

God's Sovereign Plan of Redemption

Reflections on Romans 8:29-30

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Introduction

“For 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. And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified. Romans 8:29-30”

In these two verses the Apostle Paul reveals to us God's plan for the redemption of His people. Here is the doctrine of eternal security in plain words. Here we learn that it is all in God's hands from before the beginning to never ending. Here we run headlong into God's sovereign act of election with all that it implies. Not everyone has an easy time accepting what God presents in these verses. Theologians have been arguing over the ramifications of these verses for centuries. Fellowships have broken up over their interpretation. My advice is that you pray over these verses and let God speak to you through them. If you receive them with the same spirit in which they were given they will bless you.

Let's see what all the fuss is about.

Paul uses five verbs in this passage that show us God's plan of redemption from before the foundation of the world until the glorification of the saints. These five words are put together like links in an unbreakable chain. No one is lost from the first step to the last step. Every person who is in view in the first step makes it all the way to the last step. This chain illustrates our eternal security in Christ. This is no ordinary chain. It is supernaturally strong because every link is forged by God Himself. There is great comfort to be found here.

Here is the heart of the passage.

Those whom God foreknew He predestined, and those He predestined He called, and those He called He justified, and those He justified He glorified.

I have no idea how much ink and paper has been devoted to exploring the ideas behind these five words but it is a lot. The topics are foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. Before we look at each of these we must be aware of the context in which they are written. This process is not being applied in a general way but rather in a very specific way. It all has to do with the redemption of God's people. Predestination for example does not mean that we are puppets being made to dance to God's tune. And foreknowledge, obviously God knows everyone and everything but here the word is used in a very special way.

The chapter that the words are set in is all about resting in the security of the promise of God. Verse 28 that leads into this passage is most often separated from it and treated on its own but it should not be. God works all things for good for those who are called according to His purpose and here is the proof: everyone He foreknows in this sense of election is predestined and called and justified and glorified. Verse 31 has the inescapable conclusion phrased as a challenge to Satan, the world, and even our own faltering faith. If God is for us, who can be against us? Many Bibles separate verse 30 and 31 with a new heading which is too bad because verse 31 is the conclusion to the thought and not an introduction to the next.

So the context is security in Christ for the believer, the purpose is God's, and the proof is irrefutable. Let's take a look at the five links in this glorious chain and consider what they mean to us.

The first thing you will notice is that the process of salvation presented here is seen from God's point of view. After we look at His point of view, we will take a look from the human point of view and ask the question, "What about faith?" And all along the way please remember that the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is the life-giving power to salvation for all who believe.

In fact if you do not have a saving relationship with God in Christ, I encourage you to consider the gospel before you go on. The Apostle Paul tells us that this is the gospel: "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ... then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:3-5).

I am certain that this sounds strange if you do not know the living Lord but it is not complicated. We are all born with a sinful nature because Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God the Creator. Our sin separates from God and since God is eternally holy and just, all sin must be punished. However, sin is so serious and the penalty for sin so huge that we can not pay for it ourselves. But praise be to God that He gave us His only begotten Son Jesus Christ who gave up the form of God, took on the form of a man by being born in the flesh of the virgin Mary who conceived by the Holy Spirit, and then lived a sinless life which qualified Him to die in our place. And that is where the gospel comes in because Jesus did die in our place, paying the penalty for our sin, and if you will accept that payment to your account by repenting of your sin and turning to Jesus Christ, God will mark your account 'paid in full', and you will be reconciled to the God who created you. You will be forgiven and given the inheritance that comes to the adopted siblings

of Jesus Christ. Please pray about it and ask Jesus to show you the truth. He's listening!

When you do turn to God through faith in Christ you will find out an amazing truth. You were expected.

You will also learn that you have a new desire and goal in life which is to become more like Jesus who saved you. The process of becoming more like Christ is called sanctification and although it is not mentioned by name in Romans 8:29-30, it shows up in the second step called predestination. There we learn that becoming more like Christ is what we are predestined to. And what it means is that those who turn to Christ will want to understand His will and His ways so that they can please Him with their lives. If you are saved, you will want to know your Savior better. And the way that starts is by understanding His nature, His character, and His purpose for us. And of course we learn all those things from His word, the Bible.

