

From Eternity to Eternity A Study on Romans 8:29-30

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Any good military man knows that an army fights best is when it is on the offensive and has the enemy on the run. Usually an army fighting a defensive war or, worse yet, retreating, has tremendous morale problems because there is nothing to look forward to but defeat. However, when an army hears that the enemy has been penetrated, that they are on the run and that their morale is low, this causes the troops to steel their nerve, make great sacrifices and give one hundred percent effort to completely defeat the enemy. When victory is certain an army fights best.

In Romans 7 and 8 the Apostle Paul has been talking about the Christian's spiritual suffering as he struggles with sin in his life and as he seeks to take the good news of Christ to the world. Spiritual sufferings are a reality for every child of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

In Romans 8:28-30, Paul wants to assure the Christian that these sufferings are according to the plan of God and have a divine design behind them. In order to encourage the Christian, he turns him to the purpose of God for his life. God's purpose for the Christian began in eternity past where he was foreknown, elected and predestined, and stretches into the future and eternity where he will be glorified.

God's plan is perfect and cannot fail, and he has a planned purpose for every child of God. Therefore, in the midst of this spiritual conflict, we can quietly rest back upon God's sovereign purposes and push on in the Christian life because we know the final outcome of our salvation is settled. Victory is certain; therefore we can fight the battle better in time.

In Romans 8:28, Paul has assured us that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose." The ultimate reason that all things work for good is that initially the Christian was called to salvation according to the sovereign purpose of God. God in his eternal plan, based on his sovereign will, purposed to save some as they responded to Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour. The word "purpose" indicates that the entire program of man's salvation is a planned program.

Now in Romans 8:29-30 Paul is going to elaborate on the purpose of God as it relates to the salvation of individuals.

GOD'S PURPOSE BEGAN IN ETERNITY PAST — Romans 8:29

In order to assure the Christian of victory in the midst of suffering, Paul takes the Christian's salvation back into the eternal counsels of God, when the Christian, before he ever existed, was foreknown, elected and predestined. Do not let these terms scare you. They are wonderful, biblical words that have great meaning for the Christian. Remember, they are put there for our comfort, not for our discouragement and frustration.

The teachings of election and predestination are deep truths and difficult to understand by human reasoning. We accept these truths because God's Word teaches them, not because we understand everything about them. You will never be able to reconcile God's sovereign election with man's absolute responsibility to believe.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord, For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9).

We are victims of time and space and we cannot reason or think like God.

“Every system of theology undertakes to subject the words of God to categories and catalogs of the human intellect. Now, if you undertake to “reconcile” God's sovereign election with his offer of salvation to all, you must sacrifice one truth or the other. Our poor minds may not “reconcile” them both, but our faith knows them both, and holds both to be true! And Scripture is addressed to faith, not to reason” (Newall, *Romans*, p. 331).

Martin Luther once said that those folks who have lived long and suffered much are more ready to accept the teachings of election and predestination, for they desire answers to their sufferings and can find these answers only in the sovereign purposes of God.

“For [because] whom he did foreknow.” The word “foreknow” means “know experientially before.” It speaks of a relationship God sustained to some in eternity past. It is a loving relationship which God sustains to certain individuals because of his eternal purpose.

One of the saddest mistakes ever made by students of the Bible concerns the definition of the foreknowledge of God. Men insist on dragging God down out of eternity and making him like his creatures of time, with a past and a future. Thus they define foreknowledge as being no more than knowledge in advance. They define foreknowledge as prescience or foresight, and say that God looked down the corridors of time and saw who

would believe on Christ, and elected them on that basis. This verse refutes this position because it says “whom” not “what” he foreknew. It is a relationship to individuals.

Furthermore, foreknowledge is preceded by God’s purpose in Romans 8:28. God knows all because he planned all! If God foresaw how everything would happen and then planned it, it makes the whole plan dependent on man. Thus you have a God who is less than a man.

“God is not a crystal ball gazer in that He looks down the corridors of time to see how men will believe and act and then sets His plan based on their actions. No! God is God, the Creator, the First Cause, the Author of salvation. He does all according to His own will and for His own glory” (Kenneth Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*).

God’s foreknowledge is related to God’s election of individuals to salvation: “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Pet. 1:2).

Notice that in Romans 8:31 the word “elect” is used. Election means “to choose one out of the masses.” God in eternity past set his affections on us in love and chose us as objects of his grace to salvation:

“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13).

God loved us before he chose us. This is not impossible, for I loved my wife before I chose her to be my mate.

The country boy from way back in the hills said that when he was saved, “God did his part and I did my part. God did the saving; I did the sinning. I done run from him as fast as my sinful heart and rebellious legs would take me. He done took after me till he run me down.”

Why did God elect some to salvation? We don’t know and will never know in this lifetime, but we know he did it according to the counsel of his own will.

“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:4-5).

