

“To the Elect...”—1 Peter 1:1-2

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December 5, 2021

[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in 1 Peter 1...

Salvation is a glorious thing. The grace of God is something that should always leave us awestruck. I know, for me personally, there are days where I am just so overwhelmed by the thought of where I would have been apart from His grace and how underserving I am of His grace. While I don't pretend to understand the depths of the mystery of God's grace, I have long been disillusioned of any notions of entitlement. He owed me nothing good. I deserved no offer of salvation, only wrath. Yet here I am, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. It's a testament to both the marvel of God's grace and the mystery. But I did nothing to earn this grace. God owed me no such favor.

I think people sometimes fail to grasp this. For things to be fair, they think, God has to give fallen sinners a chance to be saved. But does He owe us that? Absolutely not. One proof of this is that we are not the only moral creatures that He has made. There are fallen angels too, who sinned and in rebellion were separated from God. The Bible also speaks of “elect angels” (1 Tim. 5:21). But the Bible never speaks of God offering redemption to fallen angels. And He is not unjust to withhold it. Fallen angels are forever condemned, no hope of salvation. There would be no injustice in God if we were not given salvation. He is under no obligation to us. Yet Jesus came to the earth, clothed Himself in our humanity, that He might offer Himself up on the cross to save us from our sin. That's grace. Pure and undeserved grace. We have to stress that at the outset because if we forget the grace of it all, then we will stumble over every other theological issue ahead.

Often when theologians try to grapple with all the Scriptures say about salvation, they will refer to something called “the order of salvation,” or, in Latin, *ordu salutis*. This is an attempt to order various aspect of salvation in a way that is consistent with the biblical presentation. So, for example, one of the most widely sold theological textbooks in my lifetime, lists the following ten elements:¹

1. Election (God's choice of people to be saved)
2. The gospel call (proclaiming the message of the gospel)
3. Regeneration (being born again)
4. Conversion (faith and repentance)
5. Justification (right legal standing)
6. Adoption (membership in God's family)
7. Sanctification (right conduct in life)
8. Perseverance (remaining a Christian)
9. Death (going to be with the Lord)
10. Glorification (receiving a resurrection body)

Obviously, there is a relationship between these various items. Numbers 2 through 6 and part of 7 play out, more or less, when we speak of someone “becoming a Christian.” Number 10 will not happen until Christ returns again. And number 1 actually took place before we even existed (Eph 1:4-12).² And it is this aspect of the Christian's identity—his or her election—that Peter chooses to stress at the beginning of this epistle.

While I don't usually preach from the New International Version—not because it's a bad translation, but because it's not what we have in the pews—I do want to read the opening verses from that translation this

morning because, for reasons I explained in some detail last week, I think it does an exceptional job of clarifying the relationships between the various phrases that make up this introduction. You can follow along as best you can in your translation or with the slides above. This is God's Word...

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.” (1 Peter 1:1-2)

Last week we began considering...

THREE ASSERTIONS ABOUT ELECTION

Remember “election” just means “choice.” In this case, it is referring to the choice of God to save an individual. The “elect” are “chosen.” The first assertion about election we considered (which happens to be the last one mentioned), was that...

Christians are elect for obedience and sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ

We saw that this is covenant language. Jesus has brought us into a covenant relationship with God. We are brought into the New Covenant people of God through faith in Jesus Christ. When we turn from our sin and self, trusting instead in Christ and His work on the cross as the only hope we have in life and death, we are forgiven and brought into His people, His family. That could be you today!

The assertion we will consider today is the first one mentioned...

Christians are elect according to the foreknowledge of the Father

Before the foundation of the world, God knew who would be among His people, among the “elect.” God's people have been “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Pet 1:2). But what does that mean? Here many Christians disagree. And note I said “Christians” disagree because it is quite possible for true believers to have different understandings of things like predestination and divine foreknowledge. These are “in house” debates, not the test of one's salvation. So, for example, a Calvinist and an Arminian will disagree on these matters, but they can do so charitably and with a familial spirit. And as always, I am far more concerned that you come to a conclusion from the biblical text (not your feelings), than that you agree with my own views on such things. So please, test what I say and make sure it conforms to the Word of God.

When it comes to a text such as this, we clearly have an instance where Peter grounds the doctrine of election in divine foreknowledge. So if God's foreknowledge is the basis for our election, then the question we must wrestle with is what does it mean for God to “foreknow” us?

In English, the word “foreknow” simply means that you know beforehand. Some theologians will speak of God's prescience, meaning the “knowledge” (i.e., “science”) He possesses before (“pre”) things come to pass. Christians believe God knows in advance which individuals will respond to the Gospel with faith. No one should deny that. This fact is part of God's omniscience, which just means it's a consequence of God being all-knowing. But most Arminian theologians go a step further and suggest that it is on the basis of this knowledge—the knowledge God has of who will come to faith—that God elects and predestines a person for salvation.

