

How Romans 9-11 Declares:

God is Good

Clearing the Muddied Waters of Calvinism

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Release Notes

Let the reader be advised: this chapter is part of a larger book bearing the title above. That book promised additional chapters in a third section of the book. This is the first chapter of that third section. More is yet to come.

This chapter focuses on the topic of foreknowledge. It was more challenging to write this chapter than I anticipated. In it, I challenge some commonly held ideas of what biblical foreknowledge is. Although I'm confident my ideas are sound, I'm not as confident that I've clearly conveyed them.

I'm sending this chapter out to those of you who indicated interest in receiving an alert when additional chapters were published. I'm hoping you will read it carefully and give me your feedback before I release it to the general public. Please send any critiques, comments, and suggestions to the email from which you received this document. Let me know where further clarification would be helpful and what questions you may encounter as you read. Alternatively, you can connect with me through the social media links provided on my website.

As I complete additional chapters, I plan to publish them on my website. If you would like to be notified when new chapters appear, please leave your name and email address on <https://clearwaters.net/god-is-good/>. This will register you to receive an alert when additional chapters released.

Thank you for taking the time to read this early release. I trust the Lord will richly bless you through it.

Section 3

Foreknowledge

Ordinary Foreknowledge

When I began studying the two Greek terms associated with foreknowledge—G4267 (proginōskō) and G4268 (prognōsis)—I assumed they were primarily theological words concerning God’s ability to know the future. However, I discovered that they appeared in secular writings long before the Christian era. In fact, four hundred years before Christ, the renowned physician Hippocrates used these terms to emphasize the importance of a doctor knowing how a disease would progress, thereby gaining credibility with his patients.

It appears to me a most excellent thing for the physician to cultivate Prognosis (prognōsis, G4268); for by foreseeing (proginōskō, G4267) and foretelling (prolegō, G4302), in the presence of the sick, the present, the past, and the future, and explaining the omissions which patients have been guilty of, he will be the more readily believed to be acquainted with the circumstances of the sick; so that men will have confidence to intrust themselves to such a physician. And he will manage the cure best who has foreseen (proginōskō, G4267) what is to happen from the present state of matters. For it is impossible to make all the sick well; this, indeed, would have been better than to be able to foretell (prolegō, G4302) what is going to happen; but since men die, some even before calling the physician, from the violence of the disease, and some die immediately after calling him, having lived, perhaps, only one day or a little longer, and before the physician could bring his art to counteract the disease; it therefore becomes necessary to know the nature of

such affections, how far they are above the powers of the constitution; and, moreover, if there be anything divine in the diseases, and to learn a foreknowledge (prognōsis, G4268) of this also. Thus a man will be the more esteemed to be a good physician, for he will be the better able to treat those aright who can be saved, having long anticipated everything; and by seeing and announcing beforehand those who will live and those who will die, he will thus escape censure. (Hippocrates, The Book of Prognostics, par. 1).

As you can see, Hippocrates used “foreknowledge” in the sense of general prior knowledge, urging aspiring physicians to know beforehand how a disease would progress.

Of the seven biblical occurrences of these terms, two appear in this ordinary sense.

You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand (G4267), beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; (2 Peter 3:17)

Here, Peter uses the Greek term in its ordinary sense. He notes that his readers already possessed general prior knowledge that deceptions would come. He was not suggesting they had prophetic insight; rather, they knew of the coming errors because he had warned them—just as Paul had warned the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:29).

Paul also uses the word in an everyday sense in his testimony before King Agrippa. His usage is somewhat unusual in that he applies it in a historical sense.

“My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews

know. They knew (G4267) me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. (Acts 26:4-5)

In the Greek, Paul literally said, “They foreknew me from the first...” The context makes it clear that he meant the Jews had known him from before he became a believer. He was not saying they possessed prophetic knowledge of his life or had determined his future. Instead, Paul was using “foreknowledge” in its simple, ordinary sense of prior knowledge.

These two passages, along with the example from secular writings, show that the ordinary use of G4267 (proginōskō) and G4268 (prognōsis) carries the meaning that naturally follows from their component parts: “to know” + “beforehand.”

Delivered on Purpose

A third passage to consider is Peter’s sermon to the Jews after the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Here, he is addressing ordinary people, not rabbis or theologians. It therefore is plausible that he is using “foreknowledge” in its ordinary, everyday sense.

Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge (G4268) of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; (Acts 2:23)

If Peter is using G4268 in its ordinary, everyday sense, then he is saying that it was God’s purpose to deliver Jesus to His enemies, knowing beforehand that they would seize Him with lawless hands, crucify Him, and put Him to death. G4268 would simply mean that God did not naively deliver His Son—He knew full well what they would do.

On the other hand, if Peter is using foreknowledge in the sense of “foreordain,” then he is saying that it was God’s purpose and plan from the beginning to deliver Jesus to His enemies so that they might seize Him with lawless hands, crucify Him, and put Him to death. In that case, G4268 would mean they crucified Jesus because God had determined they would.

The difference between the two interpretations is this: in the first, God’s purpose and will is to deliver His Son over to His enemies. In the second, God’s purpose and will is that they crucify His Son. In other words, the second interpretation claims God’s intent was the crucifixion itself, while the first claims it was to deliver His Son into their hands and let them do as they wished.

The first interpretation fits within the framework of Jesus’ parable of the vineyard owner and his son (Matthew 21:33; Luke 20:13), while the second does not. In that parable, Jesus indicated that the owner’s purpose in sending his son was not so the tenants would kill him, but that they would receive him with respect. The owner said, “I will send my beloved son. Perhaps they will respect him when they see him” (Luke 20:13). It was not the owner’s desire that his son be killed, but that he would be well received.

