

# Proginosko - A Word Study

By Charles Fisher

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Because of an interaction with another in a USENET group, which included my being called an apostate and heretic because of my beliefs in certain aspects of Moral Government Theology, I was inspired to do a word study on the word "foreknow." I found that there is one word used, proginosko, in the New Testament, and that it occurs five times.

From Strong's Online:

4267. proginosko / v AV - foreknow 2, foreordain 1, know 1, know before 1; 5 1) to have knowledge before hand 2) to foreknow 2a) of those whom God elected to salvation 3) to predestinate

Proginosko occurs five times, in Acts 26:5; Rom. 8:29, Rom. 11:2; I Pet 1:20; and II Pet 3:17. In doing the study, I turned up some interesting results.

First off, in two of the five times that it is used, it is not used of God, but of men, and surely men do not have an omniscience that requires foreknowledge. In fact, in those two instances, the word proginosko is used to say that men knew something before, in times past.

## Instance #1

One occurrence of the word, when used in reference to men is:

Acts 26:5 They have known me for a long time (proginosko) and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. (NIV)  
Acts 26:5 Which knew me from the beginning (proginosko), if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. (KJV)

Who had proginosko, in Acts 26:5? Who had "foreknowledge?" The answer is in v.4:  
Acts 26:4 The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem.

Paul is presenting his defense to Agrippa, and says that the Jews KNEW HIM BEFORE (proginosko). The use of the word, proginosko, does not, in this instance, require, divine foreknowledge or omniscience. Paul is merely saying that his accusers KNEW BEFORE what his life had been like.

## Instance #2

The second occurrence of the word \_proginosko\_, when used in reference to men occurs in:

2 Pet. 3:17 Therefore, dear friends, since you already know (\_proginosko\_) this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. (NIV) 2 Pet. 3:17 Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, (\_proginosko\_) beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. (KJV)

Who had \_proginosko\_, "foreknowledge," in 2 Pet 3:17? The answer is found in the opening salutation of the book. Peter addresses his letter: 2 Pet. 1:1 Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:

The Christians who received Peter's letter are the one who KNEW these things BEFORE. Again, no divine foreknowledge of events beforehand is required. Men are not omniscient, so this usage of the word \_proginosko\_ cannot mean "foreknowledge" in the sense that most people mean when they use it. They just KNEW the things that Peter is writing about BEFORE, and he is just reminding them of these things.

No "foreknowledge" is required here.

In another two instances of the use of the word \_proginosko\_, the words are used of God, but do not require the interpretation to mean that God knew something ahead of time, before it occurred.

### **Instance #3**

One of these instances is in Rom. 11:2, a chapter often used to try and prove God's absolute omniscience and sovereignty, usually to the detriment of God's character.

Here is the verse:

Rom. 11:2 God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew (\_proginosko\_). Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah--how he appealed to God against Israel: (NIV) Rom. 11:2 God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew (\_proginosko\_). Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, (KJV)

Who had \_proginosko\_, "foreknowledge," in Rom. 11:2? God.

AHA!!!!, you shout! God had FOREKNOWLEDGE!!!

Let's look at this verse for a second:

Rom. 11:1-2 I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite

myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah-- how he appealed to God against Israel: (NIV)

Here, Paul gives an illustration from history, the OT, and of how God, who KNEW the Jews BEFORE, in the past, has not rejected the people, whom He KNEW BEFORE, under the OT covenant. He has not forgotten them, but has instead, for the time being, merely set them aside to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. There is no requirement, from the context of this verse, to make the word *\_proginosko\_* mean anything other than that God KNEW Israel BEFORE, under the old covenant.

Paul is talking about Israel, the chosen people of the OT. In the context, Paul writing that Christians have been grafted in, in the place of the Hebrews, it makes more sense to translate the verse:

God did not reject his people, whom he KNEW BEFORE. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah-- how he appealed to God against Israel:

Again, here is another verse that does not require the imposition of divine predetermination on to it, but merely says that God KNEW Israel BEFORE, in the time of the Patriarchs and the Law.

#### **Instance #4**

The fourth instance of the word *\_proginosko\_*, "foreknowledge," occurs in 1 Pet 1:20:

1 Pet. 1:20 He was chosen before (*\_proginosko\_*) the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. (NIV) 1 Pet. 1:20 Who verily was foreordained (*\_proginosko\_*) before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,(KJV)

Notice that the translators of the NIV say that Christ was CHOSEN BEFORE the creation of the world. God, before the foundation of the world, knew Christ. Why? Christ is God the Son, the second part of the Trinity. It requires no great feat of omniscience to know someone before an event, if you are intimately acquainted with them.

