

John Calvin's Ghost haunts Biblical Unitarianism

1 Peter 1:20 NASB "20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you."

1 Peter 1:20 (LGV) "20 having been known formerly, indeed even before the casting down of the world, yet made apparent in the last times for you."

Anthony Buzzard's argument is typical of 'Biblical' Unitarians:

"Most significantly, the view that Jesus existed prior to his birth only in the counsels of God is the one expressed by Peter in his first epistle. At the end of his career he has not changed the view expressed in his early speeches in Acts: '[Jesus] was foreknown before the foundation of the world but manifested in the last days for you.' (1 Pet. 1:20). E. G. Selwyn notes correctly: 'Nor are we entitled to say that [Peter] was familiar with the idea of Christ's preexistence ... For this idea is not necessarily implied in his description of Christ as "foreknown before the foundation of the world," since Christians also are objects of God's foreknowledge.'

"All of the faithful were similarly 'foreknown' (1 Pet. 1:2), but this obviously does not mean that they preexisted. ..."¹

I. Buzzard's interpretation is based on an **erroneous** "Calvinistic" understanding of the terms "fore-know" & "fore-knowledge" in 1 Pet. 1:2 & 20.

A. The verb "fore-know" is προγινώσκω (pro-ginosko). The noun form "foreknowledge" is πρόγνωσις (pro-gnosis).

B. **DOES NOT MEAN to know of someone before they exist in reality.** It means to know them previously, **BEFORE NOW**.

1. It is a compound of προ (pro – before, previously, formerly) and γινώσκω (to know, often used of intimate relationships).

a. When used of **PERSONS**, **it always refers to a former relationship with a person who existed at the time:**

1. Septuagint: Wisdom 6:13 LXX

2. NT: Acts 26:5; Rom. 8:29; Rom. 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:20.

b. When used of **EVENTS**, it always refers to having been fore-planned or fore-warned:

1. Septuagint: Wisdom 8:8; Wisdom 18:6; Judith 9:6; Judith 11:19

2. NT: Acts 2:23; 2 Pet. 3:17.

II. Every case of προγινώσκω (fore-know) / πρόγνωσις (foreknowledge) used of **PERSONS:**

A. **Wisdom 6:13 (LXX-NETS)** "[Wisdom] anticipates those who set their desire on her to **make herself known in advance** [προγινώσκω]."

1. By anticipating a person's desire for godly wisdom, "Wisdom" then "makes herself known in advance" to that person. This is **a personal relationship** between "Wisdom" and the person desiring godly wisdom even before they ask as the context proves (vss. 11-16).

¹ Buzzard, Anthony F., The Doctrine of the Trinity, p. 186.

B. Acts 26:4-5 (NKJV) 4 “My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. 5 “They knew me from the first [προγινώσκω], if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

1. All of Paul’s accusers “fore-knew” (προγινώσκω) Paul “from the beginning” and “from my youth.”

2. This was personal relationship with, interaction with, and observation of Saul/Paul from his youth. It was not some kind of premonition, predetermination, or plan concerning him before he even existed.

C. Rom. 8:28-30 (NKJV) 28 *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.* 29 *For whom He foreknew, [προγινώσκω] He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.* 30 *Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*

1. One of Calvinism’s “proof-texts.” This is what God DOES for the “elect.”

2. WRONG! All of the underlined verbs are aorist-indicative, pointing to historical events. They are not present indicative (what God is currently doing; or what God does {gnomic sense}).

3. Those whom God “foreknew” refers to the OT saints, such as Abraham,² Moses, etc., with whom God had a personal relationship in the past (knew previously).

4. This passage uses the examples of what God did for the faithful OT saints (vss. 29-30) as an example of what He will do for Christians (vs. 28).

D. Rom. 11:2-4 (NKJV) “2 God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew [προγινώσκω]. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, 3 “LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life”? 4 But what does the divine response say to him? “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”

1. Again, Elijah and 7,000 faithful men of Elijah’s day were given as examples of people whom God “fore-knew” (previously knew).

E. 1 Peter 1:20 (NASB) “20 For He was foreknown [προγινώσκω] before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you.”

1. Applying the consistent meaning of “fore-known” (known previously) to this passage, the Son of God was personally KNOWN to the Father, as He was God’s Agent in creating the world.

2. The clause “the foundation of the world” is wrong, as the term καταβολῆς (kata-bol-ace) means an overthrow, casting down, and refers to the curse after Adam sinned.³

3. Peter was actually referring to Adam’s experiential knowledge of the Son in the Garden of Eden even before he was driven from it and the curse enacted.

² Abraham was “called” (Heb. 11:8); Abraham was “justified” (Rom. 4:2-3; James 2:23-24); Abraham was then “glorified,” given a place of honor (Gen. 12:2-3).

³ For an exhaustive treatment of this clause, see my 4-part series “Lost in Translation: ‘The Foundation of the World’” <https://www.4windsfellowships.net/blog/lost-in-translation/>

4. Anthony Buzzard's appeals to Calvin's ghost in 1 Peter 1:1

- a. Like a good Calvinist, Buzzard claims that this verse shows that all Christians were known in the PLAN and MIND of God, thus predestined to salvation.
- b. The "elect" are chosen by God **after** they exist, since He knows the hearts & thoughts of all people (1 Kings 8:39).
- c. God rejects the proud but gives His grace to the humble (Prov. 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). He is found by those who seek Him with the whole heart (Deut. 4:29; 1 Chron. 28:9; 2 Chron. 15:2; Heb. 11:6).