So, for instance, Roger Olson, in his book called *Arminian Theology*, writes that...

“[Arminians] believe that God foreknows every person’s ultimate and final decision regarding Jesus Christ, and on that basis God predestines people to salvation or damnation. But Arminians do not believe God predetermines or preselects people for either heaven or hell apart from their free acts of accepting or resisting the grace of God.”³

Similarly, Jack Cottrell, another well-known Arminian theologian, states,

“[God] does not predestine certain unbelievers to become believers and the rest to remain in their unbelief. Those who accept Christ through faith do so of their own free choice. Their choice of Jesus Christ is not predestined. That choice, however, is foreknown; and as a result the choosing ones become the chosen ones, who are then predestined to receive the full blessings of salvation.”⁴

These comments are representative of the views of many believers, whether they have given much thought to the biblical text or not. And in light of such assertions, one could say that Arminians believe in a *conditional* election. That is, they hold “the view that God’s eternal choice is conditioned upon something he sees in the individual.”⁵

I once held this view. I do not any longer for a number of reasons, most of which we won’t be able to get into this morning. But one reason is when I look at the passages that deal with this subject in the Bible, none of them seem to suggest that the “choosing ones become the chosen ones.” Is that really what Peter is suggesting? And if so, how do I avoid the logical implication that I really elected myself and then God, because He knew I would do so, chose me on the basis of my self-election?⁶ That seems the opposite of what Peter is suggesting. That would seem to turn God’s choice of a person into the person’s choice of Him. But Peter doesn’t ground a person’s election in the decision of the person, but in the Triune activity of God. And this, it seems to me, is the consistent tendency in the Scriptures when it comes to doctrines like election and predestination. It does, as here, ground it in God’s foreknowledge and so foreknowledge becomes an important concept in this debate.

As always, the text of Scripture should guide us. And it may guide us in places where we are not comfortable, but as Christians we should be willing to lay down our preferences when it comes into conflict with what the Bible says about God and His ways, even if, at present, we cannot solve every conundrum in our head. I’ve said to you before, if the Bible has never challenged your thinking about God, then your view of God is not the biblical God. It’s an idol. The idol that you’re comfortable with. And don’t be surprised when that idol agrees with you on every issue, because it is, after all, fashioned in your image. But if we are humble enough to recognize that we are sinners and fallible, then we should be humble enough to accept that some things about an infinite God are going to be difficult, if not impossible, for us to grasp here and now. As the Lord said through the prophet Isaiah,

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Even the righteous Job learned that lesson the hard way, when the Lord began questioning him. Job is forced to cover his mouth and confess, *“I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know”* (Job 42:3).

The point is that if everything your God does makes perfect sense to you, then your God may not really be all that impressive. And He is certainly not the God of the Bible. There is going to be mystery. There are going to be answers that He does not give. There are going to be challenges where He is going to require us to trust Him without complete understanding, to trust that He knows what He is doing, that He is good, that He is our loving Father, and so on. And He has given us enough evidence to trust Him in those moments because He did not spare His own Son to assure us of His love and commitment. So there is need sometimes for that childlike faith that says, “I don’t get it, but I trust You because I know You are good and that You love me.” There have been

many times in my life when I have had to find comfort in believing, as Tim Keller once put it, “that God has chosen for us exactly what we would have chosen if we knew everything God knows.”⁷

But what does God “know”? Even though we don’t have a ton of time to unpack the topic of divine foreknowledge and all of the intersecting topics (e.g., predestination, providence, etc.), we should at least make some passing observations on biblical foreknowledge. I’m under no illusions that such a quick glance will satisfy all our curiosities, but it may at least give you all an idea where to dig in your own studies. In the New Testament, the verb “to foreknow” is used five times and the noun “foreknowledge” is used twice. Of those seven references, five of them refer to God’s foreknowledge. It would seem these are the most relevant texts.

The first, of course, is our text this morning from 1 Peter. The second also derives from Peter, but is recorded by Luke in the book of Acts. In Peter’s sermon on Pentecost, he states that Jesus was,

“delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God...” (Acts 2:23)

Here it is what happened to Jesus—the crucifixion—that is said to have taken place according to God’s predetermined plan and foreknowledge. God didn’t just know ahead of time what would happen through the immoral actions and decisions of Christ’s generation (though the same verse stresses the culpability of those who killed Jesus), He in some sense planned the cross of Christ. As Luke records Jesus saying, that *“the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed”* (Luke 22:22; cf. Rom. 8:32). So these ideas of human responsibility and God’s sovereign planning can coexist without tension in biblical framework. I’ve just shown that they do for Jesus, Peter, and Luke. This is called “compatibilism.”⁸ God is sovereign, and things happen according to His plan, but mankind is morally responsible for their choices. Both ideas are taught in Scripture, so both ideas must be compatible (even if we can’t sort out the mystery of it all).

