

## Grace, Calling, Foreknowledge

**Introduction:** When the bases are loaded, the fourth batter up is called the cleanup hitter. Today I'm going to try to hit a grand slam and drive home several topics related to divine election: grace, calling, and foreknowledge.

The analogy I've used is that of riding in a car versus understand what makes the car go (what's under the hood). The study of divine election radically impacts our understanding of sin (how serious it is), of man (how deeply sin has damaged our mind, will, and emotion), and God (He is sovereign in salvation).

### Grace

ESV **Ephesians 2:8** ... by grace you have been saved through faith.

**The Spanish word for “thanks” is *gracioso*. We sometimes use the word “grace” that way too (we say “grace” over a meal). Other than something people say before they eat, what is grace?** It is from *charis*, “favor, help, goodwill.”<sup>1</sup> A related word is *charisma*, one of the Greek words for “gift” (“charismatic”); a gift is the result of grace:

ESV **Romans 3:24** [we] are justified by his grace as a gift (*dorean*) ...

ESV **Romans 5:17** [speaks of] the abundance of grace and the free gift (*dorea*) of righteousness ...

Grace has been explained as God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

**Review:** I want to review the various views of grace that we went over in session one, and add more detail to it. The issue: *How important is God's grace to man's salvation?*

**Who remembers that name of the British monk who lived around A.D. 400 who denied man's basic sinfulness?** He was Pelagius.

**Pelagius:** *How important is God's grace to man's salvation?* His answer: **0%**. It is not important at all. No grace is necessary. He taught that Adam and Eve were bad examples, but that man is born morally good, and needs no grace from God to be saved.

**Cliff Example:** Man fell off a cliff, but is unharmed, fully conscious, and quite capable of free-climbing back up the rock face, no help needed.

This is clearly a non-Christian position, and was condemned at the **Council of Carthage** (Tunisia) in **A.D. 418**.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Bauer, *Lexicon*, 877.

<sup>2</sup> HC Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 260.

-----  
**What was the name of the North African (Algerian) bishop who lived when Pelagius did, and countered his views?**

**Augustine:** *How important is God's grace to man's salvation?* His answer: **100%**. He said salvation is all of grace, so much so that man is dependent on God's grace even for his *initial response to the Gospel*. Augustine taught the doctrine of total inability, unconditional election, and "irresistible grace" (that you cannot ultimately refuse God's grace if you are one of the Elect). Irresistible grace is like one of cupid's arrows; it's pleasant, and once you are hit, you are a goner to love.

ESV **John 6:65** ... no one can come to me unless it is granted (*didomi*) him by the Father. <<< *total inability*

ESV **John 6:37** All that the Father gives (*didomi*) me will come to me ... <<< *irresistible grace*

**Cliff Example:** Man fell off a cliff, was knocked unconscious, and can't respond. God lowers a rope, repels down it, picks up the unconscious man, lays him in a stretcher basket, pulls it back up to the top, and then revives him after he is safe back up on the top.

-----  
Now, here is some new material:

**Semi-Pelagianism:** Around **A.D. 430**, group of monks in France promoted a compromise theology mid-way between the extremes of Pelagius and Augustine. Agreeing with Augustine, they taught that man is indeed sinful, and needs God's grace to be saved, but in agreement with Pelagius, that fallen man still has the innate ability to believe in Jesus. They denied total inability. Thus, no need for irresistible grace; denied unconditional election.

**Cliff Example:** Man fell off a cliff, hit bottom, broke his leg, but is fully conscious. However, he is unable to rock climb. God lowers a rescue basket down to him. The man is able on his own, without assistance, to roll into it to let God raise him up to the top.

This view of man's was condemned in the **Synod of Orange** (France) in **A.D. 529**.<sup>3</sup>

-----  

---

<sup>3</sup> However, at the Council of Trent (Italy; 1500s), the Roman Catholic Church essentially reversed course and adopted semi-pelagianism as part of the counter-reformation.