Have you ever asked yourself why you should be saved while others are not? The only answer is God's grace has made your salvation possible. I remember one time I was walking down the streets of Dallas and meditating on my salvation in Christ. Thousands of people were passing by me on the street and I said, "Why am I saved and not these? Why should I have the wonderful privilege of knowing Christ? I'm no better than these." Then I leaned on a lamp post and bowed my head and thanked him for choosing me to salvation and making me a recipient of his grace and love. I remember saying to myself as I walked on down the street, "Why me, Lord, why me?"

The big question is not why did God choose some and not others, but why does God choose anyone, for no sinner deserves salvation.

As the godly poet said:

Why was I made to hear His voice,
And enter while there's room,
When thousands made a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?

Tw'as the same love that spread the feast,
That sweetly drew us in;
Else we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin.

"He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." The word "predestinate" or "predestine" means "put boundaries around," and it looks to the end or the ultimate purpose of God's choice. God set the destiny of those who were foreknown and elected for a certain end or goal. That end is that the Christian might be conformed to Jesus Christ. God's ultimate purpose is that the Christian might share the spiritual image of Christ.

God did not just predestine his people to a place called heaven, but to a likeness and relation — to be conformed to Christ. Heaven is not just where his people shall be but what they shall be!

Why did God choose the Christian to salvation? So that the Christian would be: conformed to Christ (Rom. 8:29); holy (Eph. 1:4); and a fruit bearer (John 15:16).

Conformity to Christ was initiated in eternity past and will become a complete reality in eternity future when the Christian receives his glorified body. But conformity to Christ is also taking place now in the Christian to some degree as the Holy Spirit is changing the Christian from glory to glory and the Christian is walking obediently by faith.

“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

God’s predestinating purpose can be compared to an artist who wants to sculpt from marble the bust of a person. The artist first conceives in his mind the exact image he wishes to make, and he never deviates from that original plan. He then chooses a block of marble and begins to chip away on the slab. At first it doesn’t look like much, but the finished product is exactly what he predestined the image of the person to be. There was a great deal of chipping and smoothing off of the rough edges in order to get the final image. So it is with the Christian. We have been chosen by God and predestined to be conformed to his Son Jesus Christ. God never gives up on this plan and there is a lot of chipping and smoothing out of the rough edges in our lives through suffering, but all this is for the purpose of bringing the final product which is complete and perfect conformity to Christ in eternity.

“That he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” Christ was the first to receive a glorified body, but all who have trusted in Christ will receive glorified bodies also.

GOD’S PURPOSE IN TIME — Romans 8:30a

God’s purpose must be relevant for time as well as eternity if it is going to have meaning for the Christian and comfort in the midst of spiritual suffering.

“Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called.” This is the effectual call of God to salvation of those individuals that are part of his purpose. This call is of such a nature that God works on the heart of the sinner so that the sinner, without any feeling of being compelled against his will, believes on Christ. But behind this decision is the ultimate purpose and calling of God.

“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim. 1:9).

“Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 2:14).

“But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24).

God makes the offer of salvation free and gracious to millions of people, speaking to them of their need of Christ, and more often than not it is spurned by men. This is the general call of Matthew 22:14: “Many are called, but few are chosen.” But God, in grace, gives the effectual call to some and as a result they necessarily believe in Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour.

“And whom he called, them he also justified.” Those who are called by God to salvation believe on Jesus Christ, and Christ’s death is applied to their lives. They receive the forgiveness of sin and Christ’s righteousness, and God declares these individuals righteous in his sight.

GOD’S PURPOSE FOR ETERNITY FUTURE — Romans 8:30b

The struggling saint, hot in the conflict with sin, has been pointed backwards to God’s plan initiated in eternity past, a reality in time and now an absolute guarantee for the future.

“And whom he justified, them he also glorified.” Here is an absolute promise that every person who has been foreknown, elected, predestined, called and justified will be glorified.

No Christian has received his glorified body yet, but it is so certain that Paul speaks about it as already accomplished. In that day, there will be no more struggling with sin, no more tears, no more heartache, no more suffering. We shall be conformed completely and totally to Jesus Christ according to God’s purpose.

All those who were foreknown, elected and predestined, called, and justified were also glorified. Not one was lost. What an argument for the security of the believer. In fact, there is no basis for the security of the believer apart from sovereign election.

CONCLUSION

Saved: Oh, struggling saint, take heart, be encouraged. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. He who has initiated your salvation will surely perform it. There is no one in hell or on earth that can shake you from your salvation and there is surely no one in heaven who wants to! Victory is certain, therefore let us push on even harder to defeat the enemy sin.

Unsaved: If you are still without Christ, possibly you are wondering whether you are numbered among God’s elect. Perhaps you are not, but God has commanded all men

everywhere to repent and trust Christ as personal Lord and Saviour. If you will trust Christ, you will come to understand that you are numbered among God's elect. If you really want to be saved you can be, for only God can place that desire to be saved in a human's heart. Will you ask God to save you from your sin and make you a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus?

H. A. Ironside said about the gate to heaven, "As one enters it says, 'Whosoever will,' but as he passes through and looks back it says, 'You have not chosen me but I have chosen you.'"