Chapter 1 - Foreknowledge

We can learn an awful lot about God from these verses that we are considering. The first idea that we are considering is foreknowledge. Verse 29 tells us: “For those whom He foreknew He also predestined.”

This is where it all starts, with foreknowledge. What is foreknowledge? The verb means to know beforehand. In the context of this passage the object of the verb is the word 'those'. Those whom God foreknew. Now it is obvious that God knows who everyone is. He knows everything. But in this verse God is considering the people that He is going to predestine, call, justify, and glorify. The Bible has a word for these people. They are God's elect. God's foreknowledge here carries with it the notion of choosing. He chooses or elects these people and in that sense He foreknows that they are His.

Jesus said in John 10:14 “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.” So when it says that God foreknew these people, or knew these people beforehand it is saying the same thing as Jesus is saying. I know my own.

Did you know there is a list kept in heaven of those whom God foreknew? There is a list. It is called the Lamb's Book of Life, Jesus of course being the Lamb of God. In the Lamb's Book of Life are the names of all the people who belong to God. And a very interesting thing about this book is that it was written before the foundation of the world.

In Revelation 13 we learn about the beast who is the Antichrist, or the coming world leader. What we learn is that the people who are alive on earth when the Antichrist rises to power will either worship him or worship the Lord. By

the way, that is true today as well. People either worship the Son of God or they worship the beast in one of his many deceptive forms.

Speaking of that beast, Revelation 13:8 says “and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain.”

In other words, God wrote the names of all the people whom He will save in a book before the foundation of the world. Before He created the world, before He created Adam and Eve, before anyone was born, God already knew every person that He was going to save.

That will get the little wheels turning in our heads won't it?

Rev 17:8 says it again. “... the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast...”

“And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15).

Jesus said in Mat 25:34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'”

Eph 1:4 says that God “... chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...” and Peter addressed his first letter to “those who are elect ... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Pet 1,2).

Speaking of the great tribulation Jesus said, “And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. *But for the sake of the elect, whom He chose*, He shortened the days” (Mark 13:20, emphasis mine).

The days of the great tribulation will be shortened for the sake of the elect whom God chose.

Those whom God foreknew are His elect, His chosen, and He chose them before the foundation of the world according to His purpose - not because of any merit found in them.

Jesus said to the disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16).

I have learned that if one follows the words chose, chosen, choose, choice, and so on through the Bible one will find that wherever it has to do with choosing salvation, it is God who does the choosing, not us. God initiates it all and God sees it all through. Many people want to believe that we choose to believe God's testimony but Ephesians 2:8 says that our faith is not our own doing, it is the gift of God. Philippians 1:29 says that it has been granted to us to believe in Christ. Act 11:18 says God even grants the repentance that leads to life.

So when you read about those whom God foreknew, rest assured that God chose those people for His purposes according to His good pleasure. There was no human merit involved whatsoever and God did the choosing before He formed the world.

When that sinks in we find ourselves face to face with the Sovereignty of God. Immediately our little porcupine bristles come out and we shout, "wait a minute, that's not fair! Who do you think you are... God?"

"Yep."

"Well, who made you God?"

"I AM."

Well what about free will? What about it? God gave us free will all right and you know what we did with it? We caused the fall of His perfect creation. We disobeyed God. We rebelled against God. We sinned against God and our sin brought death and sickness and evil into God's creation. We corrupted what God made. That's what we did with the free will that God gave us, and because we did that, our will is no longer free but it is in bondage to sin and Satan. And because our will is corrupted we will never choose God on our own.

But here is the good news. God chose to save some. We all chose sin and death but God chose to give His people whom He foreknew life instead.

You may well ask, how does He choose? I have no idea. Why did He choose me? I really have no idea.

Paul writes in Romans 9:18 that God has mercy on whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever He wills. And Paul anticipates the question that someone will ask. He writes, "You will say to me then, 'Why does God still find fault? For who can resist His will?'" (Rom 9:19).

And our minds think, "Yeah. That's right. Who can resist His will?" And Paul answers, "But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this? Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory-- even us whom He has called..." (Rom 9:20-24).

God is sovereign and He sovereignly controls all things. And we should be very thankful that it's true. If there was one molecule in the universe that was outside of God's control then His promises would be worthless. And all those well-meaning people who keep telling you that God is a gentleman who would never make you do anything against your will are just plain silly. I hope they will all have a chat with Jonah when they get to heaven.