In the parable, the owner seemed to genuinely believe—perhaps naively—that the tenants would respect his son. Although the owner represented God, Jesus clearly was not saying that God did not know they would kill His Son. The parable’s storyline itself showed that He knew what they would do, for it foretold their murderous response. Jesus’ point was that just as the owner intended for the tenants to respect his

son, so God's intent was for the Jewish leaders to respect His Son.

Interpreting G4268 as "foreordain" in Acts 2:23 would make Peter say it was God's purpose and intent that they kill His Son, which contradicts the Lord's parable. But if we take G4268 as "know beforehand," then Peter is saying it was God's purpose to deliver His Son to them with the intent that they should respect Him, even while knowing beforehand that they would kill Him. This perfectly fits the Lord's parable.

In fact, look closely at how Peter phrases his words. He directly links "delivered" with "determined purpose": "delivered by the determined purpose ... of God." He does not say, "crucified by the determined purpose ... of God." The very structure of the sentence declares that God's purpose was to *deliver* His Son into their hands.

This leaves us with the question of why God delivered His Son into their hands when He knew what would happen. The twofold answer is clear. First, God was exposing their hearts and revealing that they were not godly but were in fact enemies of God. Second, He was revealing the glory of His Son (John 13:31). The moral beauty with which the Lord Jesus submitted Himself to their hands—in obedience to His Father and to provide eternal life for His enemies—is the unmatched glory of all time.

The first interpretation thus conforms to the normal rules of interpretation. It takes the ordinary sense of the word, makes good sense of the passage in its own context, and avoids conflict with other straightforward passages of Scripture. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that Peter is using "foreknowledge" here in its straightforward sense of "knowing beforehand." He

is simply saying that God knew beforehand the facts of what would take place.

God Knew

Now let's examine Paul's use of "foreknew" in Romans 11. In chapter 10, Paul had shown that Israel rejected God's salvation despite His loving appeal: "All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people" (Romans 10:21). In light of their rejection, Paul addresses in chapter 11 whether God had actually cast them off. There was certainly an appearance that God had done so, since He had not brought them into the blessings bestowed in Christ—much to Paul's sorrow (Romans 9:1-3; 10:1). Yet in Romans 11, Paul shows that God has not cast them off; rather, He has blinded them.

God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew (G4267). Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying (Romans 11:2)

To understand Paul's use of "foreknew" in Romans 11, we must identify who of "His people" did God foreknew. The immediate context (Romans 11:5, 7; 10:21) clarifies that "His people" includes both the elect remnant and the unbelieving nation. The phrase points back to the "disobedient and contrary people" of Romans 10:21, where "Israel" there also corresponds to the "Israel" of Romans 11:7 ("Israel has not obtained what it seeks..."). In this verse, then, "His people" refers to the physical nation of Israel. Paul is therefore saying that God foreknew the nation of Israel as a whole—both believing and unbelieving.

Some claim that Paul is using “foreknow” in the sense of “fore-love.” Those who hold this position must be prepared to acknowledge that God loves people who will ultimately reject Him, since, as we have seen, “His people” includes Israelites who did just that. And if God truly loves those who reject Him, then John 3:16 means exactly what it says—that God loves the whole world (not just the elect). Accordingly, God actually stretches out His hands to disobedient and obstinate people—both Israelites and Gentiles—in a genuine appeal to repent and be saved. This appeal must be sincere, for it would not be loving to offer a gift while withholding the ability to receive it. To say “foreknow” means “fore-love” in this passage is to say that God genuinely loves not only those who receive His Son, but even those He knows will ultimately reject Him, and invites them to believe in His Son.

However, if the “fore-love” interpretation is correct, Paul’s point would be that God has not cast Israel away because He foreloved them (“God has not cast away His people whom He fore-loved...”). But this view is problematic, since Scripture also shows that God essentially does “cast away” people whom He loves. Every person who enters a lost eternity is someone God loves. Therefore, it would not be a strong statement for Paul to say that God has not cast away those He foreloves when it can be easily argued that He does.

But if Paul is using “foreknew” in the straightforward sense of knowing what the future holds, then he is echoing the foreknowledge expressed in Deuteronomy 31:16–18. There, God told Moses that Israel would turn to idolatry after entering the promised land. Even at that early stage, God knew they would ultimately reject Him. He also declared that He would

“provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation” (Deuteronomy 32:21), a clear reference to the church. Thus, God spoke with beforehand knowledge of the present time. So Paul is saying that God knew beforehand of Israel's future rejection when He first took them as His people.

If the simple “knowing beforehand” interpretation is correct, then Paul’s point is that God has not cast Israel away because He knew from the beginning what they would do. He chose them fully aware that they would reject His Son in the future. This becomes a strong argument against the claim that God has finished with national Israel: if God knew their future rejection when He chose them, why would He cast them away now that they have done exactly what He knew they would do?

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that Paul is using “foreknew” here in the straightforward sense of knowing beforehand what would happen. He is simply saying that God knew in advance what Israel would do.

This means that at least four of the seven New Testament occurrences of G4267 and G4268 carry the simple, ordinary sense of knowing beforehand.

Chosen Pilgrims

One of the more challenging passages on the concept of foreknowledge appears in Peter’s first epistle. It is especially difficult for us Gentiles, since Jewish history is not an integral part of our cultural heritage. We do not live and breathe Jewish culture, so we easily miss Peter’s allusions to his heritage and misunderstand his key points. Therefore, before we can

determine what Peter meant by foreknowledge, we must first identify the connection to Abraham in the passage.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles [sojourners, resident foreigners] of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge (G4268) of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. (1 Peter 1:1-2, ESV)

A little clarification before we dive in. First, the Greek word for “exile” denotes a temporary resident, alien, or foreigner who lives in a place that is not their permanent home—not necessarily someone forcibly banished or driven out. It speaks of sojourners who live alongside the natives but are not natives themselves. The word is perfectly illustrated by Abraham when he lived in the land of Canaan as a sojourner without citizenship (Genesis 23:4).

