

Salvation's Golden Chain

Romans 8:29-30

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We're going to read verse 28 in Romans 8. We looked at it last time. Then we'll read verses 29-30. It's one unit. We not only have a new hope and a new help, but now we have a new knowledge, a new assurance.

In verse 28, Paul says, "And we know that all things work together for good to those..."—note the "those" there; "those" are carried over into verses 29 and 30—"...who love God, to those..."—again—"...who are the called according to His purpose. For those..."—the same "those" in verse 28—"...God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified."

Now we're all familiar with Romans 8:28; we know it, we memorize it. "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." We got that one down pat. We know that verse.

But the problem is we don't carry it over into verses 29 and 30. As wonderful as verse 28 is, verses 29 and 30 are even more wonderful, because they tell us how God accomplishes our good and His glory. What is the "good" that God is working in verse 28? It's described in verses 29 and 30. When you read in verse 28, "All things work together for good," what is that "good"? He describes it for us in verses 29 and 30.

Romans 8:29-30 has been called "the golden chain of five unbreakable links." I like that. I almost used that as my title; I have in the past. In these five golden links, Paul traces God's saving purpose from eternity past to eternity future. It goes like this: our salvation started before time in the Father's foreknowledge, and it concludes, beyond time, in our glorification. In between those two, within time, comes our calling and our justification.

We're going to look at the five words that appear in this text from a chain that is unbreakable. Those five words are foreknowledge, predestined, calling, justification and glorification. These doctrines trace salvation's plan from eternity past to eternity future.

Now I realize that what I am covering today is controversial. But I'm not going to shy away from it, I'm not going to water it down and I'm not going to try to avoid controversy. We're going to tackle head on what I believe these texts are teaching. All I ask is that you hear me out and you listen to it very carefully and openly. The authority lies in the Scriptures, not in the preacher. I'm always saying that. I'm not the authority; the Bible is. When God speaks, we can rest assured that it's true. So I'm trusting that you will listen and follow and pay close attention.

There are two important features about this salvation plan of God's. I want to share them with

you. Number one, each link in the golden chain is made and fashioned by the hand of God. I almost want to shout that from the rooftops. Everything we're reading about here today is what God does and has done; this is the work of God. So praise and honor and glory be to God for His salvation! Man does not come into play. We don't save ourselves; it's the work of God.

In Ephesians 2:8-9—we also know this quite well—it says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” So we are saved by grace, and it is through our faith. But grace is a gift of God; it's the salvation that is a gift of God, and it's not by works, so we can't boast.

The second point I want to make is that each link is unbreakable. The links of the chain were fashioned by God, and they are unbreakable. What God has spoken cannot be broken. What God starts with grace will end in glory.

Let's look together at each of the five links in this golden chain of God's salvation. Here's the first link: foreknowledge. Verse 29 says, “For those God foreknew....” What does God's foreknowledge mean? Let me tell you what it does not mean. I can't go into all the arguments pro and con, but I want to cut right to the chase and tell you what it does not mean.

It does not mean that God, knowing everything, looks forward and sees who is going to believe in Him, and then He chooses them, based on their choice of Him. That's not what it means. It doesn't mean that God looks down the corridors of time, and He knows, off in the distance, who is going to believe, who is going to receive, who is going to repent, who is going to be saved, and based on that, God elects them. People create that idea to let God off the hook and put salvation on man's part.

If that were true, then you just eliminated the doctrine clearly taught in the Bible of election. Election teaches that God chose us; we didn't choose Him. Jesus said it: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you.” That's pretty plain. Now we can't comprehend this; knowing who we are and what other people are like, we're baffled. Why would God choose us? I wouldn't have chosen me. Don't laugh; I wouldn't have chosen you either. You're in that boat too. Everyone likes to laugh at the preacher. I don't know why God chose you, other than the fact that He chose the foolish things, weak things, despised things, base things, “and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.” So I'm a foolish thing, a weak thing, a despised thing, and that's why God has chosen me.

So it doesn't mean that God looks down the corridor of time, He sees who is going to believe in Him and chooses them. If that were the case, then you've eliminated the doctrine of election. God would choose us based on our choice of Him. That's clearly not what the Bible teaches.