**Arminius (Jacob):**<sup>4</sup> After the Protestant Reformation, a fourth view arose, best represented by Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius, who lived in the 1500's in Holland. *How important is God's grace to man's salvation?* Arminius agreed with Augustine that fallen man is incapable of have a saving faith (total inability).

However, Arminius taught that God grants enough grace to people to bring them up to the point of having the ability to have saving faith. So: **100% + human cooperation**. Man cannot be saved apart from grace, but man must cooperate with grace before God will save him. Thanks to God's grace, fallen man now has the ability to accept or reject God's grace. Grace from God overcomes everyone's total inability.

**Prevenient Grace: This is called "prevenient" grace. What does the word prevenient mean?** It means preceding; antecedent. Under this scheme, **1)** grace is resistible, and **2)** God's election is conditional; it is based on God's omniscient knowledge of who, due to prevenient grace, would believe in Jesus. Thus, conditional election. John Wesley was a proponent of this view.

**Cliff Example:** Man fell off a cliff, and was knocked unconscious. Can't respond. God lowers a rope, repels down the cliff, dashes water in the man's face to wake him up, and then gives him the choice of rolling over into the rescue basket or not.

This view was judged to be error by the international **Synod of Dort** (Holland) in **1619**.

**Irresistible Grace:** The Synod of Dort countered that there is no such thing as prevenient grace. There is only "irresistible" grace. God's election is based on God's omniscient knowledge that no one would come to Jesus (total inability), so God grants some people mercy, and God sends irresistible grace to those He chooses. This is called unconditional election.

Augustine's position was the view held by the Protestant Reformers (Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, etc.) of the 1500s, and of course the Synod of Dort.

**Difference:** Both are within the household of faith. The difference between Augustine and Arminius is over man's ability to respond to the Gospel: The Arminian view is that even though man is born unable to belief, God gives grace to overcome man's predisposition to sin, so that man has the ability accept or reject Jesus. Arminians are not technically semi-pelagian, but this belief puts fallen man in the same situation that Semi-Pelagianism does.

**Options:** I hope that everyone here believes in either prevenient (resistible) grace or irresistible grace, and not semi-pelagianism. Arminians and Augustinians alike reject semi-pelagianism.

---

<sup>4</sup> Don't confuse Arminians (a theological group) with Armenians (an ethnic group)!

**Question for Arminians:** A sincere question I have for Arminians is, *What makes you differ from your unbelieving neighbor?* If everyone has prevenient grace, but only some choose to believe, what accounts for the difference? The Arminian's answer, if he is honest, is that the difference lies in the person, not God (he is smarter, wiser, more spiritually sensitive). This, in effect, denies the doctrine of total depravity and turns it into partial depravity.<sup>5</sup>

**ESV 1 Corinthians 1:26-29** ... God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world ... so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

### God's Calling

**Fact:** Irresistible Grace is directly related to the call of God. However, God's calling consists of two types: general and effective.

#### 1. The General Call of God

**What can we learn about God's general call from Matthew 22:14?**

**ESV Matthew 22:14** ... many are called, but few are chosen.

This is called the "outward/general" call of God. It can be resisted and rejected. This call will not bring anyone to Christ, because fallen man has a total inability to believe.

**ESV Acts 17:30b** God ... commands all people everywhere to repent ...

**Application: If only a few are chosen, why should we bother to evangelize?**

1. We are commanded to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, calling men to repent and believe in Jesus:

**ESV Acts 1:8** ... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

2. Just as God predestined the end (salvation), He also predestined the means (the foolishness of preaching). The elect have to hear the gospel as part of God's process of bringing them to salvation.

**ESV Romans 10:14** ... how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

---

<sup>5</sup> Virginia Huguenot, "Arminius believed in total depravity? What am I missing?" PuritanBoard.com. Accessed March 30, 2024.

We are privileged to be part of a divine process whereby His elect are brought to salvation.