The truth is that if God did not unilaterally change the hearts of His elect then none of them would choose God. Not because God is stopping us from choosing Him, but because we won't do it. And if God does change your heart you will choose God, not because He makes you but because your changed heart drives your will and you will do it.

If you want to get picky you can say that God does not make us choose Him against our wills but that He changes our hearts so that we will change our will, but the point is that God initiates the change.

When it comes right down to it, do you really think that God has to have our permission to act? I think that is the silliest thing I ever heard. If God needs my permission to do something then He is not God, I am.

Do you think there is some decision that you are more qualified to make than God is? Do you? Really?

So then you may ask, "how can I know if I am chosen?" That one is easy. Do you believe that Jesus died to pay for your sin personally? If you do then you were chosen by God before the foundation of the world.

Well aren't there some people whom God has chosen who won't be saved? Nope. For those whom He foreknew He also predestined and those He predestined

He also called and those He called He also justified and those He justified He also glorified.

Every single person that God foreknows will choose Him. And every single person that God does not foreknow will not choose Him. I have heard and read from many commentators and theologians that all that God's foreknowledge means is that He knows in advance that I will choose Christ. And they often misquote Isaiah 46:9 as proof. They like to say, "God knows the end from the beginning." And while that is a true statement, it is not what Isaiah said. He wrote, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, **declaring** the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'" (Isa 46:9-10, emphasis mine). God does not only **know** the end from the beginning. He **declares** it. He does not look into the future to base His decisions on my actions. He is sovereign.

God is sovereign but praise God, He is also perfectly holy, perfectly just, perfectly loving, perfectly merciful, and perfectly graceful. God is all knowing, all seeing, all powerful, always present, and always existing. And He's really smart too. I think He is just a little bit more qualified to choose correctly than I am with my little peanut-sized brain that has been saturated in the corruption of sin. He's God. And remember this. Nothing that God does will ever go against who God is. God is love. Therefore His choices are loving. God is just and so are His decrees. God is holy and He rightfully hates all sin. God is merciful and He withholds His righteous wrath until His justice requires its release. God is also graceful and forgiving. His decisions will never compromise His character. That means that we

can trust God. And it doesn't matter if our finite minds cannot resolve everything in God's word. We can trust God. Praise His glorious Name!

Chapter 2 - Predestination

The next word on our list is predestined. “For 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” (Rom 8:29).

The group of people foreknown in the first link of this unbreakable chain is the same group of people that will be carried to the end. That is to say that every single person that God foreknew in the sense of this verse will be carried through to the last step which is glorification.

So the hard part is over. You can wrestle with the idea of God's sovereign election on your own time. I will take the coward's way out and simply move on to look at what else God has in store for His elect.

In this chapter we consider the idea of predestination and we can all avoid a lot of headaches if we look at *what* we are predestined *to*. The verse says that the elect are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son so that Jesus might be the firstborn among many brothers. The word brothers here means siblings as opposed to fellow Jews, and applies to all males and females who are elect.

The point here is that God intends for us to become like Jesus. It is our destiny. And it is a lofty destiny indeed, one that I would not have dared to consider if God had not said it first. After all, there is a being who got himself into big trouble by saying that he would be like God. We know him as Satan. So let's establish right from the start that we are not talking about becoming gods as some false religions teach, or even becoming god-like. We are talking about

becoming more like Jesus the perfect man. The topic of predestination is already big enough without attempting to reconcile how Jesus can be all God and all man simultaneously so we will simply have to accept it and move on. God wants us to emulate Jesus the man. If you consider the adage, "What would Jesus do?" and then do it, you would be on the right track.

God has predestined His elect to be conformed to the image of His Son so that Jesus might be the firstborn of many brothers and sisters. God is building a family of worshipers.

One passage that sheds some light on this idea is found in Ephesians chapter one, beginning with verse 3.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, (4) even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love (5) He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, (6) to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.

(7) In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, (8) which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight (9) making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ (10) as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.

(11) In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, (12) so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise

of His glory” (Eph 1:3-12).

The word predestined only occurs five times in the ESV Bible. Twice here in Ephesians, twice in our passage in Romans, and once in Acts 4:28 where we learn that Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever God's hand and God's plan had predestined to take place. In other words the crucifixion of our Lord was predestined to take place and even the people who were to be involved were known ahead of time and gathered together to do God's will.

