

A Chain of Five Links

Romans 8: 28 - 30

- If there is an eternity, then there is nothing in this short life more important than securing one's eternal destiny. That's what Paul is talking about in these verses.

Romans 8: 28 – 30 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

- Last week as we looked at these verses we talked about God's purpose, God's plan, and God's power for our salvation. Let's just quickly review what we learned last week, starting with God's purpose.
 - What is God's purpose for you salvation? Nowhere do we see that clearer than in verse 29—that we would be conformed to the image of His Son. Why is that God's purpose? Paul tells us in:

Ephesians 1: 12 we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

- God's purpose in saving us is to conform us to the image of His Son, for the praise of His glory. That's it. This is what our salvation is all about.
- Now it makes sense that if God has purposed our salvation, then He has also planned our salvation. You can't carry out your purpose without a plan.
 - In fact, as you look at Scripture you can see God's plan for our redemption unfold right before our eyes. God predestined all the events in the Old Testament to achieve His purpose to bring a savior into the world.
 - ♦ 1 Peter 1: 20 tells us that Jesus was chosen before the foundation of the world to be slain for our sins. So, we see there that God planned the means of our salvation before the foundation of the world, and then what do we see in:

Ephesians 1: 4 – 5 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will

- ♦ God not only planned the means of our salvation before the foundation of the world, but also who the recipients of that salvation would be. And note what Paul says there, he did it all according to the purpose of His will. Not my will. Not your will. His will.

John 6: 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

- All that the Father gives me. You don't give yourself to Jesus. The Father gives you to Jesus, and once the Father does that, your salvation is secure because Jesus will never cast you out.
 - Now why is it necessary for the Father to give us to Jesus rather than us giving ourselves to Jesus? Why can't we come to Jesus in our own free will?

- We have broken choosers. Every human has a free will, but their chooser is broken in such a way that apart from divine intervention, they can't like, much less love, God.

Colossians 1: 21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

Isaiah 53: 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way

- All and everyone is pretty inclusive, isn't it? And why has all and everyone turned to his own way? Because our sin has broken our choosers, so we can't like God's way and we only like our way.
- This thinking, what I am describing as being our broken choosers, is what we refer to as total depravity. We are incapable of choosing God so God must choose us.
 - Total depravity doesn't mean that people are as evil as they can possibly be. It doesn't mean people are incapable of doing anything that others would describe as being good. It just simply means that apart from Christ, everything we do is rooted in self, our choosers are broken in such a way as we can only go our own way, so that:

Romans 3: 10 – 12 "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹²All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

- If it is a true statement of our condition, then it means that God is the one who has to purpose, plan and act to save us, because we simply can't do it.

Ezekiel 37 : 1 the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley;^[a] it was full of bones. ²And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, you know."

- Truly only God knew if those bones could live again. Truly they would only be raised by the purpose of God, the plan of God and the power of God. The bones could do nothing. They were dead, and they would only come back to life through divine intervention. That is a perfect picture of our true spiritual condition.
- That divine intervention is what Paul is talking about here in Romans 8: 29 – 30, as he lays out this Golden Chain of salvation.
 - Think about this chain that Paul is describing. It is anchored with one end in eternity past and the other end in eternity future, and is formed of five very distinct links, each of which are forged by God.
 - It is God who foreknew, God who predestines, God who calls, God who justifies, and God who glorifies.
 - Now the other thing we notice is that each link is connected to the link before and the link after, except for the link of foreknowledge and the link of glorification. Foreknowledge has no preceding link—meaning it is not conditioned upon anything else. And glorification has no link that proceeds from it—meaning it is the final result.



- So how does a person get saved and get to this final state of glorification? Well, to understand that I think we need to see what each of these links is all about.
 - To understand what Paul is teaching us, let's work backward on the chain and start with the link that virtually all Christians are in agreement on its meaning.

1. Glorification

- If a person doesn't believe in what the Bible refers to as the hope of glory, then quite simply they are not a Christian. Faith means nothing if there is no hope of eternal glory. Paul sums it up this way.

1 Corinthians 15: 16 – 19 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

- If there is no hope of eternal glory, then Christians are fools to be pitied. Why? Because if there is no hope of eternity then we are missing out on this life living for the next life. But there is the hope of eternal glory because we know that Christ has been raised not just to life but to a glorified life.
- During his time on earth, between his resurrection and his ascension into heaven, Christ had a real body that could eat, be physically touched. That was his glorified resurrected body.
 - This is the glorified body that awaits each of us. But it will not happen until the day of Christ's return. On that day:

1 Corinthians 15: 51 – 53 we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

- The Christian's glorification is the reuniting of a new incorruptible, imperishable physical body with their incorruptible, imperishable spirit. Just as Christ was raised from the dead, in body and spirit, so will we. But it will not happen until the last trumpet, when Christ comes again.
 - A lot of times when a person dies you will hear people say they are in a better place, or they have gone to glory. That's kind of true but it is not the whole story. Their spirit has indeed gone to be with the Lord and is in a better place, but their body is resting in the grave until that great and final day of glorification. On that day, they will be forever changed.

