

THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD

* * * DOES FOREKNOWLEDGE DEMAND FOREORDINATION? * * *

S.L.H.
Soli Deo Gloria!

"Great *is* our Lord, and of great power; his understanding
is infinite." (Psalm 147:5)

Calvinism's Doctrine. According to Calvinism, the foreknowledge of God is a corollary of His foreordination. God foresees all future events because He has foreordained them. According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, "God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass" (WCF III.1). Despite a number of caveats attached to this dogma, and persistent objections from Calvinists to the contrary, there is little or no difference between the Reformed doctrine of God's Eternal Decree and pagan determinism; neither worldview allows for genuine freewill on the part of creatures.

Biblical Foreknowledge. The Bible teaches that God is omniscient; He knows all things (Ps139:1-6; Ps147:5; 1Jn3:20). Furthermore, God has indeed foreordained certain future events (cf. Isa46:9-10; Act2:23). However, He has apparently done so in a manner¹ that does not violate genuinely free choices on the part of His creatures. To illustrate this, consider 1 Samuel 23:9-13.

⁹ And David knew that Saul secretly practiced mischief against him; and he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod.

¹⁰ Then said David, O Lord God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake.

¹¹ Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? Will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O Lord God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And the Lord said, He will come down.

¹² Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the Lord said, They will deliver thee up.

¹³ Then David and his men, *which were* about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah; and he forbore to go forth.

Note, a breastplate was permanently affixed to the high priest's ephod, which contained the Urim and Thummim used to infallibly discern the LORD's will (Exod28:28-30). The clear implication is that Abiathar the priest used the Urim and Thummim to receive from the LORD the responses to David's inquiries. David had heard that King Saul was preparing to march on the city of Keilah since he had learned that David and his men had sought refuge there. He

¹ If it is incomprehensible to men just how such could be the case, that God can sovereignly and infallibly ordain certain future events or final outcomes, and yet also allow for free choices to be made by His creatures, that is a human limitation (cf. Isa55:8-9).

inquired of the LORD as to whether King Saul would indeed come down to Keilah, and the LORD responded, "He will come down". Then David asked if the men of Keilah would surrender him and his men to King Saul when he arrived, and the LORD responded, "They will deliver *thee* up". After receiving this information from the LORD, David and his men left the city of Keilah and scattered themselves throughout the countryside. As a result, King Saul did not come down to Keilah.

This account provides insight into the LORD's foreknowledge and its relationship to foreordination. The LORD foresaw that King Saul would come down to Keilah and that the citizens of that city would turn David and his men over to Saul. And yet, neither of those events happened, since David and his men departed from Keilah. This does not mean that God's foreknowledge was incorrect or incomplete. Rather, God foresees the results of actions that may be freely taken by His creatures, both possible and actual. The LORD correctly foresaw that had David remained in Keilah, Saul would have come down to the city, and the city would have surrendered David to him. But that sequence of events had not been foreordained by the LORD, even though it was foreseen, and the free actions of David altered that outcome.

Conclusions. Calvinism's presupposition that God's foreknowledge demands His foreordination is false. God foresees events that He does not foreordain. In fact, God foresees events that would result from free human choices, yet do not occur because those choices are not made. This view does not rob God of His sovereignty, but rather magnifies it. "Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness *is* unsearchable" (Ps145:3).