

Verse 29. For whom he did foreknow. The word used here (προεγνων) has been the subject of almost endless disputes in regard to its meaning in this place. The literal meaning of the word cannot be a matter of dispute. It denotes, properly, to know beforehand; to be acquainted with future events. But whether it means here simply to know that certain persons would become Christians, or to ordain and constitute them to be Christians, and to be saved, has been a subject of almost endless discussion. Without entering at large into an investigation of the word, perhaps the following remarks may throw light on it.

(1.) It does not here have reference to all the human family; for all are not, and have not been, conformed to the image of his Son. It has reference, therefore, only to those who would become Christians, and be saved.

(2.) It implies certain knowledge. It was certainly foreseen, in some way, that they would believe, and be saved. There is nothing, therefore, in regard to them that is contingent, or subject to doubt in the Divine Mind, since it was certainly foreknown.

(3.) The event which was thus foreknown must have been, for some cause, certain and fixed; since an uncertain event could not be possibly foreknown. To talk of foreknowing a contingent event--that is, of foreknowing an event as certain which may or may not exist--is an absurdity.

(4.) In what way such an event became certain is not determined by the use of this word. But it must have been somehow in connexion with a Divine appointment or arrangement, since in no other way can it be conceived to be certain. While the word used here, therefore, does not of necessity mean to decree, yet its use supposes that there was a purpose or plan; and the phrase is an explanation of what the apostle had just said, that it was according to the purpose of God that they were called. This passage does not affirm why, or how, or on what grounds God foreknew that some of the human family would be saved. It simply affirms the fact; and the mode in which those who will believe were designated must be determined from other sources. This passage simply teaches that he knew them; that his eye was fixed on them; that he regarded them as to be conformed to his Son; and that, thus knowing them, he designated them to eternal life. The Syriac renders it in accordance with this interpretation: "And from the beginning he knew them, and sealed them with the image of his Son," etc. As, however, none would believe but by the influences of his Spirit, it follows that they were not foreknown on account of any faith which they would themselves exercise, or any good works which they would themselves perform, but according to the purpose or plan of God himself.

He also did predestinate. See the meaning of the original of this word explained See Barnes "Ro 1:4". See Barnes "Ac4:28", and #1Co 2:7. In these places the word evidently means to determine, purpose, or decree beforehand; and it must have this meaning here. No other idea could be consistent with the proper meaning of the word, or be intelligible. It is clear, also, that it does not refer to external privileges, but to real conversion and piety: since that to which they were predestinated was not the external privilege of the gospel, but conformity to his Son, and salvation. See #Ro 8:30. No passage could possibly teach in stronger language that it was God's purpose to save those who will be saved. #Eph 1:5, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself." #Eph 1:11, "Being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

To be conformed to the image of his Son. To resemble his Son; to be of like form with the image of his Son. We may learn here,

(1.) that God does not determine to save men, whatever their character may be. The decree is not to save them in their sins, or whether they be sinful or holy. But it has primary respect to their character. It is that they should be holy; and, as a consequence of this, that they should be saved.

(2.) The only evidence which we can have that we are the subjects of his gracious purpose is, that we are in fact conformed to the Lord Jesus Christ. For this was the design of the decree. This is the only satisfactory proof of piety; and by this alone can we determine that we are interested in his gracious plan of saving men.

That he might be the first-born. The first-born among the Hebrews had many peculiar privileges. The idea here is,

(1.) that Christ might be preeminent as the model and exemplar; that he might be clothed with peculiar honours, and be so regarded in his church; and yet,

(2.) that he might still sustain a fraternal relation to them; that he might be one in the same great family of God, where all are sons. Comp. #Heb 2:12-14.

Many brethren. Not a few. The purpose of God is that many of the human family shall be saved.