Second, the Greek word “elect” is not a verb but an adjective. As such, it describes what kind of sojourners these people are. Although the Greek adjective is related to the act of choosing, throughout Scripture its application focuses not on the act of selection but on the quality of the object chosen. It describes the people not so much as chosen but as choice pilgrims. The idea is that these sojourners are treasured in God’s sight. For a more in-depth look at this Greek word, see the book “How the Bible Defines: Election.”

Parallels

Beyond these clarifications, it is important to recognize that Peter draws a parallel between his readers and Abraham. By

calling them elect sojourners, speaking of an inheritance reserved for them, and referring to the trials they are enduring (1 Peter 1:4–5), Peter connects their experience with that of Abraham. Abraham too was an elect sojourner with an inheritance reserved for him, and he endured trials while being kept by the power of God.

Peter relates their experience—with all its trials—to Abraham's by using specific phrases that correspond to the four distinct segments of Abraham's life. Each segment begins with God's promise to bless him and illustrates a particular aspect of the sojourner life. The first stage begins in Genesis 12, when God called him to leave his family and go to a foreign land. This calling and the events that followed correspond to the phrase "elect sojourner." The second stage starts in Genesis 15, where Abram believed God's promise of blessing and it was accounted to him as righteousness. This segment corresponds to Peter's phrase "according to God's foreknowledge." The next stage begins in Genesis 17, when God introduced circumcision as a sign of the covenant. It corresponds to the phrase "in the sanctification of the Spirit." The final stage begins in Genesis 22, when Abraham offered his son on the altar. It corresponds to Peter's final phrase "for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Peter's phrases and the stages of Abraham's life together illustrate the reality in which God has placed believers. We will spend some time reviewing these to show that Abraham's life is a true illustration of what Peter means by the foreknowledge of God.

Elect Sojourner

The first segment of Abram's life is marked by God's call to become a sojourner in the land of Canaan (Genesis 12).

Practically speaking, the life of a sojourner is marked by insecurity, because you are on your own. If anything goes wrong, you have no family nearby to help. If you run into conflict with a native citizen, no one will stand up for you, for you are the foreigner—the outsider—and foreigners do not enjoy the same protections as citizens.

So it was for Abram. When he went down to Egypt to escape the famine, he realized there was little chance of finding justice. If someone wanted to kill him and take his wife, no one would take his side or restrain them. In fact, when Pharaoh took his wife, Abram had no advocate to right the wrong. His only hope was God, who intervened on his behalf and restored his wife. For a sojourner, this is the reality: their only real hope is God; there is no one else to depend on for justice.

But Abram was an elect sojourner—a man favored by God, as Pharaoh soon learned. Although Abram failed to tell the truth about his wife and thereby brought trouble upon himself, God stood up for him. Pharaoh found God would ensure Abram was blessed even when he did not do the right thing.

Another reality sojourners face is that they do not own the land on which they live. Yet Abram and Lot's shepherds fought over grazing rights on pastureland they did not own. When Abram proposed resolving the conflict by separating the households, Lot abandoned the life of an elect sojourner. He chose for himself the well-watered lands near Sodom, where the people were wicked (Genesis 13:10–13). Abram, however, remained in Canaan and took no land for himself. God then reiterated His promise to give the land to Abram (Genesis 13:14–17), confirming that he had made the right choice to

continue as God's chosen sojourner. He lived in the land without possessing it, yet he remained treasured in God's sight.

As a sojourner, Abram had no obligation to involve himself in the politics of Canaan. Thus, in Genesis 14, when the mighty Chedorlaomer attacked the kings of the Jordan Valley, Abram did not join the conflict to defend land he did not possess. Yet as God's elect, when he fought to rescue Lot, he triumphed over the seemingly undefeatable Chedorlaomer. This victory came not by his own strength, but—as Melchizedek recognized—because God was with him.

At the end of this segment of Abram's life, Melchizedek pronounced a blessing on him from God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth. Abram came to understand that the true blessing of an elect sojourner is not material wealth but the favor of God Most High (Genesis 14:18–23). It was a blessing greater than anything the world could offer.

Thus, by calling them “elect sojourners,” Peter reminds his readers that they are like Abraham—sojourners favored by God. They have no permanent home in this world and cannot look to it for justice. Yet they are God's chosen treasure. He is their defense and reward, and He is bringing them into an inheritance far greater than anything the world can offer.

According To

Peter then tells his readers that their life as sojourners is according to God's foreknowledge. The distance and separation they experience from the world around them is not accidental, nor is it due to some failure on their part. On the basis of His foreknowledge, God has deliberately structured their lives so that they are not of the world, even though they are in it (John 17:15–16).

The same was true for Abram, as the second section of his life illustrates. Genesis 15 opens with God reiterating His intention to give Abram many descendants. When Abram sought assurance, God formalized the promise through a covenant. He went on to reveal the future of Abraham's descendants, showing that they would be elect sojourners according to His foreknowledge.

*Then He said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."
(Genesis 15:7)*

Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." (Genesis 15:13-16)

Here, God gives Abram a glimpse of what the future holds for his descendants. God intentionally made them elect sojourners, subject to all the challenges and injustices sojourners regularly face. They would not have endured these trials if God had made them residents among the Egyptians. But then they would never have later left their homes in Egypt for an unknown inheritance in a foreign land. According to His foreknowledge, God made them elect sojourners in order to bring them into the inheritance He had reserved for them.

Notice how the terms in this Genesis passage correspond to those Peter uses in his epistle (the Greek word for “stranger” in the LXX is the same as in 1 Peter 2:11). God’s description of Abraham’s descendants as resident foreigners in a land not their own, enduring trials, and eventually returning to an inheritance reserved for them closely parallels Peter’s description of his readers. The parallel is so close that Peter appears to have deliberately chosen his terms to draw an unmistakable connection between his readers and Abraham. It therefore makes sense to examine Abraham’s life to understand what it means to be an elect sojourner according to the foreknowledge of God.