1 John 3: 2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is

- That's it. That is our glorification, we become like Jesus, with a united body and spirit that is eternally incorruptible and imperishable. This is the last link in the Golden Chain of salvation, and I want you to notice something especially important about this link.
- Notice Paul uses the past tense as if it has already happened. Paul doesn't say we will be glorified. He says we are glorified. Now I just told you it won't happen

until Jesus comes again, so why does Paul use the past tense? Because even though it hasn't happened it is sure to happen.

- How can Paul say that with such certainty? Because it is God's purpose, God's plan, and God's power that is making it happen. If it were up to us there could be no certainty, but it is not up to us. It is up to God.

Jonah 2: 9 Salvation belongs to the Lord!

- Why is our glorification a certainty? Because of the link that comes before it. "Those he justified, he also glorified."
- Only those whom God has justified will be glorified, but notice this, all who God has justified will be glorified. Our justification makes our glorification a certainty.

2. Justification

- Now again this is something that every Christian agrees on, in order to be glorified a Christian must be justified. That is, made right in the sight of God. Because as the writer of Hebrews says:

Hebrews 12: 14 without holiness no one will see the Lord

- We can't get to glory without holiness, without righteousness.
- But here is where a lot of people who call themselves Christians get off track from the truth of the Gospel—thinking that in some way they have a role to play in their justification.
 - They see Jesus like a magic eraser taking away our sins, but does that really make a person righteous? The answer is no. If that is all that Jesus does for you—erase your sins, so to speak, then you have gone from a slate filled with sin to merely a blank slate.
 - ◆ That is why I had that daisy kind of theology—He loves me. He loves me not. I better get saved again. My slate kept getting filled up with sin rather than righteousness.
 - In fact, you'll often hear people define justification with a simple phrase just as if I never sinned. That is ok as far as it goes, but do you see that really doesn't go far enough? Just as if I never sinned makes you sinless but it doesn't give you a record of righteousness.

Galatians 2: 16 a person is not justified (declared righteous) by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ

- ◆ Through Christ's perfect life and sacrificial death, God justifies us (declares us to be righteous).

Romans 3: 22 – 25 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

- We are justified by faith in the finished work of Christ not our works. This is why a Christian can have complete assurance of their salvation because Christ's work for us is finished. It can't be undone; all we have to do is rest in it by faith.

3. Effectual calling



- Again, virtually all Christians agree that, in order to be saved—justified and glorified—God must call the person to salvation. But many believe that this is just a general call. An invitation, if you will.
 - And it is that, there is a general call of the Gospel that goes out to all to repent and believe. But it is also more than that.
- Paul has something different in mind here. It is not just a general call, a general invitation. It is what we refer to as an effectual call. A call that achieves the desired result.
 - You can see that here in Romans 8: 30. Those who he called, he justified, he glorified. It is not some that God calls that are justified and glorified. It is all.
 - Now I know the word all isn't there, but it certainly is implied, isn't it? Isn't Paul saying by implication that just as all who are justified will be glorified, all who are called will be justified.

Ezekiel 37: 3 – 10 And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” ⁴Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.” ⁷So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” ¹⁰So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

- That's an effectual call. As Ezekiel prophesied and the Holy Spirit breathed on them, life came into the dry bones. The bones had no choice but to respond.
- The basis of the effectual call is what we call irresistible grace.
 - I used to think of irresistible grace in terms of God essentially shoving grace down a person's throat making them to believe whether they wanted to or not. But do you know what it really is?
 - It is God, through the Holy Spirit, opening our eyes to see the beauty of His grace, and love, and mercy, so we can freely choose Him. It is God through the Holy Spirit fixing our broken choosers so we can freely choose to embrace Jesus and the salvation he brings to us. And once the blinders come off and we see the beauty of grace there is no turning away. It is like a moth to a flame.
- People hear the general call of the gospel all the time and turn away from it. There is no denying that. But that is because the Holy Spirit hasn't breathed on them and made them alive again by fixing their broken chooser.
 - I can preach the exact same message to two different people, one responds, and the other doesn't. Why? Because God through the Holy Spirit has effectually called one but not the other.



All whom God calls will be justified and then glorified. But how do we get to the point where we are ready to respond when God calls us?

4. Predestination

- Now I know this word causes uneasiness, but the Bible is filled with references to election and predestination, so we need to not just gloss over it, but figure out what it is all about. What is predestination?
 - It means just what it appears to mean in English. To predestine means to set a destination for ourselves or someone else. It means to make a plan ahead of time. In Greek, the word is “prohorizdo,” meaning to determine a horizon and set out for it.
- Most people object to the term predestination because they think it removes freedom of choice from us. But it does no such thing. God allows us to make our choices, but God is the one who is in control of the outcomes of the choices.

