

# **The Golden Chain of God's Work in Salvation—Romans 8.28–30**

## **Christ Fellowship Bible Church**

Geoffrey R. Kirkland

Many have termed Romans 8:28-30 the golden chain of salvation as it encapsulates a number of theological truths in just a few verses. Verse 28 affirms that, for the believer who has been called according to God's purpose and who loves God, God will in fact work all things together for good. This good conforms to God's sovereign purposes.

It should be stated at the outset that Romans 8.28-30 refers quite specifically to a particular group — and not to universally everyone. This is seen by the relative particle οὗς which draws back to the concluding phrase of verse 28: "those that are called according to God's purpose." So it is those who are called who receive the promise that God causes all things to work together for good.

### **I. God Foreknew.**

The first word Paul uses is προέγνω speaking of God's foreknowledge. Does this verse refer to the truth that God knows ahead of time what will happen? Scripture reveals in many places that God does, most certainly, know (and ordain) what will happen before it occurs. But this word does not refer to this idea. The word that Paul uses here is not some cold, ruthless decision that God made long ago because he knew what would happen. Rather, the word speaks of a kind of special choosing whereby He sovereignly, unconditionally, and mercifully sets His saving love upon a particular person. This is the Hebraic way of looking at the word as found in Gen 4:1 where Adam *knew* his wife, Eve. God talks to the sons of Israel in Amos 3:2 through the prophet and declares that "you only have I *known* among all the families of the earth." Obviously this verse is not saying that God only cognitively knew about the people of Israel. This verse teaches that out of all the people and nations on the earth, God chose to particularly and exclusively set His love upon one people, namely, Israel. The final support for this is derived from Deut 7:7-8 where Moses writes that the LORD did not set his love on Israel nor choose Israel because they were more in number than any of the other peoples ... but because the LORD loved them and kept the oath which He swore to their forefathers. This is why Peter can write to the believers and say that they are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God (=that is, the saving and particular love of God set upon them) the Father (1 Pet 1:1-2). And yes, even Christ Himself was foreknown before the foundation of the world and has appeared in the last times (1 Pet 1:20). Thus, there is a particular placing of divine love upon a person that is inherently included in the theological concept of foreknowledge.

### **2. God Predestined.**

This second link in the chain of sovereign salvation is the doctrine of predestination. Paul writes that God προώρισεν those whom He foreknew. The predestination finishes and completes what the previous foreknowledge initiated. God set his saving love upon a particular few (foreknowledge) and predestination shows to what they were appointed/predestined. Paul writes that God predestined these particular people συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνης τοῦ υἱοῦ

αὐτοῦ. That is, God set His saving love upon a few and thus appointed determinatively that they might be conformed into the image of His own dear Son, Jesus Christ. Predestination is not a cold, ruthless, mean doctrine from a mean Potentate who angrily sends some people to hell & predestines some to heaven. Rather, predestination encompasses the loving act whereby God sovereignly appoints a particular group to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ so that He may have preeminence, His grace may be magnified, and His saving power may be demonstrated. Ephesians 1:5 includes the reality that those who are predestined receive the adoption as sons into God's own family. And this all is according to the purpose of His will (Eph 1:5b, 11).

### **3. God Called.**

Those whom God foreknew and predestined in eternity past, he also ἐκάλεσεν. Theologians sometimes refer to this as the “effectual calling” of God whereby He sovereignly, supernaturally, unstopably, and irresistibly draws the elect (=foreknown & predestined) sinner to saving faith when he hears the gospel. Paul writes that God is faithful and it is by His doing that saints were *called* into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:9). This calling of God occurs only by the grace of Christ (Gal 1:6). Paul was set apart for the gospel and was called by the grace of God (Gal 1:15). Believers who have been called have entered into one body of Christ (Col 3:15). Those whom God calls will enter His own Kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:12). Second Thessalonians 2:14 says most clearly how this effectual calling takes place in the life of the particular individual. Sinners are (effectually) called through the gospel (διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου) so that they may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, those are sovereignly called and drawn to salvation *by means of* the hearing of the gospel message preached. Jesus Himself taught this when he said “my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me” (John 10:27). Those who belong to Jesus Christ can *hear* His voice, they are *known* by Him and they *follow* Him. This is the effectual calling that happens when the foreordained sinner hears the gospel & is drawn to repentance and saving faith.

