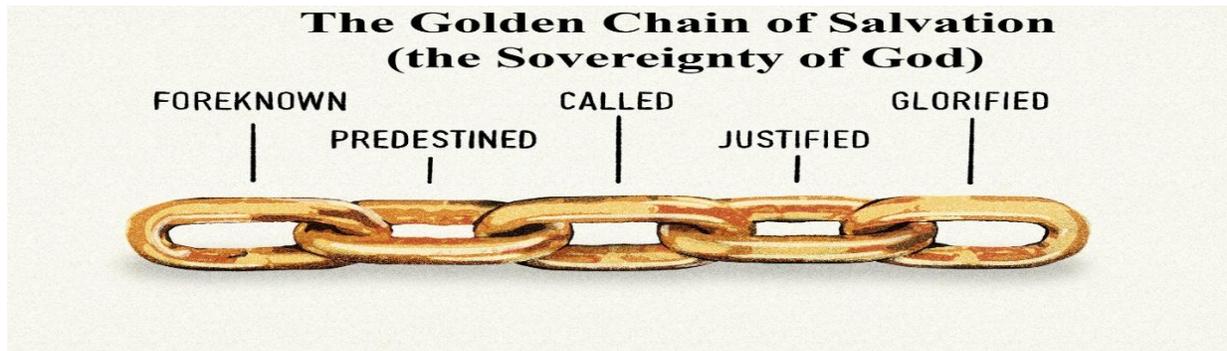


Ministry of Grace Church

Sermon Notes

Romans 8:28-32 – The Sovereignty of God



Background

When I was a young Christian, more than 50 years ago, there was a significant debate going on between those who believed in the sovereignty of God and those who believed in the responsibility of man. Some said that we are responsible for choosing to believe in God, while others said we believe in God because He chose us to believe. Those who believed in the responsibility of man, said that if God is responsible for our salvation, then we don't have to do anything to get saved, its all up to Him. They also said that it's not fair that God would choose some and not others, sending them to Hell instead of Heaven. But those who believed in the sovereignty of God claimed that God can do anything He determines to do, and He always does what is right. In Revelation we are told that "whosoever will, may come." But in Ephesians it says that we were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. I cannot fully reconcile these two positions, but I don't have to. That's up to God, not me.

In this current section of Scripture, we will behold the sovereignty of God. In fact, this is, in some regard, the pinnacle of Paul's treatise on God's sovereignty. God does, and will do, whatever He has decided to do, and nothing can alter His will or thwart His plans. Afterall, He is the Creator. He made everything that is, and He is active in everything that happens. Nothing surprises Him and whatever He has determined to be, will be just as He planned it.

In this passage of Scripture, we're about to learn some amazing things about our God. As part of His plan, He is right now producing goodness in and for all of His adopted children. Why? Because He wants to. That's part of who He is! We will learn, again, that we are saved because He chose us to be saved. Not because we decided to get saved, but because He determined it. And – this determination, this choosing, occurred before a single particle of creation came into being. However, if we choose to reject the Gospel message, we will be declared sinners and will be judged accordingly.

Think about this. Not only did God create everything that is and chose which of us would believe the gospel message, but He did so in eternity past. Before anything was, He knew us – everything that we have ever done or ever will do. He knew about every thought and intent of our minds, past, present, and future before time began. He knew every sin we would ever commit, and every evil thought we would ever have. And yet – because of who He is, He called us to Himself, He justified us (declared us to be without sin), and He has already glorified us with a glory like His.

I don't know about you, but I find this to be not just amazing, but unbelievable! The simple fact that the Almighty, All Knowing, Everywhere Present God of all creation would choose me to be His son and promise me the riches of heaven is incomprehensible? Knowing this, how could any Christian not be eternally grateful and truly love the Lord our God so much that we would do anything He asks of us, and do so with the greatest of love and gratitude!

Add this to the truth that we learned last time that no matter what we may be going through in this life, no matter how unfair it may seem, no matter how much we may have to suffer this side of the grave, it can't even compare to the glory that will be revealed in us. He has such an amazing eternity prepared for us that all of creation is straining its neck forward looking for that revelation of our glory! Our glory! Yes, yours and mine! Here's how Paul starts off this section of Scripture.

