

Romans Part 27 – Chapter 8:28-30

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Last week we discussed the three major ministries of the Holy Spirit:

First of all, the ministry of regeneration. He gave us life. We are born of the Spirit, born of the Spirit. He gave us life when we were dead - regeneration.

Secondly, the ministry of sanctification. It is He who increasingly conforms us to the image of Christ. Second Corinthians 3:18 puts it from one level of glory to the next, to the next, to the next, to the next, as we gaze on Christ as revealed in Scripture, who is the perfect model of Spirit-filled humanity. As we see Him as the example, as we gaze at Him in His full expression of deity and humanity, the Spirit changes us increasingly into His image from one level of glory to the next. That's His work of sanctification.

The third ministry that He has in this era of grace is the ministry of security. He secures us until that final ministry, the ministry of glorification when as the Spirit raised Christ from the dead, He will also raise us to be in His very likeness.

Romans 8:28-30:

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Remember one of the necessary filters for interpreting scripture is asking these vital questions:

1. In this instance is “those who love God” a qualifier or an attribute of “those who are called according to His purpose?”
2. And, is the passage descriptive or prescriptive?

Chuck Swindoll: Perhaps the most obvious case of a stand-alone verse that needs it's context is found in one of the greatest chapters Paul ever penned, Romans 8. From our mother's knee we have been nourished by the twenty-eighth verse. It brings comfort when our world crushes in. It softens the blows of calamity. It calms us when panic would otherwise steal our peace. It reassures us when wrong temporarily triumphs . . . when the fever doesn't break . . . when the brook dries up . . . when death strikes. I hardly need to write it out.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Great words! But left alone, they're incomplete. Anyone who has taken the time to look discovers that this verse starts a chain reaction that doesn't end before the magnificent statement found in the final two verses of Romans 8, which assure us of our inseparable love-relationship with the living God.

Woven into the fabric of this elegant garment of truth is an often-forgotten, easily overlooked thread that adds richness and color. Because it lacks the eloquence of verse 28, because it doesn't roll off the tongue quite as easily, it tends to get lost amidst other more obvious and more attractive phrases. I'm referring to the verse that follows verse 28, the one that explains why "all things work together for good to those who love God." Why?

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.

Put simply, we are God's personal project. He is committed to the task of working in us, developing us, rearranging, firming up, and deepening us so that the character traits of His Son—called here "the image"—begin to take shape. The emerging of the Son's image in us is of primary importance to the Father. In fact, it is impossible to thwart His commitment to the project. His work goes on even though we scream and squirm, doubt and debate, run and shun. There's no denying it, the tools He uses hurt, but it all "works together for good." It takes tension to develop the right texture. Without it, forget it. I've got a "fishy" story that'll explain what I mean.

In the northeastern United States, codfish are not only delectable, they are a big commercial business. There's a market for eastern cod all over, especially in sections farthest removed from the northeast coastline. But the public demand posed a problem to the shippers. At first they froze the cod, then shipped them elsewhere, but the freeze took away much of the flavor. So they experimented with shipping them alive, in tanks of seawater, but that proved even worse. Not only was it more expensive, the cod still lost its flavor, and in addition, became soft and mushy. The texture was seriously affected.

Finally, some creative soul solved the problem in a most innovative manner. The codfish were placed in the tank of water along with their natural enemy—the catfish. From the time the cod left the East Coast until it arrived in its westernmost destination, those ornery catfish chased the cod all over the tank! And you guessed it, when the cod arrived at the market, they were as fresh as when they were first caught. There was no loss of flavor nor was the texture affected. If anything, it was better than before.

A couple of questions seem worth asking. First, can you name some catfish swimming in your tank? Maybe you live with one of them. Or it's somebody at work whose irritating presence drives you to your knees several times a week. Every church has a few catfish as well! They're there to keep all the cod from getting soft, mushy, and tasteless. Second, have you given thanks for them lately? Yesterday, we talked about God's mission being to shape you into the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). Just think, it's that tension in the tank that helps "the image" emerge. With the right attitude, we can learn how to keep from resenting them as intruders as the chase continues.

To do so we'll need to put an end to pity parties and whine clubs and gripe gatherings in the tank. When we do, it is nothing short of remarkable how closely the chase begins to resemble "the race" mentioned in Hebrews 12 . . . but whoever heard of Hebrews 12 since Hebrews 11 is so much more popular? It's one of those passages I told you I feel sorry for, one that is overshadowed by its neighbor.

If you haven't heard of it, it's you I feel sorry for.

Dissection of verse 28:

Note the contrast between verse 26 and verse 28, there is something we don't know and there is something we do know:

26: *Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For **we do not know** what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*

28: ***And we know** that for those who love God all things work together for good*

The complete thought is that we don't know how to pray when we are under so much duress, yet we can have confidence that the Holy Spirit intercedes in our communication with God **and** we can trust Him that it will all work out to be good.