But I should also point out that in the original language, in Acts 2:23 the notions of God’s “definitive plan and foreknowledge” are governed by one direct article. That means, that they should not be viewed as two completely distinct notions. “By using one article for the two nouns *purpose* and *foreknowledge*, Peter is expressing a close interconnection between the two.”⁹ In Greek this is called “hendiadys.” It’s one way a writer shows the close connection between ideas. In this case, Peter is showing that “God’s foreknowledge is joined to his will.” As Isaiah said,

“I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’” (Isaiah 46:9-10)

The translators of the King James Version (and NKJV) recognized this close connection between God’s foreknowledge and fixed purpose, as their translation of 1 Peter 1:20 (another one of the foreknowledge passages that has God as the subject) makes clear. Concerning Jesus, that translation reads,

“Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but made manifest in these last times for you” (1 Peter 1:20; KJV)

That is the verbal form of the noun used in verse 2 for God’s foreknowledge. But they recognized that the sense in this context, as in Acts 2, is that God’s foreknowledge implies foreordination—a relationship between divine knowledge and fixed purpose. God didn’t just see that it would happen. It was part of His plan. He planned the events of Christ’s Passion, and willed them to occur. The NRSV translates the phrase “He was destined” and the HCSB and the NLT actually go so far as to translate the statement as “He was chosen.”¹⁰

Now we’ve seen three of the five times the New Testament speaks of God’s foreknowledge or foreknowing (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2, 20). Here is the fourth and most famous...

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” (Romans 8:28-30)

Notice that the great assurance in verse 28—that all things work together for good for those called according to God’s purpose—is grounded in (note the word “for”) in the saving activity of God that stretches from God’s foreknowledge to his glorification. This progression is sometimes called the “golden chain” of salvation and the links of this chain—God’s foreknowledge, predestining, justifying, glorifying—are unbreakable. One follows the next with a certain divinely orchestrated certainty. Note also that the “good” that all things are said to contribute to is not any old good, but a specific good that involves conformity to Christ’s likeness. All your circumstances, brothers and sisters, God is working toward that end. They are meant to make you more like Christ.

It is often suggested that the order here implies that God’s predestining of individuals is grounded in the foreknowledge of God. I have no issue with that. But some (usually of the Arminian variety) understand this passage to suggest that since God’s foreknowledge precedes His predestining that His predestining must be based on what He foresees about whether a person will have faith in Jesus one day. However, I don’t think that conclusion is necessary for a number of reasons.¹¹

First, I don’t think for Paul that divine foreknowledge is equivalent to the concept of “foreseeing.” Of course, none of us should deny that God foresees everything because God knows everything. He is all-knowing, which is what is meant when people say that God is omniscient. That to “foreknow” can’t simply mean to “foresee” can be discerned when you swap out the words in these verses. Paul says that those whom God “foreknew” He also predestined and justified and glorified. In other words, the “foreknown” are those He saves utterly and completely. But it would not be appropriate to say that those God “foresees” are the ones He predestines, justifies, and glorifies, would it? No. Why? Because God foresees all things, but He doesn’t save all people. So Paul, it seems to me, is not using this language of divine foreknowledge to mean simply God’s foresight of future events and persons.

Some will pushback, however, and say that when Paul speaks of those God “foreknew,” He doesn’t mean those God foresees, but rather “those He foresees will believe.” That would solve the problem. But it also creates new problems. The first of which is that this is not what Paul said. And I think it would be hard to argue that this is what Paul meant, given the context of Romans. Indeed, in the very next chapter—where we find the most sustained treatment of the doctrine of election in the Bible (and, incidentally, the chapter that changed my mind on this subject and served as something of my own Job moment)—Paul will go out of His way to stress that God’s choice of certain individuals (and not others) in the history of redemption was not owing to anything about them, but simply to the purpose and plan of God.

For example, when speaking of God’s choice of Isaac and not Ishmael or Jacob and not Esau (and by extension those who would be God’s covenant people), Paul stresses this point:

“For this is what the promise said: ‘About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.’¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac,¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—¹² she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’¹³ As it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’” (Romans 9:9-13)

The divine decision was not about the individual’s actions and choices, it was, Paul says, “*in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls*” (Rom. 9:11).¹² I remember reading that one time, years ago, and thinking “That just doesn’t seem right, would that be just?” But

then I read the next verse and it was though Paul was writing to me and was one step ahead of all my objection—not just here, but throughout the chapter. The next verse, Paul, knowing that this could be deemed unfair, states,

“What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (Rom. 9:14)

It’s like Paul was reading my inner struggle like a book. And then the apostle goes on to speak of the hardening of Pharaoh. And then concludes like this: *“So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.”* And I remember like it was yesterday, reading that and struggling with the fairness of it all and all the usual objections that seemed so right to me at the time. But then came my Job moment. Again, it was like Paul was writing to me and my personal struggles with this, for in the next verses we read:

“You will say to me then, ‘Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?’ ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?” (Rom. 9:19-24)

And I remember reading that and being forced to “cover my mouth” and “repent” like Job. I had to go back and reassess all of those passages that I thought I understood and consider that maybe there was more to what I knew than what I knew. It was humbling. And it changed me.