For Abraham’s descendants, God’s foreknowledge meant that their life as resident foreigners in Egypt was not accidental but the result of His deliberate working. Although their journey brought them to the point where it seemed God had forgotten them, they could know that He was not only with them but fully aware of everything they were enduring. He was not surprised by the twists and turns of their fortune; He had allowed their trials so that He might be known by them (Exodus 10:1-2).

This truth is illustrated in Genesis 16 through the story of Hagar, who became a living illustration of how God sees. Her life was marked by dramatic reversals: from slave to Abram’s wife, from Abram’s tender embrace to Sarai’s harsh beatings, and finally from Abram’s rich household to the barren wilderness. Yet at the end of the chapter, she encounters the God who sees her (Genesis 16:13). Her path, with all its twists and turns, led her to meet the living God who knew every reversal of her life and allowed her trials to bring her to the knowledge of Himself.

So it would be for Abraham's descendants, and so it would be for the recipients of Peter's epistle. God made them elect sojourners according to His foreknowledge so that they would come to know Him in a real way.

Set Apart

God did not use some mysterious force to prevent Abraham and his descendants from assimilating into the peoples among whom they lived. Instead, He employed a simple means that took advantage of people's natural tendency to feel superior to those who are different: He instituted the requirement of circumcision.

And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you."

And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant." (Genesis 17:9-11, 14)

Circumcision identified an individual as belonging to God's people. By itself, it was merely the cutting off of a bit of flesh, yet it effectively separated Abraham and his descendants from the surrounding nations. Within a couple of generations, Abraham's descendants refused to intermarry with uncircumcised people (Genesis 34:14). By this simple rite, they became separated from the rest of the world.

The New Testament uses circumcision as a spiritual illustration of putting off the body of the sins of the flesh (Colossians 2:11). Circumcision portrays the transformation that comes through salvation. It begins with repentance, in which a person renounces their sinful life and turns to the Lord Jesus. When Jesus saves them, He imparts the Holy Spirit, who actively opposes the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:17). The Spirit's work produces a clear separation between the believer and the people of the world, who freely indulge those desires.

Peter alludes to the parallel between Abraham's separation (sanctification) and that of the believers to whom he writes. Abraham's sanctification came through circumcision, while the believers' sanctification comes through the Holy Spirit.

Abraham, however, was not merely separated *from* his neighbors; he was separated *unto* God. In Genesis 18, God personally visited Abraham to share a meal and strengthen Sarah's faith. As He departed, He confided in Abraham, disclosing His plans for Sodom. He then listened to Abraham's intercession and adjusted how He would deal with the city. In this way, God demonstrated that He had entered into a real relationship with Abraham.

In contrast, Genesis 19 presents Lot, who (as far as we know) had not cut off the flesh through circumcision. Though he remained one of God's people, he was not set apart but lived among the wicked. Although God delivered him from judgment, he became a tragic illustration of one who does not put off the flesh when he fell into drunken immorality with his daughters. His story shows that there is nothing beautiful about an unsanctified life given over to the desires of the flesh.

Genesis 20 further shows that Abraham was truly set apart unto God. Even though he was at fault and brought great sin upon Abimelech (Genesis 20:9), God commanded Abimelech in no uncertain terms to ask Abraham to pray for him (Genesis 20:7). This demonstrated that even in failure, Abraham remained closer to God than Abimelech.

Genesis 21 concludes this segment of Abraham's life with the account of the son of the bondwoman being cast out from the son of promise. Galatians 4 later uses this story to show that children of the flesh cannot inherit alongside children of the promise. It teaches that sanctification does not come through works of the flesh or striving to keep the law, but through the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Thus, Peter draws a parallel between Abraham's sanctification by circumcision and the sanctification of the elect sojourners to whom he writes. Believers enjoy fellowship with God in proportion to their willingness to renounce the desires of the flesh. Their sanctification is not produced by works of the flesh but by the Spirit of promise. Like Abraham, they are elect sojourners, set apart from the world unto God.

Obedience and Sprinkling of Blood

According to the apostle Peter, the dual purpose for which God establishes the elect in a sojourner life is for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. The meaning of these terms is illustrated in the final segment of Abraham's life.

This segment opens with the famous story of Abraham offering Isaac as a burnt offering—truly the culmination of God's work in his life. Through all his experiences and trials as a sojourner, God had shaped Abraham into a man who trusted Him implicitly. Abraham became one who would do anything

God asked, even offering up the very essence of his life in the form of his son. He became a man who obeyed the word of God without question.

This trusting obedience is precisely the outcome for which God called Abraham into the life of an elect sojourner. By making him a sojourner, God placed him in a position where he had no support except from God. Far from friends and family, and regarded as a foreigner by his neighbors, every trial drove him to turn to God, for there was nowhere else to go for help. As God faithfully delivered him through each trial, Abraham experienced God's goodness again and again. In this way he learned to trust God implicitly. It was the direct outcome of being God's favored sojourner.

Then there is Peter's phrase "sprinkling of the blood." It refers to Exodus 24:7–8, when Moses sprinkled the blood of the covenant on the children of Israel. At that time, the people expressed their willingness to obey God's word: "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient." For His part, God promised to bless them and bring them into the land (Exodus 23:25–31). Thus, the goal of the covenant was twofold: obedience and blessing.

This concept of blessing is a unique and central feature of God's covenants with His people. To bless someone means to bring them happiness by enriching them. We bless others whenever our encounter leaves them better off than before. A blessing can be as small as a smile or as great as a life devoted to their care. Regardless of its scale, every blessing involves bringing happiness through enrichment. God's covenants aim to ensure this kind of blessing for His people.