So then what does foreknowledge mean? The word in the Greek is “proginosko.” It's made up of two words. It means “before knowledge.” It's a figure of speech. It's kind of a euphemism. It's a term that means more than just knowing something beforehand. It conveys the idea that salvation was initiated by God—that's conveyed in the thought—in His eternal, loving choice.

So God knew you before, and God chose you.

Genesis 4:1 is an indication of how this term is used here. “Now Adam knew Eve his wife and she conceived and bore Cain.” What does that mean Adam “knew” his wife? “Hi, I’m Adam. Nice to meet you. I’m glad we’re married.” No. It means he “knew” her intimately. In the context, it’s actually speaking of a sexual relationship.

When Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel, he said to her, “Mary, you’re going to have a baby, and the work of the Holy Spirit was going to be in you.”

Then Mary asked, “How is this going to happen, seeing I know not a man.” What does she mean by that? That she doesn’t know any men? No. She meant that she was not intimate with any man. She was asking, “How can I become pregnant, if I know not a man?” That’s the idea behind that phrase.

God set His love on us and chose us as objects of His loving purpose. God actually wants an intimate, deep, loving relationship with us. So the “foreknowledge” is the fact that God set His love upon you and that He elected you or that He chose you for salvation. It is God’s loving, gracious choice in salvation.

John 15:16 is the text where Jesus said, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” Ephesians 1:4 says, “He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.” So election is clearly taught in the Bible. God chose us before the foundation of the world. So yes, He knew us, but it means He set His love upon us and chose us to be His peculiar treasure.

It’s also used in 1 Peter 1:2 where Peter said, “...elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” We are elect according to God the Father. He elected us and set His love upon us.

Some would say that’s not fair. “It’s not right that God would just pick certain people.” Then they get mad or upset with God. I would just balance that out—it’s not in the text, and the problem with teaching this passage is that the focus in the passage we’re looking at isn’t man’s part, but it’s God’s part. Our part is just faith—that we trust God to believe that we receive. And that’s not a work, that’s not merited. We don’t earn salvation.

John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever...” What we’re reading in this passage does not eliminate a “whoever” Gospel. “...whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

You say, “Well, what if God didn’t choose me?”

“Then believe in Him. You’ll become a ‘whoever.’”

“Well, how do I know I’m a ‘whoever’?”

"Then you must believe and find out. You must trust Christ."

So no one can say, "Well, I'm just not chosen." You repent, you believe, you trust in Jesus and you'll find out that He'll forgive your sins and give you eternal life. Just let it sink into your heart for just a moment.

It just amazes me that God chose me. I don't deserve it. I didn't deserve it. I'm amazed that God would actually set His love upon me, that He foreknew me. That's where salvation began.

The second link in this chain is the word "predestined." Verse 29 says, "For those God foreknew He also predestined." This is another word that causes people confusion. What does "predestined" mean? First of all, it's not the same as "election." Election is God choosing you for salvation. "Predestination" comes from two words in the Greek: "pro" and "orizo," "before horizon." We get our word "horizon" from that word "orizo." It means to "set off" or "designate off." The word literally means "to decide beforehand" or "to mark out beforehand."

This word is not used for the unsaved. It is only used for the saved. Predestination is never for the unbeliever. God does not predestine anyone to go to hell. God didn't create people to fuel the fires of hell. He didn't create people and say that they can't be saved. The Bible says that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

So what is this word "predestination"? Think about the word in English: "pre" meaning "before" and "destination." What it actually means is that God decides before He chooses you what He is going to do with you. I like to think of it that way. It's almost like the Lord is saying, "Well, I've got him now. What do I do with him?" What He's going to do with us—it's in the text—is that He's going to conform us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. The reason He does that is so that Jesus Christ might be the honored one, "the first begotten among the brethren."

What is the "good" that God is doing in our lives? Two things: First, we see salvation's purpose, in verse 29. It says, "...to be conformed to the image of His Son." Second, to make Christ preeminent. Predestination is defined in verse 29: it is us being conformed to the image of His Son, that Jesus "might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." That's the answer; it's right there in that verse.

