

Certainty and Necessity

Our view of the relationship between God's certainty and man's necessity can greatly shape the way we interpret pertinent Bible verses. Conflating certainty with necessity is an understandable and common fallacy, but can lead to either denying the foreknowledge of God or denying the libertarian free will of man, either of which, in concept, diminishes the perfections of a holy, just, loving and omniscient God. Certainty is a property of persons, whereas necessity is a property of propositions (necessity indicating that a proposition cannot possibly have a different truth value). Logically, if God is free (to have created or not created, or to have created or chosen differently than he did), then divine foreknowledge and future contingency are compatible.

For example, if I choose to mow my grass tomorrow, God has always known I would mow my grass tomorrow, and whatever God knows will happen, will happen. But I am free *not* to mow my grass tomorrow. If I choose *not* to mow my grass tomorrow instead of mowing it (future contingency), God has always known I would *not* mow it. Whatever God knows will happen, will happen, but I am free to do either. In a more serious soteriological vein, the elect before the foundation of the world are those individuals God foreknew (has always known) as being in Christ, before they freely believed and were spiritually placed into Christ, each being free to have received or rejected him.*

Valid and sound argument

1. Necessarily, if God knows x will happen, x will happen
2. God knows x will happen
3. Therefore, x will happen

Invalid, and therefore unsound, argument

1. Necessarily, if God knows x will happen, x will happen
2. God knows x will happen
3. Therefore, *necessarily* x will happen

This argument is fallacious because both premises have to be necessary for the conclusion to be necessary, and premise 2 is not necessary (i.e., God could have known something different from x).

Valid, but unsound, argument

1. Necessarily, if God knows x will happen, x will happen
2. *Necessarily*, God knows x will happen
3. Therefore, necessarily x will happen

By both premises being necessary, the conclusion is necessary. This is a valid argument. But the argument is unsound because premise 2 is not true. God could have known something different from x. For example, God is free to have *not* created the world, in which if x happens in the world, x would be contingently, not necessarily, true.

Sources: Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, and Free Will*; William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* subtitled *Coherence of Theism: Omniscience, and The Only Wise God*.

*See <http://studies.travisechols.com/Salvation.pdf>