Romans 8:28

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

But what does that really mean? Okay we're going to get intensely technical for a few minutes, with good reason. This is one of those verses that has been misinterpreted and used for false teaching almost since the day it was written. Paul starts off by saying that for those of us who love God, we love Him because He called us to this love. And as a demonstration of that love, He is currently working all things in our lives to produce good in us. Say what? Yes, Paul says that God is working all things in our lives to produce good in us! Well then, what does Paul mean by the word "good."

The Greek word is *agathos*, meaning "good or well-meaning and kind" or "useful." But there is also another Greek word translated "good." It is the word *kalos*, meaning "inherently good without necessarily being well-meaning or kind." It can also mean, "beauty as a harmonious completeness." An easy way to distinguish between the two is to think of *kalos* as specific goodness or beauty and *agathos* as general or overall goodness.

But what does Paul mean by "all things work together for good?" He is saying that even though some of the things that happen to us don't necessarily seem very good, all things work together for our overall general goodness. Those of us who are older Christians can look back through our life and remember things that happened to us that certainly didn't seem at all good at the time. But as we have grown older, we realize that it was those things which shaped us and helped us grow into the type of Christians we are today.

Next, let's look at the verb "work together." It appears to be a third person plural verb. But, in fact, in the Greek, it is a singular, third-person verb. In other words, the subject for this verb is not "all things." How do we know? The word translated "all things" is a plural noun. In Greek, as in English, the number of a verb (singular or plural) must always agree with the number of its subject. Therefore since the verb is singular, the subject of the verb must also be singular. As it turns out, in this verse, the subject is not stated, but simply implied. That's why some translators render the first part of this verse as, "And we know that God works all things together for good."

Who are these people for whom God works all things together for good? Paul says they are "those who love God." Only those of us who have recognized our own sinfulness and need for salvation can fully appreciate the sacrifice that God made to have our sins paid for. And only we can really love God for having done it for us.

Paul now refers to those who love God as, "those who are called according to His purpose." Do you remember when you studied grammar so very many years ago? There you learned that a passive verb is one that acts on the subject, instead of the subject doing the action. It appears in the English translation of this

verse that the word “called” is a passive verb. But it’s not. It is a plural noun (as in, those who are the called ones). Those for whom God works all things together for good are those who are **the called ones** according to God’s purpose. Paul is saying clearly that our being called to Christ and salvation is not of our own doing. It is completely God’s doing, and it is according to His purpose. We don’t know why God called us to salvation, but we do know, according to Paul, that He is purposeful in calling us. But Paul doesn’t stop there. In fact, he is just getting started!

Romans 8:29-30

Because 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 brothers; and those whom He predestined, He also called; and those whom He called, He also justified; and those whom He justified, He also glorified.

Verses 29 and 30 are sometimes referred to “the Golden Chain of Salvation.” Entire chapters of theological books have been written on the subject matter of **Romans 8:29**, but I will attempt to give the meat of the meaning as clearly and concisely as I can. The controversy of this verse revolves around a single Greek word. Its meaning and proper interpretation, though much debated, are, actually, very clear and uncontested, and yet there are still many Bible-believing Christians who choose not to accept it. The word I’m talking about is *proginōskō*, translated “foreknew.” Foreknowledge means that God had full, thorough, intimate knowledge of us before we were born. In **Ephesians 1:3-5** Paul tells us:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him **before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love, by predestining us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

God’s foreknowledge and choosing of us as his adopted sons actually happened before the world was created.

I have heard competent, sound, fundamental Christians say to this, “Yes, of course. God foreknew who would accept Christ as Savior and, therefore, He chose them.” The problem with this interpretation is in the fact that if God foreknew who would accept Jesus Christ as Savior, then He also foreknew who would not accept Jesus Christ as Savior. Right? Therefore, according to the current verse in Romans He would have to have predestinated all people to be conformed to the image of His son (**whom He foreknew, He also predestined**). And – if that’s the case, then everyone is saved. But this simply isn’t true. This faulty reasoning speaks of God’s foresight, not His foreknowledge. Also, if God chose us based on our decision to accept Christ as Savior, then in reality we chose Him, and He had **no choice** in the matter. That’s a big man, little god theology, which simply isn’t true. According to the current verse, as a result of His foreknowledge of us He predestined us to be like His son Jesus.