What does it mean that God predetermined? He predetermined that you're one day going to be like Jesus. That's good news. But we've got a long way to go; we're not like Jesus yet.

Now just take that first concept or purpose of salvation in verse 29: "For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." When will we be like Christ? When we die and go to heaven, or when the Lord returns. What does it mean to be like Christ? It means we will be like Him bodily, and we will be like Him spiritually.

We always hear the statement, "We're going to be like Jesus." We're actually going to physically have the same kind of body that Jesus has right now in heaven. What kind of body does Jesus have in heaven? The same body He came out of the grave with: a glorified,

immortal, eternal body. No sickness, no sorrow, no sadness, no weakness, no aches, no pains; it'll be an awesome body. So we will have a brand new body. We talked about it earlier in Romans. It says, "For...the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." What is that glory? Your new body. This is a can-you-dig-it verse. I love it. You're going to get a new body.

I know that if you're young and fit and in good health, you say, "No big deal." You just wait, buckaroo. Just wait a few years. You're going to be crying for a new body! All the old people say, "Amen! Praise God!" The older you get, the more you groan for glory.

God put His love upon you and chose you and God beforehand determined your destination that one day you will be like Jesus, that you're going to have a glorified, immortal, eternal body. Philippians 3:21 says, "...Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body." 1 John 3:2 says, "But we know that...we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." In 1 Corinthians 15:20, "Christ...has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." So Christ is the most important one who ever rose from the dead, but we will follow in His resurrection and glory.

But we will also be like Jesus spiritually. So salvation's purpose is to be conformed into Christ's image physically and spiritually. What does that mean? You not only will have a new body, but you will not have one iota, trace or ounce of sin anymore. No more sickness, no more sorrow, no more tears—He'll wipe them away—and no more sin.

You married folk, you know that your spouse isn't perfect; right? (Just agree with me very subtly.) But that person you're married to is one day going to be perfect. I know it's hard to imagine. One day you will be perfect, and they have a hard time imagining that. You'll never lose your temper, you'll never be irritable, you'll never think a sinful thought, you'll never do a sinful deed; you will be holy because He is holy.

Now there are three tenses to your salvation: past, present and future—justified, sanctified and glorified. Holiness involves all of those. You are saved; you're set apart and made holy positionally. You're being saved; you're being made holier and being sanctified. One day you will be perfectly, totally, completely holy. So we're holy positionally, we're holy practically and we'll be holy totally and completely when we're in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This leads to the final and ultimate purpose of salvation, which is given to us at the end of verse 29. That is to make Christ preeminent. Verse 29 says, "...that He..."—that is, "Jesus Christ"—"...might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters," referring to Christians.

By the way, the fact that He calls us "brothers and sisters," refers to the fact that Jesus is our big brother. Jesus is not only our Savior and Lord, but He's our big brother, and we're going to be part of Jesus in a marvelous way.

What does Paul mean in verse 29 that "He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters"? The word "firstborn" in the Greek is "prototokos." In the Jewish world, they considered

the firstborn son to be the honored son. He is the one who would get the inheritance. So if you were the firstborn son in a family, you were the prototokos, the honored one, the elevated one. So when the Bible says here that He was “the firstborn among many brothers and sisters,” He is the honored one, the venerated one. He is the first in priority. He’s the first in importance. It’s so important to understand that. It means that Jesus Christ will be exalted among us. Do you know that God devised salvation in such a way that Jesus gets all the glory, Jesus gets all the praise and Jesus gets all the honor?

God the Father designed salvation in such a way that His Son would get a bride, which is the church. That bride would be holy, without blemish or spot. You and I are that bride, and we’re going to be holy and without blemish and spot when we arrive in heaven. And then Jesus is going to take that bride and offer it to the Father, that all things might be of God. So it’s a marvelous plan of salvation that Jesus would be exalted, that Jesus would get a bride, the glorious church, and that He would offer it back to God the Father in all praise to God.

Philippians 2:6-11 says that Jesus Christ, “being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. Therefore, God also has highly exalted him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess...” That’s what it means there where it says that He would be “the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” Jesus would be the exalted one, a name “above every name.”

In Ephesians 1, where Paul talks about our salvation and God’s saving grace, he says three times in that one chapter that our salvation is “to the praise of the glory of His grace.”

