen both in verses 37 and 44: “All that the Father gives me will come to me,” Jesus asserts; and again, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” Don Carson rightly comments, “The combination of v. 37a and v. 44 prove that this ‘drawing’ activity of the Father cannot be reduced to what theologians sometimes call ‘prevenient grace’ dispensed to every individual, for this ‘drawing’ is selective, or else the negative note in v. 44 is meaningless.”⁹ Moreover, it should be noted that there is not one example in the

⁶Clark Pinnock, “From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 23.

⁷Miethe, “The Universal Power of the Atonement,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 84.

⁸That “to come” to Jesus means “to believe” in Jesus is clear from v. 35: “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’” Thus, the phrase “comes to me” is synonymous with “believes in me.”

New Testament of the use of ἑλκμο (*helkmo*) where resistance is successful. Always the drawing power is triumphant. “Ultimately, therefore, salvation depends not on human believing, but on the ‘drawing’ action of the Father (presumably by the Holy Spirit) by which God moves a person to faith in Christ.”¹⁰

If one allows Scripture to interpret Scripture, the “drawing” of John 12:32 cannot be taken to mean, as Carson points out, a universal enablement that attracts all persons to Jesus; and since universalism is not taught in the Bible, there must be another meaning in view. The arrival of some Greeks triggers for Jesus the awareness of his “hour,” a word that typically in the Gospel of John refers to his arrest, crucifixion, and death (cf. John 2:4; 7:30). It is only through this “hour” of suffering and eventual glory (his resurrection) that all ethnic groups, even Gentiles, will be able to approach Jesus for salvation, as his words suggest: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). The drawing of all people in John 12:32, then, does not refer to an enablement that draws all people without “exception”; instead, it refers to an effectual work of the Father that successfully draws all people without “distinction,” meaning both Jews and Gentiles.

Other texts are also cited to prove that Christ’s work on the cross brought with it a universal and enabling grace. These passages state that Jesus died for “all” and for the sins of “the whole world” (2 Cor 5:14-15; 1 John 2:2). But regardless of how “all” and “the whole world” are defined in these verses—whether as “all without *distinction*” or “all without *exception*,” as in the preceding paragraph—the notion of prevenient grace is still absent. Nowhere do these passages teach that the atonement resulted in a restored will to all people. The same is true of Titus 2:11: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” “The grace of God that brings salvation” is a roundabout way of referring to the contents of the gospel message. It highlights Christ’s incarnation and accomplishment. Certainly Jesus Christ is God’s gracious gift to humanity that brought salvation to all people, but again, there is no hint in this verse of prevenient grace or a restored will. Paul simply states the fact of the historical gospel and what it means: that through Christ’s coming salvation is now offered to all (every person and all people groups).¹¹

Arguably the most common scriptural support for prevenient grace comes from John 1:9, which I have termed the “incarnational” argument. Schreiner notes that the

⁹D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 293.

¹⁰Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 213.

¹¹It is likely that Paul refers in Titus 2:11 to all people without distinction. See Thomas R. Schreiner, “Problematic Texts for Definite Atonement in the Pastoral and General Epistles,” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. David and Jonathan Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 386-87.

crucial phrase in this verse is “enlightens every person”, which Wesleyans understand to refer to prevenient grace.¹² Jesus’ coming into the world brought enough revelation to all people so that they are now able to reject or accept the message of the gospel. The primary lexical meaning of *enlighten* is “to shed light upon,” “to make visible,” “to bring to light,” and only secondarily “to illuminate (inwardly).”¹³ The context suggests that the primary meaning, to shed light upon, is the correct meaning:

Some are shown to be evil because they did not know or receive Jesus (John 1:10-11), while others are revealed to be righteous because they have received Jesus and have been born of God (John 1:12-13). John 3:19-21 confirms this interpretation. Those who are evil shrink from coming to the light because they do not want their works to be exposed (v. 20). But those who practice the truth gladly come to the light so that it might be manifest that their works are wrought in God (v. 21).¹⁴

That all persons are enlightened does not necessitate the bestowment of grace. Rather, the light exposes and reveals the moral and spiritual state of one’s heart.¹⁵ As Köstenberger states, it is an external illumination of objective revelation that requires a response.¹⁶ Or as Carson more bluntly describes: “It [the light] shines on every man, and divides the race: those who hate the light [that is, those who hate Jesus] respond as the world does (1:10): they flee lest their deeds should be exposed by this light (3:19-21). But some receive this revelation (1:12-13), and thereby testify that their deeds have been done through God (3:21).”¹⁷ Thus Jesus, the true and genuine light, enlightens everyone in the sense that one’s response to him reveals where one stands in relation to him. It is how one responds to Jesus and his message, as the context makes clear, that in a very real, tangible, and public way exposes one’s true nature.

A fourth defense of prevenient grace, the causal argument, appeals to the warnings, invitations, and commands in Scripture which imply that they are able to be freely carried out by every person. After all, why would God give commands unless people were given some ability to obey them? Does this not imply that people have the

¹²Thomas R. Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?,” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 239.

¹³Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 123-24.

¹⁴Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?,” 240.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Kostenberger, *John*, 35-36.

¹⁷Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 124. This is fundamentally the same argument that Schreiner makes.

ability to repent if they would only choose to do so? It should be acknowledged that Arminian logic is coherent here, and one can see why they would deduce human ability from the giving of commands. Nonetheless, even though their reasoning is commendable, it does not necessarily follow that their conclusion is true. An argument may be logically coherent and not fit with the state of affairs in the world because the answer given is incomplete. More specifically, the causal argument for prevenient grace is not in accord with the reality of life as it is portrayed in the Scriptures.¹⁸

Romans 2:4 is an example: “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” Of course it is true that God’s kindness “should” lead people to repentance, but the depravity of our sinful and hard hearts makes that an impossibility unless enabled by God’s grace (2 Tim 2:25-26). Hence, it must again be stressed what this text does not say: nowhere in this verse is prevenient grace taught, implied, or even insinuated by Paul. While the lavishness of God’s kindness, forbearance, and patience should certainly lead sinners to repent of their sins and turn to Jesus, the reality of life as it is portrayed in the Bible paints a different picture, as Romans 2:5 shows: “But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.”