Now, don’t hear what I am not saying. I’m not saying that a biblical case could not be made for views that differ from my own. I’ve had the privilege of studying under some of the leading Arminian and Calvinistic scholars of our day, the men and women who write the literature that others use when debating such things. And they are dear brothers and sisters. Cherished friends. They love the Lord and His Church, and, in many cases, have given their life’s work to advancing the mission of God. So I’m not saying that the only people who take the Bible seriously are the ones who agree with me or that there are not biblical reasons to objecting to various points I have alluded to this morning.

What I am saying is that there was a moment in my life—and it was when I was a pastor and thought my beliefs were based on the text—when I came to realize that my thoughts on this matter were based more on my inner sense of what felt right or wrong than it was on what God actually said in His Word. That’s a problem. And for me it required repentance and coming to God’s Word afresh with a disposition that was willing to have its mind changed. Because the heart is deceitful, as Jeremiah said, and it’s hard to trust (Jer. 17:9). But the Word is true and authoritative.

All that to say, it is difficult for me to conclude that when Paul speaks of those God “foreknew” in chapter 8 he means something so specific as “those he foreknew would believe on Jesus” and that this would be the basis of election given the argument Paul has already made in Romans concerning God’s undeserved grace and the argument He dedicates the next chapters to, related to election.

And it’s also difficult for me to agree with this position because I don’t think the grammar of Romans 8 supports it. Notice, and it’s clearer in the original language, that it’s not “what” God knew, but “who” God knew. It’s a masculine, personal pronoun. Paul says “*those whom*” God foreknew, He also predestined, and so on. The focus is on the people God “knew,” not some decision of faith they will make. That would be a different pronoun and there are much more obvious ways to say that.¹³

God “knew” people. Now, you might be thinking, doesn’t God *know* all people? And we’ve already established that Paul can’t mean all people here because He doesn’t save all people and salvation is what Paul says these “known” people experience. True. But this is where the language of the rest of Scripture is so helpful. Many of you have probably noticed in your studies that the language of “knowing” is not always used for “cognition,” that is, for being aware of someone or something. When the grammatical object of the verb is a person, it very often has connotations of love, intimacy, and covenant.

For example, when a husband “knows” his wife in Scripture, a common idiom, it is referring to intimate and sexual union that they experience because they are in covenant with one another. In other words, when the Scriptures talk about “knowing” someone it often has connotations of love and covenant commitment.¹⁴ We can’t survey all of the examples, so one will have to suffice. In Amos 3:2, God says to the Israelites,

“You only have I known of all the families of the earth...” (Amos 3:2; Cf. Hosea 13:4-5; Psalm 1:6; Matthew 7:23; 1 Corinthians 8:3; Galatians 4:8-9; 2 Timothy 2:16-19)

God is not suggesting there that He was only aware of the Israelites and was ignorant of all the other people groups. He’s not saying that there are nations that are unknown to Him. Clearly not. Yet He says that it is only Israel whom He has “*known*.” This “knowing” has to do with His commitment and special, covenantal love for Israel. Indeed, that is often translated as “chosen” (NIV, NASB¹⁹⁹⁵; NET; CEV).¹⁵ And this verse is likely the background for what Peter will say in 2:9, when he describes the God’s people as “*a chosen race*.”

We see a similar sense in the fifth and final New Testament example of God’s foreknowledge, which is found in Romans 11. Paul is still responding to possible objections to the doctrine of election, when he states:

“I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.” (Romans 11:1-2)

In this passage Paul is contrasting God’s foreknowledge with “rejection and the breaking of a prior commitment.” As one commentator explains, “the issue is not ignorance versus previous cognition of them, but divorce versus a prior, personal commitment to them.” Therefore, the following paraphrase is offered:

“God has not totally rejected all Jews, has he? No! As proof, I too am an Israelite, and thus a member of the remnant he still knows. So he has not abandoned his commitment made to Israel with whom he previously had a covenant relation [foreknew] for so long.”¹⁶

So, in short, I don’t think *any* of the instances in the New Testament that speak of God’s possession of foreknowledge or speak of God as the subject who foreknows support the notion that this foreknowledge connotes that God looked ahead and saw the faith of individuals. The passages in context seem stronger than that. Those God foreknows are those whom He purposes to enter into loving and covenant relationship with. The determining factor is His choice, not ours.