This should humble us. It shouldn’t puff up our heads. Rightly understanding these truths should humble our hearts and give us a heart of gratitude. It should bring us assurance and foster in us a love for God.

He knew us, He predestined us and here’s the third link in the chain: He’s called us, verse 30. “And those He predestined, He also called.” Notice that all these things God did are in the past tense; it’s a done deal. “Those He called, he also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.”

With calling, we move from eternity past to eternity present. The calling refers to God’s gracious, direct appeal to our hearts. We respond in faith and are given the free offer of forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ. The calling is God’s application in time of His election, foreknowledge and predestination before time. It comes to us through the preaching of the Gospel. It is what we call the “general” or “universal” call.

Jesus, in John 7:37-38, stood up on the great feast day in the temple and said, “If anyone...”—notice He used this word “anyone”—“...thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.” So anyone who is thirsty can come to Jesus and drink, and He’ll give us “living water.”

Then there is a second aspect to this call—and I think that’s what Paul is alluding to here in

verse 30—which is an internal, specific and effectual call. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. You don't become a Christian unless the Spirit of God is working in your life. He's called "The Hound of Heaven." I love that. He'll pursue you and follow you and convict you and convince you and break you and bring you to a place where you just say, "Lord, I surrender."

It happened to me the year I graduated from high school. I was raised in the church, but I never surrendered my life to Jesus Christ. Out of nowhere—I say that, but now I know it came from heaven—the Holy Spirit came and said, "John, you're a sinner." And I realized that I was a sinner. "John, you're going to hell." I realized I was going to go to hell. "John, you need to get saved." All of a sudden I was unhappy and miserable and was under conviction. God's Spirit started to draw me and draw me and draw me until, finally, I got hold of a Bible and was reading it and I just began to pray and call out to God and repented of my sins. Then the Holy Spirit flooded my heart with His joy and His peace and His love. I felt a weight lift off my shoulders. That was all the work of God's grace by the Holy Spirit. I didn't ask for that. I was going on my merry way when all of a sudden the Holy Spirit said, "Okay, John, now it's your time." And He reached out and grab ahold of my life and pulled me to Christ.

That's all the work of the Holy Spirit. He regenerates you. He gives you new life. And then He indwells you. Then He "seals you for the day of redemption." And then He gives you strength and grace to live the Christian life. And He opens up the Scriptures to you and helps you to understand them. Then He transforms your life into the image of Jesus Christ. It's all the work of God's Spirit. Salvation involves the Father, it involves the Son and it involves the Holy Spirit. So this calling happened when the Spirit of God came to you and convicted you and convinced you that you are a sinner and you need Jesus, and then you surrendered your life and trusted Him and was saved.

I believe regeneration happens the moment we believe in Christ. But it must be preceded by a work of conviction and drawing us to Jesus. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." But He also said, "The one who comes to Me, I will by no means cast out." If you hear God knocking on the door of your heart, it's so important that you respond in faith.

So God foreknew us, He predestined us, He called us in time, and then He fourthly, justified us. "Those He called, He also justified." Like the call, justification happens in the present time. We go from eternity past—foreknowledge and predestination—to the present time—calling and justification. When does justification happen? The moment the sinner believes in and trusts in Jesus Christ. What does justification mean? It means that God declares you righteous. Sanctification is when God makes you righteous.

Justification is a forensic or legal term. It deals with your standing or your position in Christ. The reason Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus," is because we are in Christ justified. This is my favorite definition of justification: it is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner to be righteous based on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. All those who God foreknows, who God

predestines are called. And if you're called, you're also justified. God called us, God saved us, God justified us. Those first three links are pretty cool.

And how did He justify us? By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. This is actually the theme of the whole book of Romans: justification by faith. It was the battle cry of the Protestant Reformation; that we're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Paul said in Romans 3:24, "...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." So Paul says two things there: that we're justified freely by His grace, and it's in Christ Jesus. Then in Romans 3:28, he says, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, apart from the deeds of the law." So we are saved by grace, through faith, in Christ alone. We can't work for it. We don't deserve it. We can't merit it. So, again, realize that you are justified. It's just as if you'd never sinned. You're just and righteous before a holy God.