3. Divine election is an incentive to keep on evangelizing. The doctrine of election is a big encouragement when witnessing. The results do not rest on our shoulders. In a sense we can't fail: the elect will respond.

ESV **2 Timothy 2:10** ... I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.

## 2. The Effective Call of God

**Within the general call of God is His effective call to the chosen. What does "effective" mean?** It means "successful in producing a desired result." It is a special inward call directly only to the elect, *and it is irresistible*.

**Irresistible Grace:** "God the Son has poured out the Holy Spirit to work alongside the preached Word. The Spirit of God regenerates elect sinners and draws them irresistibly to faith in Christ the Savior."<sup>6</sup>

ESV **John 5:21** ... the Son gives life to whom he will.

ESV **Colossians 2:13** ... you, who were dead in your trespasses ... God made alive ...

ESV **Matthew 11:27** ... no one knows the Father except ... anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

### How is Romans 8:28-30 and example of the effective call of God to the elect?

ESV **Romans 8:29-30** ... those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

**Summary:** Total Inability, Unconditional Election, Irresistible Grace and Effective Calling all go together as a package deal.

## God's Foreknowledge

Scripture clearly declares that God's choice (election) is based on God's foreknowledge:

ESV **Romans 8:29** ... those whom he foreknew he also predestined ...

ESV **1 Peter 1:1-2** ... to those who are elect ... according to the foreknowledge of God ... The Arminian position is that divine election is conditional; it is based on God's foreknowledge about who, of their own free will, would have saving faith in Jesus after receiving prevenient grace.

---

<sup>6</sup> "Beliefs", FIREFellowship.org. Accessed April 10, 2024.

**What does the word “foreknowledge” literally mean?** “Fore” means before and “knowledge” means to be aware of something; it is to be aware of something before it happens. The Greek is *prognosis* (basis for “prognosis”); the first entry in the lexicon is to “know beforehand”;<sup>7</sup> *pro* = “before” and *ginosko* = “to know.”

**Arminian Prognosis:** Arminians understand “foreknowledge” to be like a doctor’s prognosis. A doctor will make a prognosis of someone’s future health based on his prior knowledge of a disease that person has. Although the doctor already knows what is going to happen, *the doctor certainly did not cause it to happen.*

**The Problem:** The Arminian theologian H.C. Thiessen frankly admits, “we are nowhere told what it is in the foreknowledge of god that determines His choice...” He goes on to write that it is “postulating” to believe that God chose those who he knew in advance would accept Him.<sup>8</sup>

**Insight:** *The Bible never states that foreknowledge is God’s omniscient prior realization of who would one day believe.*

**Based on the doctrine of total inability, what did God’s omniscience tell him about who would one day believe of his own free will?** He would know that, left to themselves, no one would come to Jesus, no one would seek God, no one would accept the things of God.

**ILL Will:** If you want to run with foreknowledge strictly referring to being aware of something before it happens, then God chose us for salvation despite what He foresaw that we would do if left to ourselves (i.e., not come to Jesus). God’s choice of people for salvation would be in spite of foreseen ill will.

**John Murray:** “...the faith which God foresees is the faith He himself creates.”<sup>9</sup>

**Two Meanings:** According to the lexicon, “foreknowledge” actually has two possible meanings:

1. The mental apprehension of events beforehand; to know in advance.
2. The second definition is to “choose beforehand.” Strong’s definition is “prearrangement.” To love beforehand; to regard with favor beforehand, or to choose beforehand. It is a sovereign, distinguishing love.<sup>10</sup> Let’s look at the evidence for this second meaning:

**ESV Romans 8:29** ... those whom he foreknew he also predestined ...

---

<sup>7</sup> Bauer, *Lexicon*, 703.

<sup>8</sup> HC Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman’s, 1949), 344.

<sup>9</sup> John Murray, *Epistle to Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman’s, 1960).