I wonder sometimes if we struggle with such notions of election because of our cultural setting that puts such a premium of a no-holds-barred, libertarian freedom. But the biblical writers don’t seem to have the same cognitive dissonance and internal struggle. And I suspect that this is because most of them were Jewish Israelites. They were brought up with the understanding that God chose them to be His people. From all the nations, God covenanted with Israel alone. Was that fair? That’s the wrong question. It was grace. And their history and prophets repeatedly underscored that this divine choice was all of grace and had nothing to do with the decision of the people or how great they were (e.g. Deut. 7:7).

For this reason, the doctrine of election, even when it's not the topic of discussion, often seems to be assumed in the New Testament. Perhaps it would be better to say that it is often taught indirectly through offhand statements.¹⁷ For example, to the Thessalonians, Paul writes,

“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.” (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5)

This is not a claim that they were receptive to the Gospel and therefore were chosen. It is a statement that they were receptive because they were chosen. How do you know, asks Paul, that you were chosen? His answer is that when the Gospel was preached to you, and it resonated with you.

In Acts, when Luke is describing Paul and Barnabas preaching the Gospel to those in Antioch in Pisidia, he describes the results like this:

“And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” (Acts 13:48)

It doesn't say that they were appointed because God knew they would believe. It says that they believed because they were appointed.

Here's another example. Right before Jesus invites the weary and heavy laden to come to Him, Jesus said,

“All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”
(Matthew 11:27)

Who are the ones that know the Father, according to Jesus? The ones the Son chooses to reveal Him to. Jesus makes a similar point in John 10.

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ 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)

I love these verses. It shows that no one who comes to Jesus in faith is cast out. We don't have to worry about God rejecting us because we are not among the elect. If we come to Him in faith, we are received by Him. But who are the ones that come to Jesus, according to these verses? They are the ones the Father has given to Jesus. He says, *“All that the Father gives me will come to me.”* And the previous verse shows that this statement is meant to explain why there were some who had seen Him (Jesus), but not believed (6:36). It's not that they were not given to Him because they didn't believe. It's explicitly that they didn't believe because they were not given to Him. Every convert is a gift that the Father gives to the Son.

These are just a few examples of these passing statements that we find in Scripture that are not detailed expositions on the doctrine of election, but suggest how assumed that doctrine is. And in each case—as in all of the texts that explicitly speak of God's foreknowledge or foreknowing (and we considered all of the NT texts today)—the claim is not that you are chosen because you believe, but rather that you believe because you were chosen. These are some of the reasons why I believe that when Peter states that we are elect or chosen *“according to the foreknowledge of God,”* he means that the choice was on God's end, not in response to a choice on our end.

Now in practice, you should never know a person's understanding of election based on their commitment to missions and evangelism. We all are called to share the Gospel indiscriminately and as often as we have opportunity. So in practice, the differences between say a Calvinist and an Arminian should not be ascertained by their commitment or non-commitment to missions. Every Christian should be God's witness and call the lost to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). But it's not our job to worry about who is elect or not. We do not have the mind of God. We cannot fully grasp the mystery of such things.

The difference between those who disagree on the nuances of these doctrines should not be seen in their commitment to God's mission. They are really seen in how they understand what takes place behind the scenes in the human heart when someone believes. We can disagree on that and agree to stay on mission together. That's one of the reasons I appreciate some of the diversity we have on such things within this church and especially within our denomination. And I sometimes wonder if such diversity of association helps us to stave off certain errors, because there are serious errors on both sides.

For example, people who consider themselves Arminians, stressing the free choice of individuals, have to be careful that they don't venture into things like process theology or open theism. In other words, some have recognized that the problem of choice is not just a Calvinistic problem. It's a problem for the other side too. Kevin DeYoung explains,

"The Arminian objects to the Calvinist God because God's predetermination of all things does not allow for libertarian free will. But by my reckoning the Arminian scheme does not allow for libertarian free will either. For if God certainly knows the future, then the future must for certainty come to pass as God knows it. And if future choices are fixed and necessary, there is no place for the power of contrary choice."¹⁸

Some who have wrestled with that conundrum but still wanted to preserve the notion of an unhindered or influenced free will have concluded that the only way for such a thing to exist (a legitimate choice to exist) is if God doesn't know the future. They've done away with His omniscience and in order to leave certain outcomes "open" (hence the term, "open theism"). This is a grave error, that people on one side of the aisle have to be careful to avoid.

On the other side, Calvinists who think that God's choice is definitive and not contingent on anything outside of Himself (including our choice to believe), have to be careful that their emphasis on God's freedom to choose does not lead them to abandon evangelism and go the way of fatalism. That would be hyper-Calvinism.¹⁹ That is just as grave an error as the open-theism.

So perhaps we need each other more than we know. But if we are going to benefit each other in study and sharpen one another by the Word, then we have to do away with a lot of vitriol that has accompanied these debates, along with all the mischaracterizations. If you are a Calvinist, you don't need to accuse your Arminian brother of not believing that God is sovereign (i.e., in control). They believe He is sovereign too, even if they work out the implications of His sovereignty different. And you don't need to accuse them of not believing grace is needed for a person to believe. That's not what classical Arminians teach. They know grace is necessary if someone is to believe. Don't be ignorant. Do your best to avoid strawmen arguments. Don't demonize your brothers and sisters.