Forlines’s “influence-and-response” model, although unique in its approach, also fails to agree with the reality of life as portrayed in the Scriptures. He argues that because man is created in God’s image, God deals with him solely on the basis that he thinks, feels, and acts:

To do otherwise undercuts the personhood of man. God will not do this—not because something is imposed on God to which He must submit, but because God designed the relationship to be a relationship between *personal beings*. Human beings are personal beings by God’s design and were made for a *personal relationship* with a personal God. God will not violate His own plan. The nature of the case does not demand that God work in a cause and effect relationship with human beings.¹⁹

Forlines’s argument is fraught with red flags. I shall mention only two. First, it is filled with highly emotive language that threatens his readers’ sense of freedom. For example, he speaks of anything other than a self-determined will as “undercutting the personhood of man,” something that God would never do because it would “violate His own plan.” Language like this inevitably stirs the emotions and elicits a strong reaction against any who oppose such a view of man’s liberty. Second, and more importantly, Forlines’s

¹⁸Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?,” 242-43.

¹⁹F. Leroy Forlines, *Romans*, The Randall House Bible Commentary (Nashville: Randall House, 1987), 49.

“influence-and-response” logic is refuted by the testimony of Scripture. The Bible abounds with verses that teach a “cause-and-effect” relationship between God and man. Proverbs alone states, “The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD” (Prov 16:1). “The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps” (Prov 16:9). “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.” This does not sound like God is influencing us and waiting to see how we respond. Moreover, specific instances can be cited throughout Scripture that illustrate God’s absolute control over our lives, even over our response to his commands.²⁰ In no way does this undermine man’s accountability, for the Bible teaches both God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. But to claim that God only interacts with men and women in an “influence-and-response” relationship is simply untrue.

Perhaps the biggest challenge unconditional election faces comes in the form of the ontological argument, which puts forth the love of God as the ground of prevenient grace. Admittedly, it is hard to understand how a God who loves the world and desires all to be saved can at the same time choose only some to be saved. What one is dealing with entering into this discussion is the interplay between God’s universal love and his electing love (John 3:16; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9; 1 John 4:8; Matt 22:14; John 6:37, 44, 65; 8:47; 10:26-29; Rom 8:29-30; 9:6-23; 11:5-10; 1 Cor 1:26-30; Eph 1:4-5; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13; Jas 2:5); that is, how these two seemingly contradictory wills of God are harmonized. It is emotionally tempting at this point to let those texts which speak of God’s universal love snuff out those texts which speak of God’s electing love. However, one must allow the whole counsel of God to speak, reconciling what can be reconciled and leaving to mystery what belongs to mystery.

We shall first examine John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” This verse is commonly used as the first line of attack against unconditional election.²¹ It is argued, “Jesus says whoever believes in him will be saved—whoever. Therefore unconditional election cannot be true. God loves the world and would never limit his love in that way.” A few comments will suffice as to why this verse does not refute Calvinism’s doctrine of election. (1) The term *κοσμος* (*kosmos*, “the world”) in the Gospel of John does not emphasize the “individuals” in the world but rather the “badness” of the world. According to John, the world is the mass of fallen humanity that is in rebellion against its Creator (e.g., John 1:10; 7:7; 14:17, 22, 27, 30; 15:18-19; 16:8, 20, 33; 17:6, 9, 14).²² What makes God’s love so amazing, then, is not that the world is

²⁰One of the clearest examples of this is 2 Chron 30:1-12, which will be examined in Argument 5.

²¹Personally, John 3:16 has been quoted to me more than any other verse to refute that God unconditionally chooses whom he will save.

²²Overwhelmingly, the world stands in stark opposition to Jesus and his disciples.

so big but that the wicked do not deserve it. (2) Calvinists wholeheartedly agree that whoever believes in Jesus will be saved. That is not, nor has it historically been, an issue of disagreement. (3) This verse does not say anything about man's "ability" to believe in Jesus. It merely promises that whoever does believe in him will be saved. To use this verse as a rebuttal against unconditional election, therefore, does not work. It implies that man has the ability to come to Jesus of his own free will, which is explicitly denied in Scripture and even by Jesus himself (John 6:44).

God's universal love is also expressed in 1 Timothy 2:4, which states that God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." It is possible that careful exegesis of this verse would lead us to believe that God's desire for all people to be saved does not refer to every individual person in the world but rather to all "sorts" of people, since "all people" in verse 1 may well mean groups such as "kings and all who are in high positions" (v. 2).²³ Nonetheless, this interpretation has been unconvincing to Arminians and likely will continue to be.²⁴ Besides, it is possible that "all people" means "all individual persons," so further inquiry is needed into this passage and those like it.²⁵ What is undisputed is this: although God truly desires all people to be saved, in reality that does not come to pass. But what are we to think of a desire of God's that goes unfulfilled? There are two possibilities:

One possibility is that there is a power in the universe greater than God's, which is frustrating him by overruling what he desires. Neither the Reformed nor the Arminians affirm this. The other possibility is that God wills not to save all, even though he "desires" that all be saved, because there is something else he wills or desires more, which would be lost if he exerted his sovereign power to save all.²⁶

²³This interpretation is popular among some Reformed theologians because it shifts God's love from an "individual" emphasis to a "class," or group, emphasis: God desires all *kinds* of people to be saved, and that includes kings (v. 2) and those in high positions. This is seen as necessary in order to avoid the collision between God's electing love and his general desire for all people (all individuals) to be saved.

²⁴I. Howard Marshall, for example, writes, "This interpretation means that vv. 3f. provide justification for praying for the government authorities in 2:2. This interpretation (like the previous one) is followed by scholars who find a doctrine of particular election underlying the NT. However, nothing in the context suggests such a limitation. Nor does this interpretation secure the desired result, since in the last analysis divisions between individuals and classes of humankind merge into one another" (I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastor Epistles*, The International Critical Commentary Series [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999], 427).

