

Reformed Doctrine of Predestination - Lesson #7, The Foreknowledge of God

I. Foreknowledge vs Foreordination

Fore - prefix meaning "before"

Foreknowledge - knowledge or awareness of something before its existence or occurrence (dealing with God's knowledge)

Foreordination - To determine or appoint beforehand; predestination (dealing with God's decrees)

II. Arminian Opposition to Foreordination

Now if future events are foreknown to God, they cannot by any possibility take a turn contrary to His knowledge. If the course of future events is foreknown, history will follow that course as definitely as a locomotive follows the rails from New York to Chicago. The Arminian doctrine, in rejecting foreordination, rejects the theistic basis for foreknowledge. Common sense tells us that no event can be foreknown unless by some means, either physical or mental, it has been predetermined. Our choice as to what determines the certainty of future events narrows down to two alternatives—the foreordination of the wise and merciful heavenly Father, or the working of blind, physical fate.

- The Arminian is primarily opposed to the doctrine of foreordination. The Arminian does not like the idea God has already decreed all that comes to pass. The Arminian does not like the idea God is sovereign and decrees everything, including salvation, according to His holy will.
- The problem with the Arminian view, however, is foreknowledge presupposes foreordination; they are inextricably linked. The actions of free agents do not take place because they are foreseen, but they are foreseen because they are certain to take place.

WCF 3.2 Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.

RP Testimony 3.2 It is God's decree which by itself completely determines the course of history; it is never the course of history which in any way determines or modifies God's decree.

- Logically, in order for the Arminian to reject the doctrine of foreordination, he must reject the doctrine of foreknowledge also.

III. Arminian Solution to "Problem" of Foreknowledge

Many Arminians...have made it plain that they would very willingly deny [God's foreknowledge] if they could, or dared. Some have spoken disparagingly of the doctrine of foreknowledge and have intimated that, in their opinion, it was not of much importance whether one believed it or not. Some have gone so far as to tell us plainly that men had better reject foreknowledge than admit Predestination. Others have suggested that God may voluntarily neglect to know some of the acts of men in order to leave them free; but this of course destroys the omniscience of God. Still others have suggested that God's omniscience may imply only that He can know all things, if He chooses,—just as His omnipotence implies that He can do all things, if He chooses. But the comparison will not hold, for these certain acts are not merely possibilities but realities, although yet future; and to ascribe ignorance to God concerning these is to deny Him the attribute of omniscience. This explanation would give us the absurdity of an omniscience that is not omniscient.

Arminian: "Maybe God intentionally volunteers to not know some of the acts of men in order to leave them free."

Counter: "But this destroys the omniscience of God!"

Arminian: "Maybe God only knows everything if He chooses! Just like His omnipotence implies He can do all things if He chooses!"

Counter: "This is not a valid comparison - when dealing with foreknowledge, the acts that will happen in the future are not mere possibilities, but realities. To say God is ignorant of these realities, would again deny God the attribute of omniscience. "

IV. More Arminian Problems

When the Arminian is confronted with the argument from the foreknowledge of God, he has to admit the certainty or fixity of future events. Yet when dealing with the problem of free agency he wishes to maintain that the acts of free agents are uncertain and ultimately dependent on the choice of the

person,—which is plainly an inconsistent position. A view which holds that the free acts of men are uncertain, sacrifices the sovereignty of God in order to preserve the freedom of men.

Furthermore, if the acts of free agents are in themselves uncertain, God must then wait until the event has had its issue before making His plans. In trying to convert a soul, then He would be conceived of as working in the same manner that Napoleon is said to have gone into battle—with three or four plans in mind, so that if the first failed, he could fall back upon the second, and if that failed, then the third, and so on,—a view which is altogether inconsistent with a true view of His nature. He would then be ignorant of much of the future and would daily be gaining vast stores of knowledge. His government (governing/providence) of the world also, in that case, would be very uncertain and changeable, dependent as it would be on the unforeseen conduct of men.

To deny God the perfections of foreknowledge and immutability is to represent Him as a disappointed and unhappy being who is often checkmated and defeated by His creatures. But who can really believe that in the presence of man the Great Jehovah must sit waiting, inquiring, "What will he do?" Yet unless Arminianism denies the foreknowledge of God, it stands defenseless before the logical consistency of Calvinism; for foreknowledge implies certainty and certainty implies foreordination.

In the eternal ages back of the creation there could not have been any certainty as to future events unless God had formed a decree in regard to them. Events pass from the category of things that may or may not be, to that of things that shall certainly be, or from possibility to fruition, only when God passes a decree to that effect.

Isa 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure

Psalms 139:2 You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off.

Heb 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

V. Summary - God is God

Much of the difficulty in regard to the doctrine of Predestination is due to the finite character of our mind, which can grasp only a few details at a time, and which understands only a part of the relations between these. We are creatures of time, and often fail to take into consideration the fact that God is not limited as we are. That which appears to us as "past," "present," and "future," is all "present" to His mind. It is an eternal "now." Hence the events which we see coming to pass in time are only the events which He appointed and set before Him from eternity. Time is a property of the finite creation and is objective to God. He is above it and sees it, but is not conditioned by it. He is also independent of space, which is another property of the finite creation. Just as He sees at one glance a road leading from New York to San Francisco, while we see only a small portion of it as we pass over it, so He sees all events in history, past, present, and future at one glance. When we realize that the complete process of history is before Him as an eternal "now," and that He is the Creator of all finite existence, the doctrine of Predestination at least becomes an easier doctrine.

Foreknowledge must not be confused with foreordination. Foreknowledge presupposes foreordination, but is not itself foreordination. The actions of free agents do not take place because they are foreseen, but they are foreseen because they are certain to take place.

Since God's foreknowledge is complete, He knows the destiny of every person, not merely before the person has made his choice in this life, but from eternity. And since He knows their destiny before they are created, and then proceeds to create, it is plain that the saved and the lost alike fulfill His plan for them...We conclude, then, that the Christian doctrine of the Foreknowledge of God proves also His Predestination. Since these events are foreknown, they are fixed and settled things; and nothing can have fixed and settled them except the good pleasure of God, freely and unchangeably foreordaining whatever comes to pass.