And if you are an Arminian, you don't need to characterize Calvinists as not taking seriously that humankind is morally accountable for their choices and that believers should dedicate their lives to evangelism and mission. Come on. When accusations like this are lobbed it just shows ignorance. Charles Spurgeon, sometimes called the "prince of preachers" and arguably the most influential Baptist preacher ever, was a Calvinist. Was he not committed to evangelism? George Whitefield, famous for God using him to stoke the fires of America's Great Awakening, was a Calvinist. So was Jonathan Edwards, also known from the great awakening and largely

considered America's most influential theologian. William Carey, considered to be the "Father of Modern Missions," was a Calvinist. Most of the famous missionaries of old you know by name were as well. Even Lottie Moon, for whom the Christmas offering is named after, was a Calvinist who took the Gospel to mainland China not despite her convictions on such things, but because of them. These are just a few examples of people who had no trouble saying with Paul, "*I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory*" (2 Tim. 2:10).²⁰

So love one another. Don't mischaracterize one another. And if we are breaking cooperation on the mission of God and the fellowship of the saints over debated issues like this, then perhaps we should consider that our issue is not the issues. Our issue is one of the heart. Let me close with two historical examples of men that seemed to get this during their life.

The first is the example of Jacob Arminius himself (yes, *that* Arminius). Listen to the charity with which Arminius spoke of John Calvin (and ask yourself why those influenced by the teachings of such men are not best known for such cordialness in their debate). Arminius famously wrote the following about Calvin:

"After the Holy Scriptures, I exhort the students to read the Commentaries of Calvin...I tell them that he is incomparable in the interpretation of Scripture; and that his Commentaries ought to be held in greater estimation than all that is delivered to us in the writings of the ancient Christian Fathers: so that, in a certain eminent spirit of prophecy, I give the preeminence to him beyond most others, indeed beyond them all. I add that, with regard to what belongs to common places, his *Institutes* must be read after the Catechism, as a more ample interpretation. But to all this I subjoin the remark, that they must be perused with cautious choice, like all other human compositions."²¹

If all you knew of these men and their beliefs was what you gleaned from the interactions of those who claim to hold to their theological conclusions, you might never guess that these sentiments could be expressed. But these brothers had more in common, than not. And their writings make this clear.

Here's another example...George Whitfield (the revivalist preacher of the Great Awakening) and John Wesley (the pastor most known for his influence on the Wesleyan/Methodist churches) disagreed strongly on the doctrine of election. They were even quite outspoken early on about their disagreement. Whitfield believed that God's election was determined by the free choice of God and Wesley believe that the free choice of man determined who was elect. But as they matured, their zeal for their conclusions remained, but their theological differences were situated within the larger context of their greater passion for reaching the lost. Whitefield eventually gave Wesley a fancy ring as a gift that he described as a "token of my indissoluble union...in heart and Christian affection, notwithstanding our difference in judgment about some particular points of doctrine." Whitefield even asked Wesley to preach his funeral service. Wesley did. And it was from that sermon that the expression "agree to disagree" seems to have been coined or at least popularized. Wesley stated the following,

"And, first, let us keep close to the grand scriptural doctrines which he [Whitefield] everywhere delivered. There are many doctrines of a less essential nature, with regard to which even sincere children of God (such is the present weakness of human understanding) are and have been divided for many ages. In these we may think and let think; we may agree to disagree. But, meantime, let us hold fast the essentials of 'the faith which was once delivered to the saints' [Jude 3]; and which this champion of God so strongly insisted on, at all times, and in all places!"²²

What a beautiful example of Christian love, charity, and brotherhood. The Church of God would be a better place, if we learned from it.

Next time we will consider the third and final element of God's election that Peter mentions in his introduction. We have considered that:

Christians are elect according to the foreknowledge of the Father

Christians are elect for obedience and sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ

The last one for us to consider is the middle one:

Christians are elect through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit

We will consider what Peter means next time we are in 1 Peter together. And we will rejoice in the way Peter describes in these verses the activity of the entire Trinity in our salvation. Father, Son, and Spirit are all described here. Our salvation has a Trinitarian shape to it. To be continued...

Let's pray...

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2 ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 817.

² Ibid.

³ Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 180.

⁴ Jack W. Cottrell, "The Classical Arminian View of Election," in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 81.

⁵ Shawn D. Wright, *40 Questions About Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 160.

⁶ In other words, "Instead of free *divine* election in Christ, there is a free *human* election of Christ" Paul K. Jewett, *Election and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 72-73.

⁷ Tim Keller, "Questions of Suffering," Redeemer Presbyterian Church podcast for August 1, 2013.