Paul just told us that He works all things together for good to those “... **who are the called ones according to His purpose.**” And those whom God foreknew He predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. Now he tells us those whom He foreknew and predestined, He also called, justified, and glorified. Let’s look at each of these three things. First of all, all of these verbs (foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified) are expressed in the Greek aorist tense indicating that all these things were done at a point in time in the past.

So - what does it mean to be “called” by God? There are two senses of this word. The first is often referred to as the “external call.” This is a simple invitation to action. In Matthew chapter 22, Christ referred to a man who was present at a wedding without a wedding garment. The master of the wedding had asked his servants to invite to the wedding as many as they could find, and this man must have heard the invitation. But this man did not have the wedding garment, which was a sign of true invitation. As a result, the master

of the wedding commanded that this man be cast into outer darkness, stating that “**many are called but few are chosen.**” This man heard the external call. The other sense of the word is referred to as the “internal call.” Going back to Christ’s parable, the guests who had the official wedding garment were ones who received the internal call. They were the true guests; they were chosen, they were the “**called ones.**”

Now, Paul makes it very clear that those who were foreknown, predestinated, and called are truly saved Christians. How do we know that? Because Paul tells us that they were also justified. Remember that Paul started out this letter teaching us that justification does not come from obeying the Law; rather, it comes only by the grace of God through faith. He says it was not earned because if it was earned, then it was not of grace. That’s also what he says in **Ephesians 2:8**, “**For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;**”

At the risk of running down a rabbit trail, let me ask, “What is the gift of God” that Paul is referring to in this verse. It is not “faith.” The grammatical structure of this verse clearly points to the expression, “by grace you have been saved” as being the gift of God. So, in summary form, we can say that salvation, itself, is a gift given to us by God.

It is because of this gift, this calling, this predestination, that we are also justified, that is, we are imputed with the righteousness of Christ, not because we have done anything, but because God chose us. That’s grace!

Finally, Paul tells us that because God has justified us, He has also glorified us. Even though from our perspective this hasn’t yet happened, from God’s perspective He has already glorified us. He has already given us our glorified bodies and made us in all ways like Christ.

This Golden Chain of Salvation reminds us that salvation is entirely an act of God. It is God, and God alone, who foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and who will glorify.

Romans 8:31-32

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who indeed did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?

If you read through the entire eighth chapter of Romans up to this verse, you will see the glory of God. This chapter is like a trip up the side of a volcano in which the sides get steeper (as the theology gets more personal) until we reach the rim of the volcano in verse thirty-one. From here to the end of this chapter, we see an eruption of the glorious benefits of being an adopted child of God. God’s love and God’s blessings to us just bursts forth in these remaining verses.

Paul starts off this eruption with a couple of rhetorical questions. The first is, “**What then shall we say to these things?**” In this question Paul is challenging all of us to take stock of what he has been telling us in this chapter, namely:

- There is no condemnation to those of us who are in Christ Jesus. We have been given the righteousness of Christ.
- The Holy Spirit of God lives within us and gives spiritual life to our mortal bodies.
- We have been freed from the bondage of sin, and we have been adopted by God. We are now His children. And, not just children, but sons! Why is that significant? Because by both Roman and Jewish law, only sons could inherit from their father. We, whether male or female, have been adopted as God’s sons!
- Therefore, we are heirs of God Almighty.
- But as joint heirs with Jesus Christ, we will also suffer in this world just as He did.

- However, this suffering can't even be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us at the end of this age.
- Right now, all of creation is groaning under the curse of sin, expectantly waiting for the end of the age when we, God's sons, will be glorified.
- The knowledge that this glorious future awaits us enables us to endure our present suffering.
- In the midst of this suffering, the Holy Spirit is our prayer partner, praying for us in ways we can't even comprehend.
- In spite of our suffering, we know that God will produce good in us through this suffering.
- God completely knows us.
- In His eyes, we are without sin!
- God will give us glory like Christ has.

So, as Paul asks, "What shall we say to these things?" What do **you** say to these things? I say, Wow! The second rhetorical question that Paul asks is, "**If God is for us, who can be against us?**" The answer obviously is, "No one!"

