

# God Foreknows and Predestines—What Does It Mean?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | February 17, 2022



In November 2021, I wrote a blog about [free will versus predestination](#) and explored, through design law, the historical roots of this doctrinal divide between Arminianism (free will) and Calvinism (predestination and the five main pillars of historic Calvinism).

But in that blog, I did not take time to explain Romans 8:29, 30, which many Calvinists use to support the idea that God predetermines and, thereby, decides in advance who is saved and who is lost. Let's examine that text now:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (NIV84).

Have you ever read this text and wondered what it could possibly mean? Has it caused you to suspect that God predetermines your future—or to doubt if you have free will? Does this text teach, as many Calvinists claim, that God chooses who is saved and who is lost? Does this text mean that individual

salvation is only up to God to decide? Or do we, in our attempt to protect God's reputation, knowing that without freedom there is no love, reject the idea of God's foreknowledge altogether, as open theists do?

I want to suggest a better alternative; the key to understanding this passage, as with the rest of Scripture, is what law lens we are reading it through. If we read Scripture with the assumption that God's law functions like human law—imposed rules enforced by the rule-giver—then God is the all-powerful enforcer who makes things happen the way He wants them to happen. Under this imposed-law view, predestination is God deciding upon whom He will use His power to call, justify, and glorify.

But under design law, our understanding of this passage is quite different. We first understand that God is Creator of all reality—physical matter, energy, time, and life—that His laws (including moral laws) are the protocols upon which life is constructed to operate. We understand that God not only created all reality, but He also continues to sustain the operations of all aspects of His creation.

For by him [Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and **in him all things hold together** (Colossians 1:16, 17 NIV84).

This means God governs, through the sustaining of the laws that He built reality upon, all aspects of creation, including time. Unlike us, God is not constrained to a linear existence; He lives outside the dimension of time. God doesn't serve at the whims of time; time serves God.

When the Bible says that those God "foreknew" He "predestined" to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, it isn't speaking of mere cognitive knowledge (awareness)—a list of names and social security numbers in a heavenly registry; rather, it is speaking of biblical knowledge, the fullest sense of "knowing" someone.

Adam **knew** Eve his wife, and she conceived (Genesis 4:1 ESV).

This "knowing" is intimate knowledge, not mere cognitive awareness. The unsaved do not have this knowledge of God; therefore, they are not known by God in this intimate, saving way. Jesus said it plainly:

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never **knew** you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:21-23 NIV84).

Jesus surely knows *who* these people are, so this isn't about awareness. It is about intimacy, unity, oneness—a loving, mutual bond of trust. These people were never friends of Jesus. They never opened their hearts to allow Him in and, thus, they never *knew* Jesus even though they knew *about* Him and

claimed to be His followers. And because they never chose to know Jesus, they were not in turn *known* by Jesus in the intimate bonds of fellowship and love. This intimate “knowing” is the key to every person’s salvation:

Now this is eternal life: that they may **know** you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent (John 17:3 NIV84).

The saved *know* (not just know *about*) God! And He *knows* them in the fullest sense of personal, intimate, living, and abiding relationship. They have come to know God and have opened their hearts to Him—so that God, via the Spirit, indwells them and they are known by Him.

Thus, those whom God *foreknows* He predetermined will be conformed to the likeness of His Son. It is God’s purpose to heal and restore all who trust Him. It is a certainty that those who come to know God, open their heart to Him, and experience His indwelling presence are set right (justified). The old is gone, the new is come (2 Corinthians 5:17); the carnal heart is replaced with a new heart and right spirit (Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26). As Paul said, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20 NKJV). Those whom God *foreknows* are the very ones who have chosen to trust Him; that is how God *knows* them—because they have chosen to *know* Him.

The Bible is saying that our Creator God, who lives outside of time, *foreknows* and enters into the hearts and minds of all those who respond to the truth and open the heart to Him. And all who experience God’s indwelling presence are set right in heart, mind, and character (justified), and those who are set right in heart and mind, having the law written there (Hebrews 8:10), He conforms to be like Jesus in character—and ultimately glorifies.

As God is an infinite being who lives outside of time, from His perspective, the salvation and glorification of individuals is the reality of His experience. But from our finite perspective, living in our linear existence, the complete glorification is a future event that we will one day experience at the Second Coming.

Our being chosen by God is because we have chosen to trust Him. Our being glorified is the result of knowing God and being known by Him. This process of our restoration and healing is the outworking of God’s law of love, truth, and liberty in the lives of all who respond to that truth with their free-will choice to trust God. Those who do, God enters their hearts and conforms them to the image of His Son.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love

of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:31-39 NIV84).

It is truly amazing what God has done for us through Jesus our Savior!