

The Foreknowledge of God

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Foreknowledge is an often misunderstood and maligned concept. But many assumptions about its meaning are unbiblical. In this lesson, Dr. Lawson disabuses false notions of foreknowledge and examines what the text of Scripture actually teaches.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Romans 8:29–30; Acts 2:22–24

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

1. To correct unbiblical views of foreknowledge
2. To explain key passages of Scripture that together provide a clear and coherent picture of God's foreknowledge
3. To inspire trust and confidence in the One who foreknows His people

QUOTATIONS

God knows both the micro- and macro-dimensions of the entire universe. He numbers the very hairs of our heads. Not only does He know what we will do before we do it, but also He knows all the options we could have chosen at the moment. He knows all contingencies. Yet God's knowledge of contingencies is not itself contingent. His foreknowledge is perfect and absolute. He is not a Great Chess Player who must wait to see what we will do, but He knows absolutely what we will do before we do it. Before a word is even formed on our lips, He knows it altogether.

—R.C. Sproul

When we attribute foreknowledge to God, we mean that all things always were, and perpetually remain, under his eyes, so that to his knowledge there is nothing future or past,

but all things are present. And they are present in such a way that he not only conceives them through ideas . . . but he truly looks upon them and discerns them as things placed before him.

—John Calvin

LECTURE OUTLINE

- I. Correcting Misunderstandings of Foreknowledge
 - A. God has never looked into the future and learned anything.
 - i. God is omniscient.
 - ii. He never looks into the future and sees anything He has not already foreordained.
 - B. If all God does is look into the future to see what someone will do, then that's all that foreknowledge is.
 - i. Since mankind is totally depraved, no one would repent if foreknowledge only entailed observation and not God acting to bring about a state of affairs.
 - C. *Foreknowledge* does not mean foresight.
 - i. Romans 8:29 states, "*whom* He foreknew," not "*what* He foresaw."
 - ii. It is a gross misunderstanding of what the word *foreknowledge* means.
 - iii. *Foreknowledge* more accurately refers to God's previous choice to love a certain group of people.

- II. The Biblical Meaning of Foreknowledge
 - A. We must first establish the meaning of *know* in Scripture.
 - i. Genesis 4:1 says, "Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived."
 1. This passage makes it clear that the word *know* in Scripture can mean a loving and intimate relationship. It doesn't always simply mean the knowledge of facts.
 - ii. Amos 3:2 says, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth."
 1. Here God is speaking of Israel. *Know* here means choosing to love in a very distinguishing way.
 - iii. Matthew 1:25 says, "[Joseph] knew her not until she had given birth."
 1. This refers again to the intimate relationship between a husband and wife.
 - iv. Jesus says in Matthew 7:23, "I never knew you."
 1. God knows everything; clearly, He means here that they never had a relationship.
 - v. Jesus says in John 10:14, "I know my own and my own know me."
 1. Jesus is speaking here of an intimate, personal, saving relationship.
 - B. There are explicit examples of foreknowledge.
 - i. Acts 2:23 says Jesus was "delivered up according to the . . . foreknowledge of God."
 - ii. 1 Peter 1:1–2 says Christians are "elect exiles . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father."

1. Here those who were chosen by the Father were chosen because of the distinguishing love that the Father has for the elect.
- iii. Romans 8:29 says, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined.”
 1. Here we have clear evidence that those who are predestined are those whom the Father has loved in eternity past with a distinguishing affection.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When Christ speaks of telling certain individuals that He never knew them, He means _____.
 - a. He didn’t condone their behavior
 - b. He had never seen them before
 - c. He did not know where they came from
 - d. He didn’t have an intimate relationship with them
2. Foreknowledge consists of God’s looking down the tunnel of time to see how men will respond to His Son.
 - a. True
 - b. False
3. Choose the incorrect statement:
 - a. Foreknowledge connotes a relationship and excludes knowledge.
 - b. Foreknowledge is closely related to foreordination.
 - c. Foreknowledge cannot change.
 - d. Foreknowledge was operative before the world began.
4. Foreknowledge is very similar in meaning to foresight.
 - a. True
 - b. False

BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Since God’s foreknowledge is perfect and doesn’t change, what motivation do Christians have for evangelism?
2. Many people struggle with the idea that God foreknows certain individuals but not others. How can you show them that God’s foreknowledge actually magnifies His character rather than diminishes His fairness and grace?
3. How can God’s eternal foreknowledge encourage believers in times of sorrow?
4. Have you known other Christians who don’t adhere to the definition of foreknowledge presented in this lesson? Do they witness to unbelievers differently? Do they talk about the love of God differently?