²⁵For instance, 2 Pet 3:9 states, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, *not wishing that any should perish*, but that all should reach repentance." It is often argued that in context Peter is speaking to professing Christians (but is patient toward you), so that technically speaking God's desire that none should perish refers to those whom Peter is writing, that is, those who are professing Christ. Nonetheless, what was said of 1 Tim 2:4 could likewise be said of this passage: further inquiry needs to be made into the relationship between God's universal love and his electing love.

²⁶John Piper, *Does God Desire All to be Saved?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 39.

Simply put, all of God's desires do not rise to the level of volition. There is a greater commitment, a greater good, which is more valuable to God than saving all people by his sovereign, efficacious grace. Arminians hold that the greater value is free will and the possible resulting love relationship with God that might come about through the right response to the gospel message. Calvinists suggest that the greater value is the full manifestation of God's glory in both his wrath and mercy (Rom 9:22-23) and the humbling of man so that he enjoys giving all credit to God for his salvation (1 Cor 1:29).²⁷ The controversial 1 Timothy 2:4 does not settle the matter, for it neither tells us what that greater commitment is, nor does it teach that man has the ability to believe in Christ of his own free will. Since I do not find in the Scriptures that human beings possess the power of self-determination, I agree with the Calvinist interpretation that God deems his glory as the higher commitment that restrains him from saving all people.

In attempting to reconcile God's universal love and his electing love (as much as it is humanly possible to do so), it must be acknowledged that the Bible speaks of the love of God in different ways. There is, for example, the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father (John 3:35; 14:31). This is a unique relationship that exists only between God the Father and God the Son. It is not only "eternal," in that it has no beginning and no end, but it is also the "purest" relationship that has ever existed, in that it is not (nor can it be) tainted by sin. As well, there is God's providential love for his creation. God created this world and deemed it "good"—indeed, "very good"—and continually provides for all people, believers and unbelievers alike (Matt 5:45).²⁸ Therefore, when scholars distinguish between God's universal love and his electing love, it is not a sign of divine schizophrenia or exegetical confusion. Instead, it is a biblical attempt to come to grips with the two wills of God as taught in the Bible.

John Piper has given thoughtful consideration to this subject and shared his conclusions in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*.²⁹ He reasons that God's emotional life is infinitely complex and far beyond our ability to fully comprehend:

For example, who can comprehend that the Lord hears in one moment of time the prayers of ten million Christians around the world, and sympathizes with each one personally and individually like a caring Father (as Hebrews 4:15 says he will), even though among those ten million prayers some are brokenhearted and some are

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Carson is tremendously helpful in thinking through the different aspects of the love of God. See D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 2000).

²⁹John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?", in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 126-27.

bursting with joy? How can God weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice when they are both coming to him at the same time—in fact are always coming to him with no break at all?

Or who can comprehend that God is angry at the sin of the world every day (Ps. 7:11), and yet every day, every moment, he is rejoicing with tremendous joy because somewhere in the world a sinner is repenting (Luke 15:7, 10, 23)? Who can comprehend that God continually burns with hot anger at the rebellion of the wicked, grieves over the unholy speech of his people (Eph. 4:29-30), yet takes pleasure in them daily (Ps. 149:4), and ceaselessly makes merry over penitent prodigals who come home?³⁰

It is this divine emotional complexity that allows God to desire all to be saved and yet only set his saving love upon some. He is able, as Piper describes, to see the world through two lenses: either through a narrow lens or a wide-angle lens. When God looks at a painful or wicked event through his narrow lens, he sees the tragedy or sin for what it is in itself, and he is angered and grieved. But when God sees a painful or wicked event through his wide-angle lens, he sees the tragedy or sin in relation to everything leading up to it and everything flowing out from it: “He sees it in all the connections and effects that form a pattern or mosaic stretching into eternity. This mosaic, with all its (good and evil) parts, he does delight in (Ps. 115:3).”³¹

If this seems unfathomable, it is because in part it is. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:8-9). And, as Paul proclaims in Romans 11:33, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” Of course, these are not easy answers, but they are answers derived from the text of Scripture. God’s people must humbly bow to what they see in Scripture and leave unrevealed matters to him, accepting that the secret things do not belong to us but only to our Lord (Deut 29:29).

I have sought in this argument to establish that prevenient grace cannot be substantiated from Scripture. As best as I am able to discern, I do not see one verse in the entirety of the Bible that teaches that a universal enabling grace has restored man’s will to its pre-Fall “neutral” condition. When people claim otherwise, it appears to be driven more by philosophical presupposition than exegetical conclusion. It is thus fitting to conclude with the words of Arminian Clark Pinnock: “I also knew that the Bible has no developed doctrine of universal prevenient grace, however convenient it would be for us

³⁰Ibid., 126-27.

³¹Piper, *Does God Desire All to be Saved?*, 45.

if it did.”³²

Argument 2: Foreseen faith is foreign to the text of Romans 8:29.

Romans 8:29 says, “For those whom he [God] foreknew [προγινώσκειν] he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.” The verb προγινώσκω (*proginōskō*) means “to know beforehand,” and without question God knows beforehand all things and all people. The Bible declares consistently that God’s knowledge is vast, great, and all-encompassing.³³ However, the remainder of verse 29 teaches that those whom God foreknew “he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.” Since all people are not predestined to be conformed into the image of Christ, it is only those whom God “foreknew,” and since God knows all people in the sense of cognitive awareness, God’s foreknowledge of all men in general cannot be what Paul has in mind. Rather, he is using the word in a narrower sense, defining a special and distinct group of people separate from all people as a universal whole.

It is this reality that forces interpreters to clarify further προγινώσκειν. What precisely is it that distinguishes those whom God foreknew and marked out to be conformed to the image of his Son from those whom God did not foreknow and mark out to be conformed to the image of his Son? Simply acknowledging the narrower sense of “foreknew” does not answer all the questions that the term raises. Indeed, that God’s foreknowledge defines a special and distinct group of people separate from all people as a universal whole is agreed upon by both Arminians and Calvinists. It is when the issue is pressed further (as it must be) that disagreement arises; hence, the former interpret foreknowledge as “foreseen faith” and the latter as “covenantal commitment.”