In light of all of these wonderful things, it is obvious that God is a loving father to each one of us. And, as if responding to the neighbor kid claiming that his dad is bigger, or stronger, or smarter than ours, Paul knows that our Father is greater than anyone or anything that may stand against us. Therefore, be courageous because "**If God is for us, who can be against us?**"

And this is just the beginning of Paul's exciting volcanic eruption. We know from other passages of Scripture that God is Almighty, that is, All Powerful. No one is more powerful than God (our father is stronger than their father). But - just because He can do anything to protect us and defend us doesn't mean that He will make our lives full of ease and prosperity. In fact, because He is an all-knowing God, He knows what things will make us most Christ-like. He knows that times of trial and difficulties in our lives will make us stronger. That's precisely the issue that Paul is addressing in this passage.

God the Father, did not spare His only Son, Jesus. In fact, God the Father, sent His only Son to live a perfect life and then freely offered that life as a substitutionary sacrifice to pay for your sins and mine. He permitted His precious Son to be subjected to one of the most cruel and painful tortures ever invented by the sin-sick minds of man so that the penalty of our sins could be paid for. Then, once our sins were paid for, He declared us to be righteous and adopted us as His sons. That has been His plan since before time began and nothing can alter that plan. Nothing!

So, Paul's point in verse 32 is very simple; if God is willing to offer up His only Son so that He could adopt us as His children as well, He must really love us. And if He loves us this much, surely, He will freely give us all that we need, or as Paul put it; "**how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?**"

But what does Paul mean by "all things?" The Apostle Peter gives us the answer to that question in his second general epistle to the church:

seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the full knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. (2Peter 1:3)

Thus, we see that in addition to giving the life of His Son to pay the penalty that we can't pay ourselves, God gives us everything we need to live completely fulfilled lives as godly people.

So What?

When we are in the midst of trials we should be encouraged for three reasons. The first is that the Holy Spirit is our prayer partner and He knows just what to pray and how to say it. The second reason is that no

matter how bad things seem, God is going to use whatever is happening to us ultimately to produce good in us, and that brings the glory back to Him. The third reason that we should be encouraged in the midst of trials and tribulations is because the glory that God is going to give us in the future is far greater than the present trials we are going through. Remember, these present trials are temporary, but our heavenly glory will be eternal! The key to understanding Christian persecution and suffering is not to focus on what we have done or what we want to do, but on what He has already done – and what He will always do.

We **will** suffer in this life because we are Christians! In fact, the greater our testimony, the more likely it is that we will suffer. Keep in mind that we have an adversary who is the second most powerful being in all of creation. He wants to defeat us and to thwart God's plan. However, he has been opposing God's purpose since the beginning and has failed every time. Satan may also be the second smartest and second strongest being, but he must be insane. What do I mean? Well – it has been said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and each time expecting a different result. Satan continues to try to thwart God's plan, but he never succeeds!

Sometimes we have to ask ourselves, how can a loving God send some people to Hell while others will spend eternity in His presence. Remember, we deserve Hell just as much as anyone else. It's hard for us to accept the fact that God chose us for salvation while He allowed others, as a result of their sins, to suffer in Hell for eternity. However, that's exactly what the Bible teaches. Instead of blaming God for being so cruel as to send some people to Hell, let's remember two truths. The first is that God is righteous, that is, He always does what is right. And the second is that God is gracious and merciful to those of us who are saved, and He will not allow to happen to us the very thing that we so desperately deserve. So, instead of fighting against God (a futile activity, at best) let's praise Him for having chosen us to be conformed to the image of Christ and to be adopted as His children!

The next time that you feel like a defeated Christian due to the weight of your suffering or the weight of your sin, think about the book of Romans and all the truths that Paul teaches us about our God and our future. In the next few verses, in fact, Paul is going to offer words of encouragement and a glorious truth for all of us to remember when we are in the midst of those trials or when we are in the depths of discouragement.

Now, before we go, let me point out something that you may not have ever noticed even though you may have read it 100 times. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught many truths and there is one that is particularly relevant to our study today. He said:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, in Your name did we not prophesy, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many miracles?’ “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.’
(Matthew 7:21-23)

Do you see what Jesus will say to those who think they have earned their way into heaven? He will say, “I never knew, *ginōskō*, as in *proginōskō* (foreknew) you.” He will tell them, I never knew you!

Let's pray