

The Golden Chain of Salvation

This week I received an email from some person in Nigeria who wanted to give me \$50 million. All I had to do was send my bank account information and they promised the money would be deposited safely into my account. If I had believed that promise to be true and went out this week and bought things like I had \$50 million, you would call me crazy.

Listen, if you're going to bank your life on a promise, you'd better make sure it's true. Last time we looked at the great and precious promise of Romans 8:28, **"And 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 said that this verse has helped countless Christians through the ages to endure the hard and painful experiences of life because we know God is working all things for our ultimate good.

But, what if that promise is about as likely as the one from Nigeria offering me \$50 million? You can only bank your life on Romans 8:28 if you know for certain that it's true. So in 8:29-30 Paul explains why you can know that verse 28 is true. This is the passage that explains Romans 8:28. That verse is true because these verses are true. Without this passage, Romans 8:28 is just wishful thinking.

Verse 29 begins with the word "for" which means "because." Here Paul shows us the foundation under the promise of verse 28 — the great truths that hold it up and keep it from falling — and keep us from falling with it. These verses tell us why you can bank on the promise that God works all things together for your good.

Find Romans 8 in your Bible. As I read I want you to circle or underline five words in this text: Foreknew, Predestined, Called, Justified, Glorified. Those five words make up the golden chain of your salvation.

Romans 8:29-30

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

29 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.

30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

You can know that all things work together for good because of what God has done in bringing you salvation through Jesus Christ. Verses 29-30 are all about what God has done. He is the subject of every verb. Underline it: He foreknew, He predestined, He called, He justified, He glorified.

Those five things are the five links in the chain of your salvation. They are true of every believer. They are true only of believers. If you are a believer, these five links in the chain explain God's plan from eternity past to eternity future to accomplish your salvation. It's because these five things are true that we know beyond any doubt that all things indeed work together for good.

1. God foreknew.

"Foreknew" is not a difficult word to understand. It means to know beforehand. The real question is: What is it that God knew ahead of time?

Some think that foreknowledge means that God knows everything in advance (which is true). So they say God looks down the corridor of history to see those who are going to believe in Jesus. He looks to see who will respond to the invitation of the gospel. The people that He foreknows will believe are the people He chooses to save.

It sounds reasonable enough. However, other texts lead us to ask: Can anyone choose God without God first choosing them? Remember what Paul said in Romans 3 about humanity,

10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;

11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.

12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."

In John 6:37 Jesus said, **"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."** If the Father does not give them they will not come to trust Jesus. Later in verse 44 Jesus said, **"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."** If we take these words literally, it means no one has the ability to come to Christ on their own without God drawing them to faith.

The Bible repeatedly shows that all of salvation, including the spiritual understanding, repentance, and faith to be saved, is God's gift of grace. Ephesians 2:8-9, **"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast."**

If foreknowledge only means that God knew in advance who would believe, and thus He elected them, then He did not purpose to save a people for His glory. He just saw how the parade would go and jumped to the front of the parade. But the Bible is clear that God determined the parade route.

What God knows, he does not know merely as information. He is no mere spectator. What He foreknows He ordains. He wills it. In this sense, 1 Peter 1:20 says of Christ, **"He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."** The same word translated "foreordained" in that verse is the word "foreknew" in Romans 8:29. In Acts 2:23, Peter says of Jesus, **"Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death."** He doesn't mean that God just knew in advance that Jesus, of His own free will, would offer Himself as the sacrifice for our sins. Rather, God chose and ordained Jesus for that role before the foundation of the world.

So we see that when God is the subject, to foreknow means to choose or determine before, often with the sense of, "enter into a relationship with before." God isn't said here to foreknow what people will do, but rather to foreknow the people themselves.

In Romans 11:2, with reference to the Jews, Paul says, **"God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew."** In Amos 3:2 God says to Israel, **"You only have I known of all the families of the earth."** God obviously knows all the nations and people on the earth, but He chose to set His love on Israel. In Jeremiah 1:5, the Lord tells the prophet, **"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations."** There are many other references where the word "know" means to choose, especially with a view to God entering into a relationship with the person (Abraham in Gen. 18:19; the righteous in Ps. 1:6; 1 Cor.

8:3, **“But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him”**). God knows in advance everyone who has ever lived; but some He chooses to foreknow in love. That is the meaning in Romans 8:29.

To say God foreknew you means that God fore-loved you. He not only knew you before you were born, He loved you before you were born. Before the world was created, He not only knew He was going to create you, He knew he was going to love you. He loved you before you loved Him. He chose you before you chose Him. He sought you before you sought Him. Salvation does not begin with us but with God. Even before Christ came, He knew you and He loved you.

2. God predestined.

Verse 29 again says, **“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.”**

To pre-destine means to determine a destination beforehand. What is a destination? It's the final stop. It's where your trip is going to end. If you set out on a vacation, you've got a destination in mind before you leave. If I plan go to Hawaii on my vacation you could say that my vacation has been predestined.

God has predestined you to reach a certain destination. What is the destination He has set for you? **“He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.”** God has predestined that you would someday be like Jesus Christ. We will one day be conformed to the image of Christ. The word “conformed” means to be shaped or molded. God has determined that one day you will be like Jesus. Ephesians 1:5 says that we were predestined to adoption as children of God. Ephesians 1:11 says that we were predestined for obtaining an inheritance with Christ.