Admittedly, many Calvinists readily grant the appeal and reasonability of defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith. Schreiner confesses, “Such an interpretation is attractive in that it forestalls the impression that God arbitrarily saves some and not others.”³⁴ Moo concedes that “foreknew,” as its etymology in both Greek and English suggests, usually means “to know ahead of time.” “This being the commonest meaning of the verb, it is not surprising that many interpreters think it must mean this here also.”³⁵ Murray agrees: “The most common [understanding] is to suppose that what is in view is God’s foresight of faith. God foreknew who would believe; he foreknew them as his *by faith*.”³⁶ Paul

³²Clark Pinnock, “From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 22. Pinnock goes on to deny total depravity, appealing to the notion that Scripture implores people *as though they are able* to respond.

³³The Old Testament, for example, provides abundant evidence for God’s omniscience. See Pss 139:2, 18; 147:5; Prov 16:2; Isa 41:23; 66:18; Ezra 1:1-4.

³⁴Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 452.

³⁵Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 532.

Jewett, as well, notes that among Protestants the position that bases God's election on his foresight of faith has long had an appeal. One could even argue that it is the most widely held view. He explains why this is so:

It can easily be inferred from a fundamental strand of biblical revelation: the Scriptures plainly teach that a genuine offer of salvation is made to all in the gospel (Matt. 28:19-20), that the gospel itself is the good news that Christ died for all (2 Cor. 5:14-15), and that this death commends the love of a God (Rom. 5:8) who wills the salvation of all men (1 Tim. 2:4). If God is the seeking God, the God who all day long stretches forth his hands to rebellious sinners (Isa. 65:2; Rom. 10:21), the God who solemnly declares that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11), what other position can one take? The fact that some are beneficiaries of his grace must, in the last analysis, be attributed to the free decision of the creature either to accept or to reject the grace freely offered in the gospel. At least so it would seem.³⁷

This is what Cottrell means when he says that "Arminians reasonably infer that what God foreknows is our decision to meet these conditions, especially the condition of faith."³⁸ What may seem reasonable, however, is not always scriptural, and in this particular scenario one is forced to ask, "Where is faith mentioned in this verse?" That God foresees a person's faith and bases his election of an individual upon that choice is a notion that is foreign to the text and to the Bible as a whole.³⁹ To say otherwise is simply smuggling a meaning into foreknowledge that is glaringly absent from the word (and the passage) itself. The "foreknowledge as foreseen faith" view, appealing and reasonable as it may be, "presupposes" that God sees each individual's act of self-wrought faith and consequently predestines him or her unto salvation.

Ironically, this is even acknowledged by a number of Arminian scholars. Cottrell says, "Arminians reasonably infer that what God foreknows is our decision to

³⁶John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 316.

³⁷Paul K. Jewett, *Election and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 70.

³⁸Jack Cottrell, "The Classical Arminian View of Election," in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2006), 85, emphasis added.

³⁹On the contrary, Acts 13:48 teaches just the opposite: "[A]nd as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." God's divine sovereignty in election results in the belief of the Gentiles, demonstrating that their belief was due to God's grace alone. The clear meaning of the passage is that the ones who believed did so because they were appointed to eternal life, a note that Luke, through the Holy Spirit, saw important enough to include. Moreover, passages such as Eph 2:8-10, Phil 1:29, and 2 Tim 2:25 (as well as others) teach that faith and repentance are gifts of God.

meet these conditions, especially the condition of faith.”⁴⁰ Forlines confesses, “It is true that the Bible does not specifically say that foreknown faith was the condition of election in eternity past.”⁴¹ Behind these statements, of course, is the underlying belief in free will. But even Olson admits, “Arminians believe in free will because they see it everywhere assumed in the Bible.”⁴² The reason these scholars speak so candidly about faith, free will, and foreknowledge is because they know, exactly as Forlines states, that the Bible “does not specifically say” that God foresees an individual’s faith and elects him or her based upon that prior knowledge. It is an assumption, an inference, a presupposition, and their moral integrity obligates them to be honest in their assessment. Nevertheless, even though (by their own admission) they see no hard scriptural evidence in support of defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith, they continue to hold fast to their position.

Inevitably, all forms of conditional election fall prey to defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith. Forster and Marston try to distance themselves from this fact by suggesting that in Romans 8:29 Paul is not dealing with why some came to be converted and some did not; instead, he is simply writing to Christians about their position, or their status, before the Lord. They then conclude that “the foreknowledge [Paul] has in view implies a complete understanding of them, of their characters, their weaknesses, and their reactions.”⁴³ I do not see how this definition of foreknowledge varies in any substantial way from the traditional Arminian definition of foreknowledge. Does not God knowing a Christian’s “reactions” include his knowing his “reaction” to the gospel?

That this is what they are actually saying seems even clearer when they sum up their position in the final paragraphs of the chapter: “Our inheritance is obtained and our destiny worked out in Christ, and this destiny was set out by God in the full light of his knowledge of those who would so receive it.”⁴⁴ This is not substantially different from Arminianism’s traditional interpretation of foreknowledge. To say that the Christian’s destiny was set out by God in the full light of his knowledge “of those who would so receive it” is fundamentally saying the same thing as the traditional Arminian interpretation: God predestines individuals based upon his foreknowledge of who will and who will not repent and believe in his Son. Let us note that saying the same thing a different way is still saying the same thing, and that does appear to be what these two scholars are doing. While in many ways their treatment of foreknowledge provides an

⁴⁰Cottrell, “Arminian View,” 85, emphasis added.

⁴¹Forlines, *Classical Arminianism*, 186, emphasis added.

⁴²Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 98, emphasis added.

⁴³Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1973), 205.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 204, emphasis added.

excellent word study,⁴⁵ in the end Forster and Marston make precisely the same interpretive error that every scholar who holds to conditional election does: they assume that a person's free-will decision to receive Christ is what God foreknew when he elected them unto glory, which affixes an element to the word that is foreign to the text.