This is significant, because not all covenants have this purpose in view. For example, when you draw up a contract with a builder, your core intent is usually not to enrich him but to ensure he performs the desired work. The contract is meant to compel him to do what you want. But God's covenants with His people aim not merely at compelling behavior, but at the happy enrichment that comes through blessing. His ultimate goal is to enrich His people.

Making someone wealthy is not the same as blessing them. When Pharaoh made Abraham wealthy but took his wife, Abraham did not feel happily enriched but impoverished. Therefore, when God establishes His covenants, His intent is not merely to bestow prosperity but to happily enrich His people, making them truly blessed. To that end, He called Abram to the life of a sojourner.

However, the life of a sojourner does not appear to lead to enrichment. When Abraham went to sojourn in Canaan, he left behind community, friends, and family. As a sojourner, he could not settle into a permanent home with large property, since he would have to leave it behind when he moved on. In Genesis 23, he purchased the only land he owned in Canaan: a burial plot. Although he was rich, his wealth was mostly in movable herds—the one form of wealth that could travel with him. At first glance, God's call to a sojourner life seems more intended to limit his possessions than to richly bless him.

The same is true for believers. God calls us to follow Him in the life of a sojourner, leaving behind friends and family to pursue holiness and righteousness. It often seems that this life is more intended to limit our possessions than to richly bless us.

Yet God's covenants with His people are not meant to impoverish them but to enrich and bless them.

So it was for Rebekah in Genesis 24. Abraham's servant called her to undertake a journey, leaving behind friends, family, and community. She would have to leave most of her possessions behind as she embarked on her sojourn. But the servant's intent was not to impoverish her but to greatly enrich her at the end of the journey.

Rebekah's story illustrates what God was doing with Abraham. Though God called Abraham away from friends and family, His intent was not to impoverish him but to greatly bless him at the end of his journey. We do not know the full extent of Abraham's blessing, because we cannot see beyond the grave. We do not comprehend the richness of blessing God brought him into. But we do know it was an inheritance that does not perish or fade away, and we count Abraham as greatly blessed.

Abraham's story in turn illustrates our own. God calls us to follow Him into full obedience and a willingness to lay down the essence of our lives at His command. Yet His call is not intended to impoverish us; it is meant to bring us into the fullness of the covenant in Jesus Christ, who is the heir of all things.

When Peter refers to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, he is speaking of the covenant of blessing sealed in Jesus' blood. It is a covenant of unparalleled blessing, including every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3), an inheritance reserved in heaven (1 Peter 1:4), the future experience of the exceeding riches of God's grace (Ephesians 2:7), inheritance with Christ (Romans 8:17), and so much more. God calls people into the life of a sojourner with the intention of bringing these blessings upon them.

Elect Sojourners

So Abraham was a choice sojourner, not by happenstance but according to God's foreknowledge. God kept him separate from the people of Canaan through the rite of circumcision. His purpose in bringing him into the life of a sojourner was to produce true obedience and bring him into rich blessing at the end of his journey.

To the elect sojourners... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied. (1 Peter 1:1, 2)

Peter's readers were also choice sojourners, not by happenstance but according to God's foreknowledge. God keeps them separate from the world through the Holy Spirit. He brings them into the life of a sojourner to produce true obedience and bring them into rich blessing at the end of their journeys.

Thus, Peter uses "foreknowledge" here in the sense of knowing what the future holds. God made the believers chosen sojourners, fully aware of what such a life would entail and knowing that the life of a sojourner is the best life for His treasured people.

He Was Foreknown

Peter goes on in chapter 1 to encourage his readers, in the midst of their trials, to hold fast to the truth of the Lord's return and to be holy as God is holy. He urges them to live with appropriate reverence toward their heavenly Father, who will

judge the earth, knowing that He has redeemed them with the precious blood of Christ. Then he says of Jesus:

He was foreknown (G4267) before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you (1 Peter 1:20, ESV)

Peter here applies foreknowledge in the context of knowing a person rather than knowing future events. His phrasing is similar to Paul's when he noted that the Jews had prior knowledge of him dating back to his early years (Acts 24:5). In the straightforward sense, Peter's wording simply indicates that the Father had prior knowledge of His Son dating back to the foundation of the world.

The NKJV translates G4267 as "foreordain," but that rendering does not fit the context. Peter sets it in a pair of contrasting clauses: "He was G4267 ... but was made manifest (revealed) in these last times." If he meant foreordain, he would be saying that the Father had a plan and purpose for Christ from the foundation of the world but revealed Him only in these last times. This would contradict his earlier statement that God had long ago revealed His plan regarding Christ to the prophets (1 Peter 1:12), well before the "last times" mentioned in verse 20.

But if Peter meant "foreknow," he is saying the Father knew His Son from the foundation of the world and has revealed Him in these last times. This flows better and fits with his earlier comments about the prophets, who knew about the Lord Jesus but did not know Him personally. Peter is therefore saying the Father intimately knew His Son from the foundation of the world.

His statement appears in the context of God redeeming believers with the precious blood of Christ rather than with perishable things like silver and gold. Therefore, his point is that the Father, by His intimate knowledge of His Son, knew that Jesus would endure the trials of the crucifixion with excellence. He knew that any attempt to crush His Son would produce not bitterness or hatred but a sweet fragrance of moral excellence such as the world has never seen. He also knew that the Lord Jesus would not cry out for vengeance on His enemies but would call for mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

The Father knew the moral excellence of His Son from before the foundation of the world, but only now in these last times has that excellence been revealed to us who believe in God through Him (1 Peter 1:21). We now see His unmatched moral glory demonstrated through His willing sacrifice on the cross, and it has brought us to believe in God.

So Peter's use of foreknowledge here differs from his earlier uses. In the previous passages, he employed it in the sense of knowing the future. In this case, he uses it in the sense of having an intimate, prior knowledge of a person.