### **4. God Justified.**

Paul next notes that God ἐδικαίωσεν this particular person. This is the court-room act whereby God announces and pronounces that the foreknown, predestined, and called sinner is declared perfectly righteous because of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9). The court-room setting for the concept of justification is clearly seen in the immediate context of Romans 8 as in verse 33 Paul asks: “who can bring a charge against God's elect? For it is God who justifies” (see Isa 50:8 where the same Greek word is used referring to justification in the context of a person having a “legal case” with God and one who “contends” with God which denotes a clear court-room, legal context). Here we have, in Paul's mind, a clear reference to a court-room scene whereby God declares a sinner to be righteous. Justification happens to a sinner and justification happens outside the sinner. This is to be distinguished from regeneration which happens in a sinner and it happens inside the sinner. Justification is the legal, supernatural, divinely-instituted, instantaneous, eternally-unchanging decree from the Sovereign Judge that the predestined and repentant sinner is declared righteous through the merits of Jesus Christ.

## 5. God Glorified.

The inevitable result and final link in this golden chain is that God ἐδόξασεν this foreknown, predestined, called, and justified person. This undoubtedly speaks of the future glory that the saved sinner will experience when Christ is revealed and the sinner beholds God face to face (cf. 1 John 3:1-3). The glory spoken of here is the same glory that refers to Christ coming in His magnificent splendor (Matt 25:31), and after He suffered on earth, the Messiah would enter His glory (Luke 24:26). This glory refers to the heavenly and divine presence that Jesus had with the Father before the words began (John 17:5). There is an eternal glory that awaits suffering believers (2 Cor 4:17). It is a glory that will endure forever and ever (Phil 4:20). It is this glory that Paul speaks of when he says that God will bring His people to glory. He has set His saving love on a particular few, He has determined that they be conformed to the image of His Son, He has sovereignly summoned them to salvation, He has supernaturally and legally declared them righteous and acquitted them of all sin, and He will safely, securely, and unchangeably see them all the way to glory.

### **Conclusion...**

I want to conclude with a few guiding facts that this study has revealed.

First, those whom God foreknew and predestined are the same ones who will be glorified. That is to say, God loses none—ever.

Second, all the verbs in this “golden chain” are in the 3<sup>rd</sup> singular with God as the subject. “He...” is how every verb begins. It is all the action of God and it is all His work. Salvation, truly, is of the Lord.

Third, all of the verbal forms in this section signify complete action. From the author’s viewpoint, he intends to portray the action of the verbs in summary form and as complete events. He is not so much concerned about every intricate detail as he is with showing that the event in its entirety — and in its fulness — happened.

Fourth, in addition to seeing what Paul does include one should also note what he omits. The doctrine of sanctification is omitted probably for three reasons. Sanctification is a doctrine that is synergistic—that is, a cooperative working together of the Spirit of God and the believing saint. Paul’s focus in this text is the sovereign and supernatural work of God *and God alone* in salvation. Another reason could be that sanctification is to be assumed when a sinner is justified (this is what Paul clearly argued in Rom 6-7). Every justified person will be sanctified. There is no regenerated person who continues to live in a sinful pattern of living. The justified man will be a sanctified man. And the final reason Paul may have neglected to mention sanctification here is because it is in 8:29 where those whom God predestines are those who are conformed into the image of His Son. Thus, it is assumed that the predestined one will be the transformed one. The one who is predestined will be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

God brought all this about so everything would resound to the praise of His glorious supremacy.