This textual addition has been aptly called a “qualifying adjunct.”⁴⁶ To relieve God from the accusation of injustice, and to give mankind complete freedom in determining his eternal destiny, Arminians must add something to προγινώσκειν in Romans 8:29 that is not inherent in the word, in the verse, or in the surrounding context. Furthermore, as Murray points out, the rejection of this interpretation is not dictated by a predestinarian interest.

Even if it were granted that “foreknew” means the foresight of faith, the biblical doctrine of sovereign election is not thereby eliminated or disproven. For it is certainly true that God foresees faith; he foresees all that comes to pass. The question would then simply be: whence proceeds this faith which God foresees? And the only biblical answer is that the faith God foresees is the faith that he himself creates (*cf.* John 3:3-8; 6:44, 45, 65; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; II Pet. 1:2). Hence his eternal foresight of faith is preconditioned by his decree to generate this faith in those whom he foresees as believing, and we are thrown back upon the differentiation which proceeds from God's own eternal and sovereign election to faith and its consequents.⁴⁷

In other words, even if foreknowledge is allowed to mean “foreseen faith,” that does not solve the problem of origin. Where does the individual's faith come from?⁴⁸ Again, any qualifying adjunct at this point is just that: an addition to the word (and the verse) that is not intrinsic to the word (or the verse). For this reason, the view that foreknowledge refers to the foresight of faith must be rejected. There is simply no exegetical rationale for defining foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 in such a manner.

Argument 3: The verb γινώσκω (ginōskō), from which “foreknew” is derived, often connotes love, affection, and relationship. Argument one concluded that prevenient grace cannot be corroborated from Scripture. Argument two further concluded that foreseen faith is foreign to the text of Romans 8:29. This alone is enough evidence to reject Arminianism's definition of foreknowledge and consider the possibility of an alternative interpretation. Murray proceeds forward with keen insight:

⁴⁵Ibid., 178-208.

⁴⁶This expression is Shedd's.

⁴⁷Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 316.

⁴⁸See footnote 7 in this chapter. Also, this issue will be addressed more fully in argument 5: since justification is by faith and only those who are called are justified, it must be that God's calling produces faith.

It should be observed that the text says “*whom* he foreknew”; *whom* is the object of the verb and there is not qualifying addition. This, of itself, shows that, unless there is some other compelling reason, the expression “whom he foreknew” contains within itself the differentiation which is presupposed. If the apostle had in mind some “qualifying adjunct” it would have been simple to supply it. Since he adds none we are forced to inquire if the actual terms he uses can express the differentiation required.⁴⁹

Instead of adding something alien to the text, Murray suggests that the word “foreknew” should be investigated to see if it supplies within itself any extra information. Indeed it does:

The usage of Scripture provides an affirmative answer. Although the term ‘foreknew’ is used seldom in the New Testament, it is altogether indefensible to ignore the meaning so frequently given to the word ‘know’ in the usage of Scripture; ‘foreknow’ merely adds the thought of ‘beforehand’ to the word ‘know’. Many times in Scripture ‘know’ has a pregnant meaning which goes beyond that of mere cognition. It is used in a sense practically synonymous with ‘love’, to set regard upon, to know with peculiar interest, delight, affection, and action.⁵⁰

The texts that support this meaning are abundant. In reference to Adam, Genesis 4:1 says, “Now Adam knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain.” Obviously, this is referring to sexual knowledge, but the point is that the word “knew” means something significantly more than that Adam was aware he had a wife named Eve. By contrast this same idea is expressed in Matthew 7:23. False disciples come to Jesus claiming they have prophesied in his name, cast out demons, and performed many mighty works, and he tells them, “I never *knew* you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” This does not mean that Jesus never knew they existed, or that they were doing these works in his name. Jesus is not expressing some sort of cognitive ignorance, as if he is completely unaware of their identities and activities. He is stating that he did not know them in a personal and saving way; otherwise, he would have welcomed them into his kingdom.

Similarly, this is the sense in which Paul uses the word “know” in Galatians 4:9: “But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God” “To know God” implies a genuine relationship with him. In the case of the Galatians, they were tempted to revert back to principles and practices they had previously followed before their union with Christ (v. 9). Paul is astonished, and in essence says to them, “How can that be, now that you know the one and true living God?” From the Galatians perspective, they have just recently and experientially entered into a relationship with

⁴⁹Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 316-17.

⁵⁰Ibid., 317.

God. But we can know God only because he first knew us (Rom 8:29), just as we choose him because he first chose us (John 6:44; 15:16), and we love him because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). Evident in these texts, then, is that the word “know” can (and does) have the connotation of love, delight, and intimate relationship.

The background of the term is in the Old Testament, where for God “to know” refers to his covenantal love in which he sets his affection on those whom he has chosen.⁵¹ Amos 3:2 speaks of this type of knowing. God is warning Israel through his prophet that judgment is coming, and he reminds them, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” Judah and Israel believed that their special relationship as the chosen people of God would protect them from harm, but it is precisely this fact that makes them even more accountable. God knew all the peoples of the earth and easily could have chosen any of them to set his covenantal love upon. Out of love and his own autonomous decision, however, he chose Israel.⁵² Deuteronomy 7:7-8 affirms this interpretation: “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all the peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers.” What is evident in these passages is that the word “know” is used to express God’s unconditional act of loving whom he chooses to love, apart from anything he sees in those he loves.⁵³

Thus far I have sought to demonstrate that the word “know,” in both its New Testament usage and Old Testament background, can carry within itself the idea of affection, love, and, often, covenantal commitment.⁵⁴ Of course, this does not necessarily

⁵¹The Hebrew word *yada* (“to know”) carries a range of meanings, one of which can be described as “God’s special relationship with.” Willem VanGemeren notes, “The vb. is used for God’s relationship to Israel as a people, ‘You only have I known’ (Amos 3:2 NRSV), and with individual leaders

(Abraham, Gen 18:19; Moses, Exod 33:12; Deut 34:10 [‘face to face’]; David, 2 Sam 7:20; Jeremiah, Jer 1:5). This usage does not focus on election in a narrow way, but on the relationship in its fullest sense. To know ‘by name,’ on the part of either God or humans (Exod 33:12; Ps 91:14), refers to closeness, not to a badge of identification” (Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997], s.v. “yada,” by Willem A. VanGemeren.