One other thing to note about his use of G4267 is that it shows foreknowledge does not necessarily refer to the foundation of the world. If it did, Peter would not have needed to add the clarifying phrase "before the foundation of the world." He included it presumably because he did not expect his readers to automatically associate the term with the beginning of time. This tells us that when we encounter foreknowledge in Scripture, we should not automatically assume it refers to the beginning of time but should look to the context for clarification.

Whom He Foreknew

We have come full circle. The passage that started us on this exploration of foreknowledge is the only one remaining to examine. It is unique among the foreknowledge passages because it presents God's foreknowledge in a limited sense: it speaks of God foreknowing a certain group of people whom He predestined. Notice that the passage does not say, "Of all whom He foreknew, He also predestined certain ones to be..."

For whom He foreknew (G4267), He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Romans 8:29)

Instead, the verse is saying, "Of certain ones whom He foreknew, He also predestined them all to be..." The word "also" clearly indicates that God predestined all of those whom He foreknew. Some translations even add the word "those" to emphasize this point.

because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. (Romans 8:29, NET Bible)

We are faced with the fact that Paul presents God's foreknowledge in a limited sense. Since God has not predestined all people to be conformed to the image of His Son, it must be that He has not foreknown all people (in this sense). Paul is saying that all those whom God foreknew He also predestined. Since He did not predestine all, He therefore did not foreknow all.

This interpretation, as logically simple and straightforward as it is, seems to contradict the reality that God knows all things. To resolve this paradox, we must explore the meaning of the root word underlying foreknowledge.

Digging Out The Root

Despite all the controversy surrounding it, “foreknowledge” is a relatively straightforward compound word made up of a simple prefix and a common root. In Romans 8:29, the word is Strong’s G4267 (proginōskō). Its prefix is pró (G4253) and its root is ginōskō (G1097).

The prefix G4253 (pró) simply means “beforehand” or “before the present time.” It does not inherently refer to eternity past, though it can be used that way in context. By itself, it only indicates some time earlier than the present. The precise timeframe—whether recent or ancient—is determined by the surrounding context, as we have already noted.

The root word, G1097 (ginōskō), is a common word, being used in 766 verses throughout the Septuagint and the New Testament. Many popular Christian authors portray the root G1097 (ginōskō) as being primarily an intimate, relational “heart” knowledge in contrast to factual, intellectual “head” knowledge. However, in reality, the word portrays a broad scope of knowing. Key nuances in common biblical usage include:

- Intellectual: To understand or comprehend.
- Relational/intimate: To acknowledge, be acquainted with, or know personally.
- Experiential: To realize, perceive, or become aware through experience.

- Euphemistic: Sexual relations (a Hebrew idiom carried into Greek biblical usage).

Intellectual knowledge is a knowledge of facts. It is the knowledge you have of a person from studying their actions and interactions. You can have intellectual foreknowledge of a person without ever meeting them.

Intimate knowledge is knowing a person for who they are. It is the knowledge you have of a person through personal interaction with them. As you hear them express their thoughts and feelings, you begin to know them in an intimate, personal way. Knowledge developed through personal interaction is typically more real to us than intellectual knowledge.

Experiential knowledge is the knowledge from experiencing an event. Imagine that the person you know has anger issues. It's one thing to intellectually know a person has a habit of losing their temper, it's another to personally hear them tell of their feelings of anger towards someone. It's yet another to experience firsthand their anger against yourself. Knowledge from experience is usually the most vivid and impactful upon us. It often is more real to us than the other types of knowledge.

Euphemistic knowledge doesn't really need any explanation because nearly every other study of G1097 explores this knowledge, often in detail. In reality, it has almost no bearing on our current study.

It's worth noting that each type of knowledge has its limitations in growth. Intellectual knowledge is only limited by one's ability to discover facts and comprehend them. Relational knowledge can only develop through firsthand interaction: if the person is not alive, you cannot develop relational

knowledge of them. Similarly, experiential knowledge can only come through personal experience: you only know an experience by experiencing it.

Relational Knowledge

Of these nuances, the one most often applied to God is the nuance of relational intimate type knowledge. The Psalms in particular express the depth with which God knows people.

Would not God search this out? For He knows (G1097) the secrets of the heart. (Psalms 44:21)

The LORD knows (G1097) the thoughts of man, that they are futile. (Psalms 94:11)

O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know (G1097) my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know (G1097) it altogether. (Psalms 139:1-4)

God knows us at a very intimate level, even the secrets hidden in the deepest recesses of our hearts. Not only does He know these secrets, but He understands their circumstances and origins. Thus, His relational knowledge of us is more intimate than anyone else can have. Furthermore, His scope of knowledge is unlimited.

“As for you, my son Solomon, know (G1097) the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands (G1097) all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. (1 Chronicles 28:9)

His intimate knowledge is not restricted to a select few. He knows and understands *all* the thoughts of *all* hearts. God searches the heart of every living person so thoroughly that He even knows the attitude behind each thought.

This passage is particularly insightful because it shows that God does not monitor all thoughts merely out of idle curiosity. Instead, it portrays God as actively searching each heart to discern who is seeking Him and who is forsaking Him.

In this passage, David urges Solomon not to be satisfied with secondhand religious knowledge about God but to know Him personally and seek Him with an honest heart. He reminds Solomon that God knows and understands every heart. If Solomon only made a show of seeking God while turning away in his heart, God would know.

Ultimately, this passage highlights the relationship between God and humanity. People bear the responsibility to seek after God and pursue a personal knowledge of Him. Not all do so; some merely put on a show and only appear to seek Him. But they do not deceive God.

But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew (G1097) all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. John 2:24-25

Some may push back against the idea of people seeking God, citing passages such as Romans 3:10–12, which declare there is none who seek after God. It is true that no one, left entirely to their own devices, will ever seek God. But we must remember that God does not leave people to themselves; He reaches out to them. To many, He sends gospel preachers. In Solomon's case, He had David call him to seek after God. To all

people, He has revealed Himself through creation (Psalms 19:1–4; Romans 1:19–21) and has set the boundaries of the nations so that they might seek Him (Acts 17:26–27).