Spurgeon explains, “God was so well pleased with His Son, and saw such beauties in Him, that He determined to multiply His image.” Being conformed to the image of Christ means primarily to be progressively molded into the character of Christ in your heart. Of course, this inner transformation is seen in our outward behavior. But it begins in the heart (Matt. 6:1-18; Mark 7:21-23). We will not be perfectly conformed to the image of Christ until we see Him (1 John 3:2), but if we have experienced God's saving grace, we should be growing in purity and obedience (1 John 3:3-10). The fruit of the Spirit should be increasingly evident in us.

The reason this verse puts such a massive foundation under the promise of Romans 8:28 is that those who love God and are called according to His purpose are destined to be like Jesus — destined to be conformed to the image Christ. All things work together for your good because you were chosen and loved before you existed. God ordained for you to be like Christ. All things work for your good because all things work to make you like Jesus. For this you were loved, and for this you are predestined.

And the reason we can be sure that God will complete it is in the last phrase of verse 29, **“that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”** That means that Christ will have supremacy over all the redeemed, who are adopted into God's family and are now His brothers and sisters. God's eternal purpose is that Jesus Christ will be glorified. God's eternal purpose is not ultimately about us, but rather about the preeminence of Jesus Christ.

3. God called.

“Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called.” There are two kinds of calling in the Bible: The general call and the specific call. The general call is the call to salvation that goes out to all people everywhere. It is universal and non-discriminatory. It is the invitation that God gives to the whole race. “Come and trust my son Jesus Christ.” The general call is related to verses like John 3:16, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** Romans 10:13, **“For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”** Revelation 22:17, **“And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”** That is the general call of God. That call is given to everybody. It may be accepted or it may be rejected or resisted.

That’s not the call that Paul is talking about here. This verse speaks of the specific, personal, inward call of the Holy Spirit where the Holy Spirit calls you and draws you to Jesus Christ. It’s the saving call of God. Theologians call it the effectual call. It’s the invitation which also gives you the ability to respond.

The raising of Lazarus in John 11 is an unforgettable illustration of Jesus’ power to call the spiritually dead to spiritual life. When Jesus called, “Lazarus, come forth,” He imparted life with the call, so that Lazarus responded.

What I’m saying is, you didn’t save yourself. You didn’t come to the Lord. He called you first. Salvation doesn’t begin with you. It begins with God.

4. God justified.

“whom He called, these He also justified.” As we have seen in our study of Romans so far, to justify means “to declare righteous.” When God justified you He declared you righteous the moment you trust Christ while you are still a sinner on the basis of the saving work of Christ. Because of your faith in Christ, the righteousness of Christ is credited to your account in heaven and your sins are put to Christ’s account who died in your place. The result is that you are no longer condemned. You are declared not guilty. The record is wiped clean. We receive justification by faith. But where does the faith come from? It doesn’t come from man. It is a gift of God. Even the faith to believe the gospel comes as a gift from God in heaven.

5. God glorified.

“and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” What does it mean to glorify? It means to be clothed with the glory that God Himself has. When it applies to us it is what verse 29 says, **“conformed to the image of His Son.”** Complete glorification is still in the future for the children of God. It hasn’t happened yet, and it won’t happen as long as you live on this earth. I’m not glorified yet, you’re not either.

But notice how all these verbs are in the past tense: Foreknew, Predestined, Called, Justified, Glorified. How can “glorified” be in the past tense when the glorification is in the future? The answer is this: It is so certain that God speaks of it as past tense even though it is still future to us. In God’s plan and purpose all the past, present, future are the same. In some sense we can’t fathom, our glorification has already happened. Ephesians 2:6 says that God has **“raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”** It’s so certain that God can speak of it in the past tense.

God initiates our salvation.

God works our salvation.

God completes our salvation.

1. Our salvation is a work of God from beginning to end.

The Bible says salvation is of the Lord. Dr. Harry Ironside used to tell the story of an old man, a saint of God, who testified how God had saved him from a life of sin. He told how God had found him at a terrible place, saved him, cleaned him up, justified him, forgiven him, and given him a brand-new life. After the service was done, a legalistic brother said, "Well, my dear brother, you gave a wonderful testimony and gave glory to God. But you left something out. You didn't talk about your part of salvation. Don't you know salvation is part us and part God, and you left your part out." The man who gave his testimony said, "My dear brother, you're so right. I did leave my part out. My part was to run away from God as fast as I could. God's part was to run after me until he caught me." That's exactly right. We spend our lives running away from God and eventually he catches up to us. Salvation is of the Lord from beginning to end.

2. We are therefore eternally secure since our salvation rests on God and not on us.

We are eternally secure. Those whom God saves, he saves forever. Thank God, salvation is of the Lord. It is not of man. Sometimes young Christians talk as if they are the ones who found the Lord. It's OK to speak of finding the Lord. But you've got to understand the whole picture. He found you long before you found him. Yes, you came to Christ but Christ came to you before you came to him. I'm glad that salvation doesn't rest on me because if it did, I'd probably lose it or break it or misplace it. But since it depends on God, we will keep it forever.

3. Since that is true, we have confidence that God will complete his work in us no matter how difficult our present circumstances may be.

If you are going through difficult circumstances, remember this: God will not be defeated in your life. Romans 8:28 is true. God will work all things for your good and His glory. You may be a single mom, you may be out of a job, you may not have a lot of money, you may be in a difficult place, but God will complete his work in you. You can bank on it.

That leads me to this question. Are you going to be there? If you died tonight, would you go to heaven? Are you sure? Perhaps you've been running from God and now at last he has found you. If you are not sure about your salvation, and if you would like to be sure, may I lead you in a simple prayer? I want you to be sure that if you die today or tomorrow or in 50 years, you're going to go to heaven.