⁵²This is the point of Deut 10:14-15: “Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.” The truth of God’s sovereign ownership of the entire universe, and by extension all the peoples therein, serves as a backdrop to highlight his grace in freely choosing Israel. Simply put, God owns everything and can take any nation he wants for his own special possession.

⁵³Many other passages can be cited to support the Hebraic sense of “know” as well. Old Testament texts include Gen 18:19; Exod 33:17; 1 Sam 2:12; Ps 18:43; Prov 9:10; Jer 1:5; Hos 13:5; as well as further New Testament passages, such as John 10:14, 17:3; 2 Tim 2:19; 1 John 4:7.

entail that we should import the Hebraic sense of “know” into Romans 8:29, but it has proven that there is exegetical grounds to do so (or at the very least consider it to be a legitimate possibility). Often forgotten in this discussion, however, is the fact that Paul uses the word “foreknowledge” just a few chapters later in Romans 11:2: “God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.” This is not an unimportant observation, and should be given serious consideration when determining the meaning of “foreknowledge” in 8:29. Bruce Ware has given this rightful attention in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*:

Now if we applied the Arminian notion of foreknowledge here, this text would mean, “God has not rejected his people *whom He knew in advance would choose Him.*” But clearly this is not the case! God chose Israel, from all the nations of the world, even though she was the smallest and weakest of the lot (Deut. 7:6-8; 14:2)! It is simply not the case that God picked Israel to be his people because he knew in advance that Israel would pick him! Rather, what Romans 11:2 is saying is this: “God has not rejected His people whom He *previously had been disposed to be in relationship with and favor.*” Both the usual lexical meaning of “foreknowledge” and the historical facts about God’s relationship with Israel indicate that this is what Paul means in Romans 11:2.⁵⁵

Schreiner, as well, appeals to Romans 11:2 in arguing for the Hebraic sense of foreknowledge. “The verb προέγνω (*proegnō*) here functions as the antonym to ἀπόσατο (*apōsato*, “he rejected”). In other words, the verse is saying that God has not rejected his people upon whom he set his covenantal love (cf. also Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2, 20). Similarly, in Rom. 8:29 the point is that God has predestined those upon whom he has set his covenantal affection.”⁵⁶ Baugh, too, concludes that Paul refers to the concept of a committed relationship with the phrase “whom he foreknew,” as it is confirmed by the context: “God’s eternal foreknowledge, his devotion to his people before all ages, inspires the apostle to conclude with a virtual restatement of that eternal, divine commitment to us in verse 31: ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’ What better exhibits this divine determination to have us as his people than the fact that he delivered over his own Son on our behalf (Rom. 8:32)?”⁵⁷ Murray is right to conclude that when this import is appreciated there is no reason for adding any qualifying notion, for “whom he foreknew” is seen to contain within itself the differentiating element required. It means

⁵⁴Usually, context makes it very clear if this is the sense in which the word should be understood.

⁵⁵Bruce A. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation: Unconditional, Individual, and Infralapsarian,” in *Perspectives on Election*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 27.

⁵⁶Schreiner, *Romans*, 452.

⁵⁷S. M. Baugh, “The Meaning of Foreknowledge,” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 194.

“whom he set regard upon” or “whom he knew from eternity with distinguishing affection and delight,” and it is virtually equivalent to “whom he foreloved.”⁵⁸

Generally speaking, Arminians do not find fault with attaching the connotation of love to γινώσκω (*ginōskō*); they just find fault with doing so in the particular case of Romans 8:29. For instance, Osborne writes, “The verb is connected to the Hebrew *yada* for God’s loving knowledge of his people. . . . Yet one wonders if it is the most natural understanding of the verb.”⁵⁹ It is better, he concludes, to link foreknowledge to a faith decision and interpret it as God’s knowledge regarding those who would respond in faith to his call.⁶⁰ There is no need to address the numerous problems with Osborne’s assertion (as they have been previously discussed), other than to say that his understanding of “foreknew” is not the most natural understanding of the verb. On the contrary, his interpretation takes προγινώσκω far beyond the bounds of what the text allows.

The most natural understanding of προγινώσκειν in Romans 8:29 carries with it the notion of love, devotion, and personal commitment. It is bound up with covenantal implications, to be sure, because God is a loyal and faithful God to those he chooses to redeem. It is then appropriate to render Romans 8:29-30 in such a way that reflects that love, devotion, and personal commitment: “For those whom [God] set his heart in love he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”⁶¹

Argument 4: The terms “foreknowledge” and “predestination” are not synonymous. It is common for Arminians to refute the Calvinist understanding of foreknowledge on the grounds that it folds “foreknowledge” and “predestination” together, thus making the two terms basically indistinguishable, which is obviously not what Paul meant. Osborne, for example, writes,

The majority of commentators (Murray 1968; Cranfield 1975; Hendriksen 1981; Morris 1988; Stott 1994; Moo 1996; Schreiner 1998) take “foreknew” as virtually equivalent to “predestined” on several grounds: (1) The relational love inherent in “foreknew” goes further than mere knowledge of choices and means “to determine

⁵⁸Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 317.

⁵⁹Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 221. See also Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1889), 107-10; Forster and Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History*, 178-208.

⁶⁰Ibid., 222.