Back to the "qualifier question" – Does it work out for good because we trust Him and love Him?

Strictly stated, this promise is limited to "those who love God," and "those who are called according to His purpose." In short, that means the promise is for Christians: for saved believers, who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ (John 3:16–18; 14:6; Romans 3:26). No matter our feelings on a given day, loving God is part of what it means to live in Christ. That's who we are. Each of us is also called to fulfill God's purposes.

In other words, this verse cannot rightly be applied to non-Christians. Those who reject God do not express their love for God by coming to Him through faith in Jesus. For those who die without Christ, things will not have worked out for the better; they will have rejected the opportunity to take advantage of this promise (John 3:36).

What is the promise? That, for those who are saved, all things will indeed work together for good. "All things" should be taken to mean each and every circumstance one might experience, even pain or suffering. "Work," or "work together," must be understood in light of God taking action in the world. He is the one who causes all things to work together or, perhaps, works in and through all circumstances toward a specific end. What is that end? "Good."

The word "good" does not necessarily mean happy or painless or financially successful or our idea of the best possible outcome on any given day. God's ultimate good for us is to glorify us in eternity (Revelation 21:1–4). Beyond that, God works in and through us toward an ultimate good that serves His purpose for the universe.

The comfort of the verse is that nothing in this life of waiting and suffering is wasted. As stated in one of my favorite quotes "There's nothing wasted in God's economy." It is all meaningful for those in Christ, even if that doesn't diminish our pain in the moment.

28: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for **good***

What is the "good" that is working together? His purpose is in the next verse...

29 *For those whom he foreknew **he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.***

Back to verse 28, what is “all things?” *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good..*

Romans 11:36 *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

Ephesians 1:11-12 *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.*

Romans 8:29: *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

We as Christians do not stumble into a relationship with God. Paul means to comfort us in our waiting and suffering as we long to be with God and be glorified by Him. He has just described believers as people who are called according to God's purpose. This passage begins to introduce one of the most controversial and contentious ideas in all of theology: that of predestination.

Paul begins by saying our calling to serve God's purpose goes all the way back to "before." He writes that God "foreknew" those who are now brothers and sisters of Jesus, because they have become the children of God by faith in Jesus. The word "foreknew" means that God, in some way or sense, knew each Christian before we knew Him.

Based on this sense in which He "foreknew" us, God predestined—determined, appointed, or ordained in advance—those who are saved to be conformed to the image of Jesus. Paul says it even more plainly in **Ephesians 1:4:** *"He chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him."*

Much of the controversy over this passage deals in whether or not God allows human free will to be a part of this choice, or whether God's actions are totally unilateral. So far as it goes for this specific statement, that level of detail is irrelevant. Chapter 9 will further discuss this concept, in ways which are more strongly influenced by how predestination is interpreted.

The bottom line of this particular verse is that we can stand secure. We can know, as those now in Christ, that God's purpose for us has always been that we should become like Christ. God had scheduled our entry into His family long before we were ever born. If God knew about us before we were born, and arranged for our salvation, He certainly knows about our trials and sufferings now, and what lies ahead. That should provide us with great comfort as we wait to be with our Father forever.

Romans 8:30 *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

God's purpose for our lives has ever and always been that we will become like Jesus. In some way, God both knew and chose those who would be saved, long before we even existed to make such a choice. The subtle details of what this means, and how God accomplished it, are part of a much larger debate. In the context of this specific passage, however, those debates are beside the point.

Now Paul writes that those God predestined for this purpose, He also called. Stated in reverse, God called every single person he predestined. As Paul uses the word in Romans, being "called" by God is about His breaking into our awareness of Him and drawing us toward Himself.

Next, God justified every single person He called. The first four chapters of Romans deal with the issues of God's justification. To be "justified" by God is to be made right with Him. We can never justify ourselves because of our sin, not even by following the law, since we can't keep the law (Romans 3:10, 23). We can only be justified through faith in Christ (Romans 5:1).

Finally, every person God justified, by faith in Christ, He then glorified. Paul writes this in the past tense, indicating that our glorification is as good as completed in God's eyes. However, Paul began this section in verses 18–19 by saying that all of creation is waiting for the children of God to be glorified. We are waiting for that, too, though our sure and confident hope is that it is coming in God's perfect timing.

Paul wants us to know that your salvation and my salvation started in eternity past, and it extends to eternity in the future. Notice how the words grow on each other: "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, and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." Here's just the words: Foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. Five words, those could be called the five links of salvation.

So, here's the first one, link number one is foreknowledge. "Whom He foreknew". Essentially "From all eternity, long before you were born and became a part of history, you existed in God's heart. Long before your parents admired you or your friends acknowledged your gifts or your teachers, colleagues, and employers encouraged you, you were already chosen. The eyes of love had seen you as precious, as of infinite beauty, as of eternal value, it is a lifelong struggle to claim that closeness, but it is also a lifelong joy".