<sup>10</sup> Steele, *Calvinism*, 87.

**What's the difference between "whom" God foreknew versus "what" God foreknew?** God's foreknowledge concerns whom He foreknew (people), not what He foreknew (that people would have faith). To be foreknown by God means that God determined in advance to have a covenant relationship with someone; it is not God knowing in advance what those people would do (believe).

**The following verses contain the Hebrew or Greek word for "know." How does each usage broaden your definition of "foreknowledge"?**

1. ESV **Genesis 4:17** Cain knew his wife, and she conceived ...

**What does it mean when it says Cain "knew" his wife (Ge 4:17)?** It clearly does not mean that Cain simply knew about her or merely knew of her. It means he had an intimate relationship with her. **Joke:** This example is pregnant with meaning!

2. ESV **Psalms 101:4b** I will know nothing of evil.

**Does Psalm 101:4b mean that God does not know about the existence of evil?**

**In what sense does God know nothing of evil?** It means He won't have anything to do with it.

3. ESV **Amos 3:2** You only have I known of all the families of the earth ...

**In Amos 3:2, did God mean that of all the nations in the world, He was only aware of Israel's existence?** Of course not. **What does it mean?** God knew about all the nations. However, God only had a special relationship with the Jews.

4. ESV **Matthew 7:23** I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

**How it is that Jesus, Jehovah God in human form, did not know who these people were?** Jesus did not know them in the sense that He did not have a saving relationship with them.

**Summary:** "Know" in the above instances clearly means more than a simple cognizance of some facts; it denotes an intimate, special, accepting relationship with someone. Thus, "foreknowledge" refers to the love that God had for certain chosen people before they were ever born. God regarded them with favor beforehand, He loved them beforehand, and so He chose to give them salvation (Jacob I loved, Esau I hated). Paul put it two different ways:

ESV **Romans 8:29-30** ... those whom he foreknew he also predestined ...

ESV **Ephesians 1:4** In love He predestined us ...

**Summary:** “Foreknowledge” refers to the love that God had for certain people before they were ever born. God regarded them with favor beforehand, He loved them beforehand, and so He chose to give them salvation.

### Applications

**Is it possible to “break the loop” of Romans 8:28-30; that is, can someone be foreknown but not be predestined, or predestined but not called, or called but never justified, or justified but never glorified? Why?** No; the text clearly states that if a person is foreknown then he will “also” be predestined, called, justified, and glorified. They are linked. It is a package deal.

ESV **Romans 8:29-30** ... those whom he foreknew he also predestined.... And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

**Application #1:** It is not possible to lose one’s salvation. This is called the Perseverance of the Saints.

ESV **John 6:37** All that the Father gives me will come to me ...

ESV **John 6:39** ... this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me ...

ESV **John 6:40** ... this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life ...

If you had eternal life for ten years but then lost it, it was not eternal life, it was ten-year life. Eternal life is, by definition, eternal!

ESV **John 10:28-29** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.

ESV **Romans 8:38-39** ... neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ESV **Ephesians 1:13-14** ... you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

**Note:** There are verses that could be taken to mean one could lose his salvation. Certainly, it is possible for a person to claim faith in Jesus and for a time follow Christ, only later to fall away. Such people are like Judas: false believers. They did not lose their salvation; they never had it. As Adrian Rodgers said, “The faith that fizzles before the finish had a flaw from the first!”

**Application #2.** God will sovereignly use everything to make us more like Jesus.

**ESV Romans 8:28-29** ... for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son ...

God causes all things to work together for our good, to make us more like Jesus! You need to remember this, and count on it, when things in your life don't go as planned (you don't get into school you wanted; you don't get that scholarship; you mess up at work; that special someone you like doesn't feel the same about you; you get sick or injured and have to miss important events in your life). Know and believe that God causes all things to work together for good, to conform you to the image of His Son.

Stephen E. Atkerson  
NTRF.org  
04/08/2024