God does not wait until the moment of salvation to begin revealing truth to a person. Instead, He intervenes repeatedly throughout their lives, revealing truth little by little as they are able and willing to receive it. Many believers describe their coming to Christ as a journey, realizing that God was at work in their lives long before they placed their trust in Him.

Left to themselves, people do not seek after God. But God does not leave them to themselves—He takes the initiative and reveals truth to them. Some receive it and begin seeking Him, while others reject it and turn away. In either case, God knows their hearts and sees exactly how they respond to the truth He presents, for He has intimate knowledge of all hearts.

Experiential Knowledge

Since experiential knowledge is by nature limited—you cannot have it without the experience—it is perhaps the most difficult to see how it could apply to God. Would we dare say that God lacks some aspect of experiential knowledge simply because He has not had that particular experience? This may seem sacrilegious. Yet, as much as it may appear to contradict God’s omniscience, it is a concept presented in Scripture.

*though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,
(Hebrews 5:8-9)*

According to this passage, Jesus—who is God—learned what it is to obey the Father in a context of suffering when He

became a man. The fact that He learned it indicates it was a new experience. It certainly was, because in glory He did not suffer when doing the Father's will. Thus, He did not experientially know what it is to obey at the cost of real personal suffering. He learned this only through becoming a man.

Just to be clear, as I present this nuance of God's knowledge, I am not trying to undermine the truth of His omniscience. Rather, I am trying to make sense of inspired passages that appear to contradict it. Hebrews 5:8 and similar passages are as much a part of Scripture as those that speak of God's omniscience. They cannot be dismissed but must be understood in their proper context. My goal is to resolve the apparent paradox by recognizing that there are different types of knowledge and therefore different contexts.

Truly, in the context of intellectual knowledge, God's knowledge is unlimited. There is no fact or event—past, present, or future—of which He does not fully know all the details. The same is true of His intimate knowledge: He has firsthand knowledge and understanding of every secret thought ever entertained by every living person. But experiential knowledge is, by definition, limited to those who have had the experience. Without the experience, there cannot be the knowledge that comes from it. Scripture shows us—perhaps surprisingly—that this is true even for God. There are times when He does not consider it adequate merely to know all the facts or to intimately know all hearts; He desires to know by His own firsthand experience.

And the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether

according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know (G1097).” (Genesis 18:20-21)

Of course, God knew in an intellectual sense the factual reality of Sodom and Gomorrah’s sin. But He went down to those cities to see it for Himself and know the reality by experience. He would bring judgment only after personally experiencing their wickedness.

Similarly, it was not enough for God to know all the facts about Abraham or to intimately know the inner recesses of his heart. Even with all of that knowledge, He did not swear His oath of blessing to Abraham and his Seed (Genesis 22:16–18) until after He had experienced Abraham’s obedience.

And He said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know (G1097) that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” (Genesis 22:12)

God fully knew of Abraham’s reverence toward Him long before Abraham took Isaac up the mountain. But when Abraham reached out and took hold of the knife, God profoundly experienced firsthand the treasure of Abraham’s reverent fear and trust in Him. Only after Abraham acted did God know by experience what He had only known intellectually before.

To some, this concept of God’s experiential knowledge may sound as if it contradicts His immutability, but we will see in a later chapter that it does not. We will show that God is a living being, not an unemotional force. As such, His experience of events is meaningful to Him. For now, we only need to see how

this nuance of knowledge explains why God knows some people in a way He does not know others.

And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew (G1097) you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ Matthew 7:23

We know God knew these people intellectually and intimately. But He did not know the unique experience of walking with them, for they practiced lawlessness instead of righteousness. They lived independently of God, and God did not share in their life of self-righteous wickedness. Thus, He did not know them with the experiential knowledge that comes from mutual relationship, for they did not walk with Him.

It is this nuance of experiential knowledge that sheds light on Romans 8:29, for there we see an aspect of God’s foreknowledge that is limited to certain people.

Yada Yada

However, before we return to Romans 8:29, I want to expose the fallacy of equating G1097 (ginóskō) to its Hebrew equivalent, yâda’ (H3045). This is a Hebrew word that often corresponds to G1097 in the Septuagint. Some examine how the Old Testament uses H3045, draw conclusions from it, and erroneously import its definition back into G1097. This approach is fatally flawed because it attempts to derive the meaning of a Greek word from a Hebrew one.

While no reputable study would stoop to using an English dictionary to determine the meaning of Greek words, for some reason there are those who accept the practice of using the Hebrew Bible to define Greek terms. In reality, you cannot accurately derive the meaning of a word in one language from a word in another—especially when that language, like Hebrew,

is highly metaphorical. So although G1097 corresponds to H3045 in many passages, there is no guarantee that the two words will carry equivalent meanings in all passages.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew (yâda’; H3045) you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.” Jeremiah 1:5

This verse is one example where the translators of the Septuagint (LXX) did not consider G1097 a fitting translation in this context. Instead, they chose G1987 (epistamai), showing that H3045 is not exactly synonymous with G1097. In some contexts the two words overlap in meaning, but in others they do not.

Nevertheless, some scholars and teachers still appeal to H3045 to define G1097. Doing so seriously undermines their credibility. It suggests they are either unaware of how languages actually function, are deliberately misleading, or are so committed to their theological system that they cannot accept evidence that contradicts it.

To arrive at an honest definition of a Greek word, we must examine Greek contexts. This does not mean we should ignore the Old Testament. On the contrary, there is great value in studying the Old Testament for Greek definitions—provided we use the ancient Greek translation (the Septuagint) that the apostles and early Christians read and used, rather than the Hebrew text.