I could just as well say that BEFORE I purchased a computer, I KNEW my wife. Of course I did, since we have been married for more than 25 years, and I was finally able to purchase a Macintosh only three years ago. In no sense of the word would one say that I had foreknowledge of my wife. I just KNEW her BEFORE I bought my computer.

In the same sense, God the Father, BEFORE the creation of the world, KNEW Christ.

This verse does not require an omniscient foreknowledge of of the future. It simply says that God the Father knew Jesus Christ before the creation of the world. Since Christ is the Son of God from eternity past, this is no surprise.

Well, that disposes of 4 of the 5 occurrences of the word *\_proginosko\_*, "foreknowledge." In none of these instances, does the usage of the word require the actual translation "Foreknow," or "Foreknew." In fact, in two of the four, it has to be positively eliminated, as it is used in reference to men.

There remains one more occurrence of the word *\_proginosko\_*, "foreknowledge."

### **Instance #5**

The final occurrence of the word *\_proginosko\_*, "foreknowledge," is in Rom 8:29:

Rom. 8:29 For those God foreknew (*\_proginosko\_*) he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (NIV)

Rom. 8:29 For whom he did foreknow (*\_proginosko\_*), he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (KJV)

I like Clark Pinnock's treatment of this verse, in his essay, *[From Augustine to Arminius](#)*:

2. I was then driven back to the Scriptures to reconsider what divine election might mean, if in fact God desires all to be saved and cannot be thought of any longer as selecting some to be saved and placing the others under wrath and reprobation, as in high Calvinism. How shall I understand those texts that I had always assumed said and meant exactly that?

One possibility that presented itself was to think of election as being based on the foreknowledge of God (Rom. 8:29); I Peter 1:2). This was the standard Arminian position--one favored by early Greek fathers--and it would deviate least from the Calvinian idea of the selection of a certain number of specific individuals from before the creation of the world to be saved. It would simply introduce, on the basis of divine omniscience, the element of conditionality into the idea of divine election and thus appear to rescue it from arbitrariness. Although at this time I had not yet come to reconsider the nature of the divine omniscience presupposed in this account, even then I found myself attracted to a second possibility--that election is a corporate category and not oriented to the choice of individuals for salvation. I knew that everyone admitted this to be the case in the Old Testament where the election of Israel is one of a people to be God's servant in a special way. Was it possible that the New Testament texts too could be interpreted along these same lines? Upon reflection I decided that they could indeed be read corporately, election then speaking of a class of people rather than specific individuals. God has chosen a people for his Son, and we are joined and belong to the elect body by faith in Christ (Eph. 1:3-24).

According to Pinnock, this verse can refer to an election of a body of believers, unknown in the specific, but predetermined by the plan of God. Pinnock points to God's dealing in the past, with regard to Israel, in the OT. God chose a people, the descendants of

Abraham, to be His people. This is in the aggregate, not the specific, for not all who were Israel were/are saved (Rom 11:7). Just so with the NT. God "foreknew" a body, the church, in the aggregate, because it was His predetermined purpose to save "whosoever will." But this aggregate is not specific; it is not predetermined who will be saved, and who will be damned. Instead, God chose to open the offer of salvation to all, and He gives the invitation to all. And all may refuse or not refuse. Nothing in this verse requires that God know ahead of time who would and would not accept His invitation. God issued a general pardon, and waits for all to accept or reject.

Pinnock's treatment satisfactorily deals with this last verse.

As a last note, isn't interesting to note that there are two definitions of the word \_proginosko\_, one definition when it is used of God, and another when it is used with man? Seems schizophrenic, doesn't it?

It is just that the church has been in the thrall of the teachings of the Platonic-influenced Augustine, for centuries, and John Calvin's treatment of Augustine, that became the dominant treatment in Protestant Christendom for the past 400 years. It is too bad that this is so, because this teaching has done great damage to the reputation of God. In fact, I know of a man who has purposefully rejected Christ and the gospel precisely because of Augustinian/Calvinistic teachings, claiming that God is a *sadistic bully* for predestining men to Hell.

I recommend that all read Clark Pinnock's essay *From Augustine to Arminius*. It is an excellent, well-thought out essay, and documents Pinnock's pilgrimage in knowing God.

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