⁶¹Foreknowledge and predestination in Rom 8:29 are roughly equivalent to what Moses says to Israel in Deut 10:15: “Yet the LORD set his heart in love (foreknowledge) on your fathers and chose (predestination) their offspring after them, you above all people, as you are this day.”

to enter a relationship with,” that is, God’s choice or election (as in Rom 11:2; 1 Pet 1:2, 20); (2) it relates to his preordained plan from verse 28; (3) it is foreknowledge that determines rather than just knows what is to happen; (4) the emphasis is on the second verb *predestined*, and the first verb simply prepares for it; (5) it connotes that God knew his people, not just about what they would decide to do; (6) since it refers to a prior intimate knowledge of believers, it by nature becomes synonymous with God’s choice “before the creation of the world” (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20). This is very impressive, even persuasive, for it fits the emphasis on divine sovereignty throughout this passage (leading into chaps. 9-11). Yet one wonders if it is the most natural understanding of the verb. For one thing, none of the other five stages are virtually equivalent (even *predestined* and *called* are different stages); rather, each one prepares for the next. Why should the first two be synonymous?⁶²

It is clear that Osborne is familiar with how Calvinists have reached their conclusions, and even finds the arguments persuasive, yet ultimately he rejects the Hebraic sense of foreknowledge, first, on the basis that it is equivalent to predestination. While Arminians do acknowledge that γινώσκω can have the connotation of love, they inevitably assert that Calvinists’ primary definition of γινώσκω is “to choose,” “determine,” or “set apart.”⁶³ This is apparent in Forster and Marston’s word study of “foreknowledge” in *God’s Strategy in Human History*, as well as Cottrell’s essay in *Perspectives on Election*. For instance, Cottrell writes, “For Calvinists God’s foreknowledge is the act by which he (unconditionally) makes distinctions among people, *choosing* some out of the mass of future mankind to be the sole recipients of his saving grace. Foreknowledge is the same as election.”⁶⁴

It is not entirely accurate, however, to claim that Calvinism’s primary definition of foreknowledge is election. In fact, a brief survey of even a few of the commentators Osborne cites reveals differently. Murray presents a thorough and well-articulated defense of “foreknowledge” as “foreloving.”⁶⁵ Stott concludes unambiguously, “Foreknowledge is ‘sovereign, distinguishing love.’”⁶⁶ Moo notes that “foreknowledge” likely means “know intimately,” or to “have regard for.”⁶⁷ Schreiner

⁶²Osborne, *Romans*, 221.

⁶³Godet does clearly distinguish between foreknowledge as “to choose beforehand” and the Hebraic sense of “foreloving,” but rejects both in favor of foreseen faith. See Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 103.

⁶⁴Cottrell, “Arminian View,” 87.

⁶⁵Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 315-18.

⁶⁶John Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 249.

⁶⁷Moo, *Romans*, 533.

asserts that the point in Romans 8:29 is that God has predestined those whom he set his covenantal affection.⁶⁸ While all these commentators see foreknowledge and predestination as in some way related, that is a far cry from saying they are in every way the same. The word προγινώσκω means “to know beforehand,” and προώρισεν (*proōrisen*, predestine) “to destine beforehand.” “The latter term stresses the preordained plan of God that will certainly come to pass (Acts 4:28; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11) in accordance with his will. The former has a different nuance in that it highlights his covenantal love and affection for those whom he has chosen.”⁶⁹

An analogy may help here. Suppose a guitarist visits his favorite music store and plays a handful of fine acoustic guitars. After several hours of playing he finds himself especially enamored with a particular Gibson J-45, but chooses to leave the store that day without it. On the other hand, suppose another guitarist visits his favorite music store. He too plays all the acoustic guitars and falls in love with a rather dry and spritely Martin D-18. He knows if he walks away from this rare mahogany find he will live to regret it, so he decides to purchase it that very moment and use it to record his next album.

What is the difference between these two scenarios? The primary difference is one of purpose. The first musician, undoubtedly smitten with the J-45, ultimately decides not to take it home, while the second musician, also smitten with the guitar he has discovered, purchases the D-18 with the specific intent of using it on his next project. This, in essence, illustrates the difference between foreknowledge and predestination. Foreknowledge tells us that God set his heart in love upon certain individuals before the foundation of the world, and predestination tells us what he determined to do with them: conform them into the likeness of his Son. Simply put, προγινώσκω emphasizes God’s love, whereas προώρισεν emphasizes God’s “purposive intent” in that love.⁷⁰

When we consider this high destiny defined, “to be conformed to the image of his Son,” there is exhibited not only the dignity of this ordination but also the greatness of the love from which the appointment flows. God’s love is not passive emotion; it is active volition and it moves determinatively to nothing less than the highest goal conceivable for his adopted children, conformity to the image of his only-begotten Son. To allege that the pregnant force of “foreknew” does not leave room for the distinct enunciation of this high destiny is palpably without warrant or reason.⁷¹

⁶⁸Schreiner, *Romans*, 452.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 453.

⁷⁰I am not trying to make a correlation along all points of this illustration, such as why God chooses some for salvation and others he does not. I am simply stressing that there is a clear difference between foreknowledge and predestination, emphasizing, in this analogy, that the “purpose” of predestination makes it distinct from God’s prior act of foreloving (foreknowing).

Arminians would be right to object if in fact Calvinists made no distinction between foreknowledge and predestination, but that allegation is, as Murray states, without warrant or reason, for a clear line of demarcation exists between these two pre-creation acts of God. Whereas προγινώσκω emphasizes God's loving commitment to those individuals he set his affections upon, προώρισεν emphasizes God's destination for these same individuals. In other words, "foreknowledge" and "predestination" are not synonymous terms; they highlight two related-yet-distinct actions performed by God from before the creation of the universe. Therefore, the claim that the Calvinist definition of προγινώσκω obliterates the distinction between foreknowledge and predestination is unjustifiable and should be rejected.