Those Whom He Foreknew

As we mentioned earlier, Romans 8:29 speaks of God foreknowing a limited set of people. Thus, it cannot be speaking

of God intellectually knowing beforehand of what these people would do, because that would be saying He has an intellectual knowledge that is limited to a specific set of people. Nor can it be speaking of Him having a beforehand intimate knowledge of only specific people, because scripture declares that He knows and searches the hearts of *all* mankind. This leaves experiential knowledge as the only reasonable option, not only by process of elimination but also because it is the type of knowledge where God knows certain people in a way that He does not know others.

For whom He [experientially] foreknew (G4267), He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Romans 8:29)

As we mentioned before, we cannot assume G4267 here refers to knowledge from before the history of the world, for the word by itself does not indicate that. Given that Paul uses this word elsewhere in the context of a short timeframe (Acts 26:4–5), we must acknowledge the possibility that it may have a short-term scope here. After all, if Paul is using it in the sense of eternity-past knowledge, then he is saying God had experiential knowledge before the experience had taken place. Humanly speaking, it is simply not possible to have experiential knowledge before having the experience.

Some may argue that God is able to have experiential knowledge beforehand because He transcends time. But the reality of the gospel challenges this claim. In it we see that God did not transcend time with regard to Christ's death on the cross. Before the Lord's death, God passed over sins in His forbearance; after it there was propitiation (Romans 3:21–25). Although God was fully aware of all things regarding Christ's

death on the cross, His intellectual knowledge of the event did not provide propitiation. His experience of it did.

The fact that propitiation occurred after Christ died shows that God did not experience the event before it happened. It shows that Christ's death was not merely the presentation of a carefully scripted sequence but that His willing sacrifice was a truly meaningful experience to the Father in real time. The Lord Jesus' voluntary offering of Himself for humanity was so richly beautiful that it fully appeased God's wrath in that moment and forever afterward.

Thus, the truth of the gospel contradicts the idea that God pre-experiences meaningful events. If God did not beforehand experience an event as significant as His Son's death on the cross, then surely He does not pre-experience other, lesser events. Given that the construction of Romans 8:29 indicates experiential knowledge, the word foreknowledge cannot refer to God knowing these people from the beginning of time, long before they were born.

Instead, it is saying that God had an experiential knowledge of these people before a particular point in time. Since the word itself does not indicate the point of time in view, we must examine the context to identify the intended time marker.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.
(Romans 8:28-30)

The time marker in this passage is subtle. All we have to work with is the phrase “those who love God.” But it is enough, because people are not born with an inherent love of God. Instead, they are born with an inherent desire to be independent of all authority—including God’s—and they naturally resent His commands. For each person who loves God, there is a point in time when they transitioned from not loving Him to loving Him (Romans 3:9–23). Therefore, the time marker is the period when these people loved God, and foreknowledge refers to the time before they came to love Him. Of course, people come to love God at the point in time when He justifies them. This means our passage is saying God foreknew them from before their salvation.

Notice how well this interpretation of the timeframe meshes with the flow of thought. The verse placed God’s foreknowledge at the beginning of a sequence that leads to justification: He foreknows, predestines, calls, then justifies and glorifies. In this sequence, His experiential knowledge precedes all the other elements of a person coming to love Him.

In simple terms, the passage tells us that God has an experience with certain people before their justification that moves Him to predestine them to be conformed to the image of His Son. It is not hard to deduce what this experience is: it is the experience of them responding to the truth He has revealed. David told Solomon (1 Chronicles 28:9) that God searches all hearts and knows when people begin to seek Him. Their response to the truth He has revealed is the experience that moves Him deeply, even to the point of predestining them to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Some may push back, saying, “Does not God predestine people from before the foundation of the world?” But we will see in a future chapter that predestination does not inherently refer to the foundation of the world, and that it actually makes sense in this context to say that God predestines people in time rather than before time began.

Bottom Line

For now, we will notice that with regard to foreknowledge, Romans 8:29 is not presenting us with a mystery beyond our comprehension but giving us a straightforward process. God has placed His witnesses—such as creation (Psalms 19:1–3; Romans 1:19–20) and preachers (Romans 10:15)—to testify of His truth. As this truth goes out through the earth, He examines every heart, looking for those who are humble and contrite before His word (Isaiah 66:2). When we acknowledge the truth of His message, He takes note, for our response is deeply meaningful to Him. We become people He knows through experience even before we come to know and love Him.

From our perspective, our story begins with us living our lives according to our own desires. Then one day an element of His righteous truth penetrated our consciousness, and we were confronted with the reality of our wrongdoing before God. We faced a decision. Perhaps for a while, not wanting to give up our desires, we rejected and even suppressed the truth. But eventually we became troubled by our condition and began looking for a solution. It was at that point—whether we realized it or not—that we were responding to God’s truth. We began searching for answers, perhaps not even knowing the God we were seeking.

But God knew us and our hearts. Our response to His truth was precious in His sight, and, unbeknownst to us, He began to actively work in our lives with the goal of delivering us from sin's bondage and bringing us into the image of His Son. Keenly aware of what was happening in our hearts, He saw when the time was right and invited us to believe in His Son. When we believed, He justified us and glorified us above the angels, making us heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).

So foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 speaks of God's experiential knowledge of us prior to our knowing—and coming to love—God. It is not a mystical knowledge difficult for us to comprehend, but a straightforward prior knowledge that speaks of His rich, loving care toward us from the moment we begin responding to His truth.

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About the Author



Caleb Bulow resides in the wide-open spaces of North Dakota alongside his wife, kids, and a couple of lovely grandkids. As a regular Bible teacher at youth camps and churches, he loves working slowly and prayerfully through Scripture until its message rings clear and relevant to daily life. Influenced by voices like David Gooding, he believes true understanding flows from listening attentively to the text rather than imposing our own ideas. Through his writing, Caleb hopes to help believers see God's goodness more vividly—particularly in the passages that stir questions and discomfort.

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