Proverbs 16: 33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

- God doesn't force the choice, but He controls the outcome to achieve His purpose.
 - I know this is true from my own life. From 1974 (the year I graduated high school) until 2002, I chased my dreams. I made choices. I had a plan for my life. I was going to be somebody. But that somebody wasn't the man God had planned for me to be.
 - I was this close, so many times, to getting where I wanted to be. A couple times, I thought I actually had made it, but God in His mercy never let me get there. And I think that is good because if I had gotten there, I wouldn't be here.
 - But God wasn't just pulling the rug out from under me over and over again. At the same time everything was falling apart concerning my dreams, God had me stumble into a class called Sonship. I know it was God orchestrating my being there because I was supposed to be somewhere else that night.
 - But in that class, I heard things I had never heard before in church. What did I hear? That, because by faith, Christ' righteousness was my righteousness; God's approval was beaming down on me.
 - Before that, the Gospel I heard over and over again was Jesus died for my sins, but then I needed to get my act together and straighten up and fly right. But this Gospel was different. Jesus not only cleansed my sins, but he also gave me his righteousness. And it electrified me. I was no longer trying to earn my keep as a slave, I was adopted as a son. While the rest of the world saw me as a failure, God saw me as His Son.
 - Do you know what seeing that did for me? It fixed my broken chooser. This was an irresistible grace that I couldn't get enough of.
 - Now I want you to see what is going on because it will help you to understand predestination. God didn't force me to make a single choice. But He allowed all the choices I was making, that would have taken me

further away from His love, to turn out awful. But while God was crushing me through the bad outcomes of my own choices, He was also making sure that I heard the good news of grace, love, mercy, acceptance, and adoption that is the true Gospel.

- Everything I was looking for the world to give me, God had already given me in Jesus. I freely made all the choices, but God orchestrated the outcomes to achieve His purpose, fix my broken chooser and turn me from my slavery to self to the freedom of being a son, whose place in the family was absolutely secure because it didn't rest at all on me, but on what God had done for me through Jesus.
- There is so much more I could say on this but before we move on let me just say this, especially if you are struggling with the idea of predestination. Think back to Romans 8: 28. The phrase everybody loves. The phrase we always quote—

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.

- Whether you realize it or not, that verse is predestination. All things, really means all things. For those whom God has called, God is using everything, successes, failures, and everything in between for good. And what is that good? It is that you would be conformed to the image of His Son—that you would be glorified.
- Predestination is simply God orchestrating all the events in the lives of whom He is calling to achieve His purpose of saving them and adopting them into His family.
 - All He predestines (has a plan for) will hear and respond to His effectual call, and all who respond to His effectual call will be justified and all who are justified will be glorified.

5. Foreknowledge

- The vast majority of Christians who reject the Reformed view of predestination adopt what is sometimes called the prior knowledge view of predestination.
 - Briefly stated, this view teaches that from all eternity God knew how we would live. He knew in advance whether we would receive Christ or reject Christ. He knew our free choices before we ever made them. God's choice of our eternal destiny was then made on the basis of what He knew we would choose. He chooses us because he knows in advance that we will choose him. The elect, then, are those who God knows will choose Christ freely.
 - But think about the problem with thinking this way. What this view is really saying is that your choice determines God's choice. So, who is in control? You are, and suddenly your salvation becomes all about you and what you do rather than God's love for you.
 - In essence you are saying you are being saved by your works, and Jesus is nothing more than a tool you work with to achieve your salvation. Rather than God getting all the glory for your salvation, you get the glory because you made choices that made God choose you.



● But is there another way that we should understand this word foreknowledge that we find in the Bible?

- In the Bible, when we are told God “knows” someone, it means he has set his love on him in a personal way. For instance, think of what God said about Israel in:

Amos 3: 2 “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.”

- Was God saying there that He had no knowledge of any people but Israel? No, of course not. He was saying that all of the families of the earth, God chose to love Israel. If God had looked down the tunnel of time to see whether or not He should choose Israel, He never would have chosen them. Over and over again, they were faithless and ungrateful entering into adulterous relationships with other gods.
- Israel gave God no reason to love God, he simply chose to love them.

Deuteronomy 7: 6 – 8 The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but it is because the Lord loves you

- Why did the Lord love them and chose them? Simply because He chose to love them.
- In Matthew 7: 23, Jesus says to some: “Depart from me, I never knew you.” When he says that he is not saying he has no knowledge of them and what they have done. He is saying that he has no relationship with them.
- In the Bible, foreknew” means “forelove.” God set his love on us back before the beginning of time. This is stunning!
- God, because of his love for us, has set a destination for us—to be with him in glory, conformed to the likeness of Christ.
- How does this look from the vantage point of our present lives? Christians have experienced being called as they heard the gospel and enjoy being justified because they have put their faith in that gospel.
 - Now, Christians are able to look back “down” the chain and know that before creation God fore-loved them, and predestined them to be justified. And a Christian can look on “up” the chain and know that in eternity they will know unimaginable glory in his presence.
- If we love God, we are called (v 28). And if we are called people, then we are fore-loved, predestined, justified, soon-to-be-glorified people. This is the good news of the Gospel! Savor it. Meditate on it, and the more you do the more it will electrify you.