There are some common conversations about the foreknowledge of God, I have heard people say something like this, "Sure, I believe in God's foreknowledge, after all he's omniscient. He knows all, and since he knows all, he knows who will believe and who will not, so it is accurate to say that God foreknows". And another person will say, "Before the world was created, God foresaw who was going to believe in him and who would not, so on the basis of what he saw he decided to elect those people who had decided to elect him". But these ideas don't work if we really take the Bible at face value. The foreknowledge of God is much more than this for this reason:

If all the word means is that God knows beforehand what people will do in response to him, or to the preaching of the gospel, and then determines their destiny on that basis, what could God possibly have seen in any human heart except opposition to him? We don't have anything to offer God. I mean, if you think we do, you need to take a good look. Here's what the Bible says about us, "There is no one righteous, not even one, no one understands, no one seeks, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God". Foreknowledge is not God seeing that we would have enough sense to respond to him, and then saying, "Sure, I select them". Foreknowledge means that salvation has its origin in the eternal counsel of God, not in man.

The foreknowledge mentioned in Romans 8:29 indicates that in his own sovereign, good pleasure, God set his love on individuals, gladly acknowledging them as his own and electing them to everlasting life

and glory. You can't read it any other way. Now, I can't completely comprehend or explain all of what the foreknowledge of God means, but I can enjoy it. God's love for me is secure, he's given me a purpose, it's not based on my love for him, but his choosing of me before the world was even formed. I may not know anything else about the whole subject of God's sovereignty and election except this: The Bible says I was chosen in God before the foundation of the world. If that's all I knew, I should spend the whole week with my hands up high, dancing and singing and glorifying God. He loved me, and before the world was ever formed, before the stars hit the skies, We were in the heart of Almighty God.

Brennan Manning helps us understand that, he said, "I love the Jersey Shore, I love "Handel's Messiah," I love hot fudge, and I love my wife, Roslyn. I love some for what I find in him or her, but God is not like that. It is not because men and women are good that He loves them, nor only good men and women that He loves. It is not that he detects what is congenial and appealing and He responds to us with his favor, He, God, loves us because it is his nature to love. He is the source of love, He chooses, He does not react, God's love is totally without motive except in the fact that God is love". God didn't choose me before the foundation of the world because there was something special in me, there isn't anything special in me, God chose me because it was in his heart to do it, he chose you for the same reason.

Proverbs 16:4 *The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.*

Ephesians 1:5 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.*

But what is His will? **2 Peter 3:9:** *The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance.*

C.S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity*: "Why then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having."

So rather than "free will," it might be best to talk about "true will."

That is, can a person make genuine decisions, or are all decisions subject to something like fate or divine predetermination? We will talk more about predetermination and foreordination in the future posts about Unconditional Election and the Sovereignty of God, so I don't want to use a lot of room to discuss these issues here, except to say that Scripture, reason, and experience all seem to point pretty clearly to the fact that God expects us to make wise choices and holds us accountable for the choices and decisions we make.

If our decisions were fated or predetermined by God, then God could no more hold us accountable for the decisions we make than we could hold accountable a wind-up toy car for driving off a table if we are the ones who wound it up, put it on the table, and sent it driving off toward the edge. Or to use a more complex example, though most modern people have had the experience of yelling at our computers in frustration for what they do, we all know that the fault is never with the computer, for it is simply doing what we (or some computer programmer) have told it to do.

I would argue further that sin is the greatest proof for the existence of human true will (or free will, if you prefer that term). Why? To begin with, given the facts that God has a will and that sin exists, we are only left with a few options as the origin of sin and evil: We must say either that God willed sin into existence or He did

not. Most Christians, however, agree that God did not will sin into existence. And if He did not will sin into existence, then it had to have come from some other will—a will outside of God's will.

Sin cannot have come from God's will, for sin is contrary to and opposed to God's will.

Therefore, sin must have its origination in a will that is separate from God, or else God would be divided against Himself. Since all people sin, the will of an individual person must be one such will that is separate from God. Curiously then, the sinfulness of mankind does not disprove the existence of the will of man, but proves it!

Self-caused actions founded in the wills of men are the best explanation for the origin of evil.

If, therefore, self-caused actions help account for the origin of evil, then the origin of evil helps prove the existence and reality of self-caused actions. In other words, if there is no true will, we would have no way to explain the origin of evil unless it were attributed to God.

But since evil cannot have its origin in God, the origin of evil must be explained through the real decisions of God's creatures. He created beings with true wills, knowing that they might misuse and abuse this amazing gift for the purpose of rebellion, but also knowing that without such a gift, there could be no way for Him to receive the goal and purpose of a true will, namely, true love. God knew that without a true will there could be no true love; and God, desiring to have loving relationships with His creation, decided that the gift of a true will to His creatures was worth the risk.