Now there is one last link in this chain. It's in verse 30. It's glorification. So God foreknew, He predestined, He called, He justified and then He glorified. "Those He justified, He also glorified." What does that mean? It means that what begins with God's grace in election ends with His glory. Philippians 1:6 says, "...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." God starts a work, and God will finish that work.

Now I want you to remember salvation's purpose. We saw at the end of verse 29 it was two things: to make us like Jesus and to bring glory and honor to Jesus. So this glorification at the end of verse 30 is the accomplishment of those two things. We get a new body, we get transformed into the image of Christ, and Jesus Christ gets all the praise and the glory and all the honor. That's glorification.

So the plan of salvation is foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification and glorification. What begins with God's love and grace will end in glory.

Now I'm not so naive that I don't know that Christians do disagree on these points. But I believe that the Bible is perfectly clear. The authority is not church tradition. It's not denominational authority. The authority is the Word of God alone. We stand on the Scriptures. And I believe that God sets His love on us. He predetermines what He's going to do with us. We're going to be arriving safely in heaven. Then He calls us in time and justifies us and declares us righteous in our standing or position in Christ. Then one day we'll be glorified in Him. This is the greatest affirmation of assurance anywhere in the Bible.

Paul ends Romans 8 by saying that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." That's how the chapter ends. It opens with no condemnation, it ends with no separation and in between is no defeat. What a marvelous truth that is.

I want you to note that it's all in the past tense. Grammatically, He foreknew us, He predestined us, He called us, He justified us and He also glorified us—all in the past tense. The word

“glorified” is actually stronger in the Greek; it’s in the aorist tense. That means that it happened in the past, carries to the present and takes us on into the future. The tenses are very important in this passage.

Jesus said that He was the Good Shepherd. And the good shepherd starts with 100 sheep and ends with 100 sheep. Aren’t you glad that when we get to heaven, we aren’t going to be missing? Can you imagine? “Where’s Pastor Miller?”

“Oh, he slipped through My hands. Slippery little guy. I lost him.”

Jesus said that the good shepherd has 100 sheep and 1 of them—1 stubborn, little sheep—goes wandering off and gets lost. If I were the shepherd, I’d say, “I got 99 left; no biggie. I’m not going to go out and endanger myself to find that one, little, stupid sheep.” But Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He goes out and seeks for and hears the bleating of the sheep. He then finds the one, little, lost sheep and He puts it on His shoulders and comes back rejoicing. He rejoiced that this one, little, lost sheep that was lost has been found. What a marvelous truth that is. Jesus begins with 100 sheep, and He ends with 100 sheep.

“Being confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it to the day of Christ Jesus.” Jesus said it like this: “All that the Father has given Me, I have lost none.” Jesus prayed in John 17: “Father, I will that those whom Thou hast given Me, that they be with Me, that they may see My glory.” Not only did Jesus pay a price for your sins, not only did Jesus make a promise to come again, but Jesus prayed a prayer asking God the Father that everyone who was given to Him would be with Him in glory. I believe that prayer will be answered. No wonder we sing

“Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine.

O what a foretaste of glory divine.

Heir of salvation, purchase of God,

Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

This my story, this is my song,

Praising my Savior all the day long.”

One of my favorite Bible teachers is a man named Harry Allan Ironside, the pastor of Moody Bible Church in Chicago for 50 years. He used to tell the story of a testimony meeting in which one of the senior, older saints of God stood up and gave a testimony in which he described how the Lord sought him, saved him, gave him the Spirit and protected him and guided him all his life. In describing his conversion, he was focusing on all the things that God has done in saving him throughout his life. When the service was over, a younger, zealous, more legalistic Christian came up to this older man and wanted to correct him a little bit. He said, “Brother,

your testimony was good, but I need to correct you. You forgot about your part, what you did in your salvation.”

The older saint said, “Yes, you’re right. I’m sorry. Please forgive me. My part was that I kept running and running and running from Him, and He kept pursuing and pursuing and pursuing me until He caught me and overtook me and saved me by His grace.” That’s the truth.

You and I can take no credit for our salvation. God gets all the glory. Amen.