

“God’s Foreknowledge”

A common misunderstanding about Reformed theology is that it makes people smug because it teaches unconditional election. Unconditional election teaches that salvation begins from God’s love independent of any choice by a man or woman. It comes from biblical teachings such as “those whom he did foreknow” (Rom. 8:29). God knowing beforehand does not mean that God knew whether a person would choose faith. “Foreknowledge” speaks of God’s free choice to love a particular people as His own. The word “foreknow” often means to love or choose with blessing and approval. For example, the Lord says that he foreknew Abraham to keep the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19). Again, Jesus was “foreknown” before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20). Furthermore, Peter speaks of the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” when describing Christ’s crucifixion (Acts 2:23). The cross was always part of God’s plan for salvation, for God knows the end from the beginning and his counsel shall stand (Is. 46:9-10).

The Reformed emphasis on unconditional election was a response to the 17th century teaching of Jacobus Arminius. This was the event that became known as the Synod of Dort. Arminius taught that God’s knowledge of future events was based upon man’s future actions. In other words, salvation is always dependent upon a person’s ability.

In response, the Reformers at Dort began where Scripture began, namely, that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Because of man’s depravity to even choose God, Scripture transitions to God’s great love for sinners in Jesus Christ. Out of his love God chose to send His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish (John 3:16). Yet, even that ability to believe in Christ is the work of God, for it is “the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). In other words, the Reformers returned to the Scriptures to emphasize God’s grace from beginning to end.

While there might be a smug attitude of self-importance among some who claim to hold to Reformed theology, unconditional election creates an attitude of humility. Who can boast in themselves if it is salvation is a gift of God? It also creates an attitude of joy. “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 Cor. 1:31). In fact, the Reformers at Dort demonstrated that their teaching was not novel. It had been embraced by the faithful church throughout history, for the 5th century theologian Augustine said, “For he chose us, not because we believed, but that we might believe.”

Christian, put no trust in yourselves for salvation, but give your grateful praises to the God of election, “according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:5-6).

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