⁸ I've preached on this before. This acknowledgement is what should safeguard Calvinists from going the way of hyper-Calvinism. S. M. Baugh is correct to note: "Acts 2:23 also implies another truth integral to Calvinism that must not be (and is too often) overlooked: Humans possess genuine, unforced volition and are thereby morally responsible. Although God accomplished his fixed purpose by handing Christ over to the cross, he himself did not crucify him: 'You nailed up and killed this man through the agency of wicked men.' Peter's hearers and their agents were both culpable participants in Christ's death. God ordains all that comes to pass, but 'neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of creatures; nor is the liberty of contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.'" S. 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 Books, 1995, 2000), 190, quoting the Westminster Confession of Faith 3.1. This is also why both Calvinists and Arminians can together affirm what is stated in the Baptist Faith and Message: "Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility." See <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#v-gods-purpose-of-grace>.

⁹ Baugh, "The Meaning of Foreknowledge," 190. "And we can conclusively infer from Peter's remark that Christ 'was delivered over by God's fixed purpose and foreknowledge,' that God had clear prescience of all that surrounded Christ's death, not through mere foresight of decisions beyond his control, but because he had determined to bring it about. God's foreknowledge is joined to his will. This is further confirmed as the only legitimate interpretation of Acts 2:23 when we appreciate the sensitive use of the Greek article in the phrase *God's fixed purpose and foreknowledge*. By using one article for the two nouns *purpose* and *foreknowledge*, Peter is expressing a close interconnection between the two. God's foreknowledge of the events of Christ's death included his planning and willing them to occur. Hence the certainty of God's foreknowledge of the event was conditioned not because he merely observed the 'pure contingency' of human decisions involved. It was certain and foreknown because God had determined to accomplish it." Ibid., 189-190.

¹⁰ "Jesus Christ was foreknown by the Father before the world was created. The chosen people of Christ are also foreknown by the Father [1 Pet 1:20]. Their inclusion in the people of God is no accident, no afterthought, but God's purpose from the beginning. Those who are foreknown by God are foreknown in and with Christ [1 Pet 1:2]. The expression *foreknowledge* does not mean that God had information in advance about Christ, or about his elect. Rather it means that both Christ and his people were the objects of God's loving concern from all eternity." Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, BST (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 33.

¹¹ Cf. Matthew Barrett, *40 Questions about Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018), 98-100; R. C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2019), 76-77.

¹² Some might push back and say that “faith” is not properly considered a “work.” But Paul’s point is that God’s election allows no one any grounds for boasting in their salvation. In his book, *Exegetical Fallacies*, D. A. Carson addresses this matter in his section on “Inadequate analogies”: “The fallacy in this case lies in supposing that a particular analogy sheds light on a biblical text or theme when in fact that analogy is demonstrably inadequate or inappropriate. Analogies always include elements of both continuity and discontinuity with what they purport to explain; but for an analogy to be worth anything, the elements of continuity must predominate at the point of explanation. Donald M. Lake, for example, in attempting to argue that grace is no weaker in an Arminian system than in a Reformed system, offers us the analogy of a judge who condemns a guilty criminal and then offers him a pardon. Although the man must accept it, such acceptance, argues Lake, cannot be thought of as a meritorious work, a work that in any sense makes the man deserving of salvation. ‘Calvin and later Calvinists,’ he adds, ‘never seem to be able to see this fundamental distinction unfortunately!’ But to argue that the role of grace in the two systems is not different, Lake would have to change his analogy. He would need to picture a judge rightly condemning ten criminals, and offering each of them pardon. Five of them accept the pardon, the other five reject it (the relative numbers are not important). But in this model, even though those who accept the pardon do not earn it, and certainly enjoy their new freedom because of the judge’s ‘grace,’ nevertheless they are distinguishable from those who reject the offer solely on the basis of their own decision to accept the pardon. The only thing that separates them from those who are carted off to prison is the wisdom of their own choice. That becomes a legitimate boast. By contrast, in the Calvinistic scheme, the sole determining factor is God’s elective grace. Thus, although both systems appeal to grace, the role and place of grace in the two systems are rather different. Lake fails to see this because he has drawn an inadequate analogy; or, more likely, the inadequacy of his chosen analogy demonstrates he has not understood the issue.”

¹³ So also Wright: “‘Whom’ is a relative pronoun, telling us that persons—not something they were to do—were the object of God’s loving choice” (*40 Questions*, 161).