Argument 5: Since justification is by faith, and only those who are called are justified, it must be that God's calling produces faith. The plain point of Romans 8:29-30 is that all the foreknown will ultimately be glorified; not one person will be lost, dropped, or left out of God's plan of salvation. Jesus speaks of this same type of inevitability, albeit using different language, when he says,

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:37-40)

Furthermore, both Jesus' words and Paul's words imply selectivity. To say that "all" those God foreknew are predestined, called, justified, and glorified is to say that "only" those God foreknew are predestined, called, justified, and glorified. Since justification is by faith (Rom 5:1), and Paul says that only those who are called are justified, it must be that this calling is an "effectual" calling, a calling that, without fail, accomplishes faith and consequently justification. This type of call is most clearly seen in passages such as 1 Corinthians 1:23-24: "But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." While a "general" call, a true gospel invitation,⁷² goes out to all people, an "inner, effectual" call goes out to the elect. This divine call creates a new heart of willing faith so that the gospel, which was once considered foolish, is now seen as the power and wisdom of God.

⁷¹Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 318.

⁷²Matthew 22:14 demonstrates this type of call: "For many are called, but few are chosen." Here the word *call* is used in the general sense, as it is juxtaposed with *chosen*. Although many are called in the sense of being invited, only the "chosen" actually partake of the wedding feast.

The Bible illustrates this effectual, or irresistible, call in various ways. Paul, speaking of those who are perishing, says to the Corinthians, “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:4-6). Because men are blinded to the worth of Christ and the beauty of the gospel, a divine work, indeed a miracle, is needed for them to see and believe. Paul compares this miracle with the first day of creation when God said, “Let there be light.” When spiritually dead people come to see and believe in Jesus, it is in fact a new creation, a new birth that has taken place, which makes God’s creative power seen in Genesis 1 an appropriate parallel.⁷³

Arminians balk at Calvinism’s doctrine of effectual calling, or irresistible grace, because they see it as God forcing someone to do something against his or her will. The doctrine of irresistible grace, however, simply means that when God pleases he overcomes all resistance and makes the heart happily willing to believe in his Son rather than remain in a state of rebellion and condemnation. Generally speaking, perhaps the most explicit account of God’s sovereignty over men’s hearts is found in 2 Chronicles 30:1-12. King Hezekiah wrote to the people of Israel commanding them to keep the Passover, as was decreed and pleasing to the Lord: “So the couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. However, some men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD” (2 Chr 30:10-12).

What is striking in this passage is that all people were given the same decree. They were commanded by the king to return to the Lord, to not be like their fathers and brothers who were faithless, stiff-necked, and brought judgment upon themselves. Instead, Hezekiah pleaded with them to yield to the Lord and serve him only so that God’s fierce anger may be abated and turned away from them. Sadly, some laughed and mocked the couriers and the king. Others, though, humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. And then the Spirit records, “The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD” (2 Chr 30:12). Verse 12 demonstrates a general principle that is at work not only in this passage but also in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6; 1 Corinthians 1:23-24; and Romans 8:29-30:

⁷³Another example of God’s divine work that brings a person to faith in Christ is in Acts 16:14, where Lydia is listening to the preaching of Paul. Luke says, “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” This heart-opening is what happens when God “calls” those he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. It is not merely an opportunity for man to choose or reject the gospel, but an infallible work of God that creates new spiritual life, opens blinded eyes, and creates a heart of willing faith. Lydia experienced this in Acts 16:14 and so has every person who has ever come to faith in Jesus.

behind an individual's moving/working is God's moving/working.⁷⁴

This principle is consistent with the Calvinist understanding of “calling” and “justification” in Romans 8:30. We have already noted that the calling in verse 30 is selective: “The call here is given only to those God predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, as verse 30 says, ‘Those whom he predestined, *these* he also called.’ And this call leads necessarily to justification, as verse 30 says, ‘Those whom he called, *these* he also justified.’ All the called are justified, not just some of them.”⁷⁵ But, again, inherent in this verse is both selectivity and inevitability. Those whom God foreknew and predestined are infallibly called and justified; and because justification is by faith, it naturally follows that the calling produces, or guarantees, faith. The calling in view, then, is a divine act by which God calls faith into being. Just as he creates light out of darkness and moves men's hearts to obey his vice-regent king, he calls spiritually dead people to faith in his Son.

Unquestionably, the Arminian interpretation of Roman 8:29 places faith in between foreknowledge and predestination, for it is those God foresaw by their own free will who would believe in Jesus that he, in turn, predestined. But the “foreseen faith” understanding of foreknowledge is not exegetically or logically plausible. Since only those who are called are justified, it must be that the calling itself creates faith. If God foresees any faith, it is the faith that he begets in the life of the called, and this calling does not come to all but only to those who are predestined. The correct interpretation of this text cannot have faith falling in between “foreknowledge” and “predestination.” Instead, it must fall in between “calling” and “justification,” thus proving the Calvinist understanding of foreknowledge to be the only legitimate interpretation.

Conclusion

This paper has presented five arguments in favor of the Calvinistic sense of foreknowledge in Romans 8:29: (1) defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith requires that the concept of prevenient grace be true, which is an idea not substantiated from Scripture; (2) foreseen faith is foreign to the text of Romans 8:29; (3) the verb γινώσκω,

⁷⁴Space does not permit me to look at other passages that reflect the same reality. For instance, Jesus responds to certain Jews' unbelief by saying, “The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, *but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep*” (John 10:25-26, italics

mine). Jesus does not say, “You are not my sheep because you do not believe,” but rather, “You do not believe because you are not my sheep.” The reason they do not believe is that they do not belong to him. As well, in Acts 13:48 the gospel is preached to Gentiles and Luke records, “and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” While human responsibility in believing must never be undermined, the emphasis here is that the Gentiles believing was due to God's grace alone: their election *resulted in* them believing, and not the other way around.

⁷⁵John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2000), 141.

from which “foreknew” is derived, often connotes love, affection, and relationship; (4) the terms “foreknowledge” and “predestination” are not synonymous; (5) since justification is by faith and only those who are called are justified, it must be that God’s calling produces faith. Considered separately, any of these five arguments provide compelling evidence against the Arminian definition of foreknowledge and for the Calvinist interpretation. But when taken cumulatively, it is inconceivable to argue that foreknowledge means foreseen faith in Romans 8:29. Rather, it seems exegetically and contextually right to define foreknowledge as God’s purposive love which results in predestination and finally glorification.