¹⁴ Shawn D. Wright states, “[K]now’ in the Bible often has connotations not of intellectual awareness but of loving the chosen one” (*40 Questions*, 160). Similarly John Murray claimed, “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 particular interest, delight, affection, and action” (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968], 317). Baugh writes, “It would be best to say that the phrase *God knows us* expresses a relationship of commitment” (“The Meaning of Foreknowledge,” 193). Thomas R. Schreiner makes similar remarks: “The chosen exiles are foreknown by God the Father. Foreknowledge does not only mean God foresaw that they would be his elect strangers. Foreknowledge should be understood in covenantal terms, and the foreknown are those upon whom God has bestowed his covenant favor and affection” (*1 & 2 Peter and Jude*, CSC [Holman Reference, 2020], 44). According to Juan R. Sanchez, “When Peter uses the word foreknowledge, he doesn’t just mean that God foresaw who would respond to his offer of salvation in faith. ‘Foreknow-ledge’ has covenant implications. Foreknowledge indicates that God freely chose to set his covenant love on certain individuals before the creation of the world, and foreordained that those whom he foreknew would come to salvation at the appointed time. So Peter uses the same word when speaking of Jesus Christ being ‘foreknown before the foundation of the world’ (v. 20). God the Father was in intimate relation with Jesus, his Son, before the foundation of the world and foreordained that at the appointed time the Son would be revealed in order to accomplish the salvation that was planned from all eternity” (*1 Peter for You* [The Good Book Company, 2016], 18-19).

¹⁵ Cf. Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 407-408.

¹⁶ Baugh, “The Meaning of Foreknowledge,” 195.

¹⁷ The examples that follow are also considered by Tim Keller in a sermon called “Election,” preached to Redeemer Presbyterian Church on September 12, 1993.

¹⁸ Kevin DeYoung, “Can God Know Everything and Give Us Free Will?”; see <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/can-god-know-everything-and-still-give-us-free-will/>. DeYoung says the following, earlier in his argument: “You may object that foreknowledge of an event has no more influence on the necessity of that event than after-knowledge. If you can look into the future and see that I will choose waffles tomorrow, all you have done is seen the future. Your knowing the future, you may argue, has no bearing on my choice of Eggos tomorrow. It’s no different than after-knowledge you may say. If you read in my journal entry for today: “Yesterday, ate waffles for breakfast” you simply know that I had waffles yesterday. Thus, as the reasoning goes, just as your after-knowledge of my choice did not make my choice necessary, neither does your foreknowledge of my choice make it necessary. To which I would respond, that this misses the point. You are quite right to argue that knowledge of an event does not make that event necessary. Knowing something ahead of or before its occurrence *does not cause* the necessity of the occurrence, but it does prove that it cannot be otherwise. If you have after-knowledge of my breakfast choice because you read my journal from today, you can have certain knowledge that I ate waffles. Your knowledge of this did not cause my choice, but your infallible certainty about the waffles proves that yesterday’s breakfast cannot be other than waffles. Any certain knowledge of a choice proves that the choice itself is fixed and cannot be otherwise. In other words, foreknowledge does not affect future certainty; it assumes it. We see this plainly with after-knowledge. What you know for certain about the past does not cause the past event but it does assume that it is fixed, or else your knowledge would not be certain. So when it comes to foreknowledge the same applies. For all certain knowledge of a choice (before, after, or during) demonstrates that the choice is necessary, fixed, and cannot be otherwise than it is. And if my choice cannot be otherwise, then I have no free will in the libertarian sense” (ibid.). Cf. R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: Understanding the Role of the Human Will in Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 92-95.

¹⁹ “In contrast to hyper-Calvinism, the decree of election is not a basis for logical deductions that control other areas of theology and practice. The Bible presents it to reinforce assurance, to stress that salvation is of grace; wherever it surfaces, the response is thanksgiving, praise, and prayer (Matt. 11:25-27; John 17:1-26; Rom. 11:33-36). These are the appropriate contexts in which to consider election.” Letham, *Systematic Theology*, 408.

²⁰ “Consider Paul, the same apostle who said ‘whom he foreknew he also predestined.’ This Paul taught that persons needed to be confronted with the gospel and call on Jesus to be saved (Rom. 10:8-17). He lived that way too (Rom. 15:17-24). In Acts, for instance, we see him constantly reasoning with his listeners, urging them to listen to what he is saying (e.g., Acts 13:38-41), and holding them accountable for whether they obey the gospel or not (13:46) while at the same time being confident that among all his listeners ‘as many as were appointed to eternal life believed’ (13:48). He reasons with listeners (17:17) and commanded them to repent (17:30-31). He took his role as ambassador so seriously that he was once stoned for preaching and left for dead (14:19; within a matter of days he was preaching again (14:20-21)! This same apostle who took people’s responsibility to respond to the gospel seriously (20:20-21; 26:24-29) also believed that God’s unconditional election was an incentive to evangelism (18:6-11). Rather than seeing this biblical doctrine as a hindrance to evangelism, then, we should follow Paul’s example, taking to heart that God has chosen a people and calls us to preach the gospel indiscriminately to everyone so that the elect will hear, believe, and be saved.” Wright, *40 Questions*, 161-162.

²¹ “Declaration of Arminius” in *The Christian Observer* (1807), 179.

²² John Wesley, “Sermon 53 On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitfield.” <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-53-on-the-death-of-the-rev-mr-george-whitefield/>.