God planned from the beginning not only to create the universe and everything in it including us, but also to redeem His own, and that plan always included the death of Christ on the cross. His death was not an afterthought or a reaction to things that men did. It was planned before the creation took place and Jesus took part in the planning!

It is interesting to note that the other four occurrences of the word predestined have to do with the people who are reconciled to God through Christ's actions at that cross. We are predestined to live in Christ who was predestined to die for us. Our destiny is to live in Christ. His destiny was to die for us and to defeat death for us so that we can live in Him and what a destiny that is!

In this passage in Ephesians we get a hint of what it means to be chosen in Christ. Paul writes that God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.

If you want to resonate with the right tone of thanksgiving when confronted with God's sovereign election, then realize that it is the greatest blessing possible

to be blessed in Christ before the foundation of the world. If someone hands you a million dollars are you going to complain because they did not consult you in advance of offering the gift? Of course not, because you would consider it a very good thing.

Well, let me tell you, the spiritual blessings of God in Christ Jesus are worth more than all the money in the world. In fact, it is a great insult to God to even compare the riches of His grace to the riches of the world, so much greater is His grace. So how dare we be indignant at the idea of God choosing? If we understood the greatness of the gift, we would not be critical of the method in which it was given. And if we understood God, we would understand that even His method is of course, perfect.

The reason that people struggle with the idea of sovereign election is not because the words in Scripture are difficult or unclear, but because those words conflict with our high opinion of ourselves. We have an attitude problem that is manifested in the fact that we do not think highly enough of God, and we think too highly of ourselves. Did God consult you before He made you? Why should He consult you before dying for you? Our attitudes need adjusting.

More proof of our attitude problem is that when we read that we are predestined to be holy and blameless before God (verse 4 above) we don't tend to jump for joy at the thought. In fact I think that to most of us the idea of being holy and blameless before God does not sound like a lot of fun. It sounds like a lot of work that will take a lot of effort. It sounds like pursuing holiness may conflict with some of the ways that we choose to use our time now. But as we begin to understand the thrill of being pleasing in the sight of God, our attitudes will

change.

Have you ever seen a little puppy absolutely shivering and squirming with delight just to be in your presence? The little tail looks like it will come right off and the puppy puts everything it's got into demonstrating to you that all it wants is to please you, to have your attention, to bask in your approval, and to feel your reassuring touch.

That is what we should feel like before God. Our utmost desire should be to please Him. Our hearts should quiver with delight at that very thought of being in His presence. He is God! He is the awesome Creator of everything that exists!

Jesus said in Matthew 18:3, "... Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." We need to become like children in the presence of God. We need to become like a puppy that lives to please its master.

We have different part of puppyhood down pretty well. That is we sulk and whine and tear the place up when we don't feel the presence of our Master. But the difference between us and a puppy is that God designed us to be aware of His presence all the time. He predestined His own to be in Him and He in us. At the moment our faith is awakened He seals us with His Holy Spirit who literally dwells within us so that we never need to be alone. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing and that blessing never ceases to fall on us even though we frequently choose to put up our spiritual umbrellas to block the flow. And it is all blessing upon blessing that God pours on us.

Proverbs 10:22 says , "The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and He adds no sorrow with it."

Let's take a look at some of the blessings that the elect are predestined to receive.

In love, Ephesians 1:5 says, "God predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved."

We are predestined for adoption through Jesus Christ. This is the idea we saw presented back in Romans where it said that God predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers.

We are adopted into God's family as brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:11 says that we have obtained an inheritance in Christ. It is because we are adopted sons and daughters of God that we inherit with Jesus. And what an inheritance it is! We will talk more about that inheritance when we get to glorification. For now suffice it to say that Peter calls our inheritance (1Pe 1:4) imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. He says that it is kept in heaven for us who are being guarded by God's power until that time is reached. Hebrews 9:15 says it is an eternal inheritance. Paul says that part of the inheritance is the redemption of our bodies. Our souls have already been redeemed and we have eternal life now, but our bodies are still mortal and we wait for the adoption ceremony at the rapture when our mortal bodies will be traded for immortal.

Hebrews 1:2 says that "in these last days God has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things."

Paul says in Romans 8:16-17, "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and

fellow heirs with Christ.." and in Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?"

What an inheritance it will be! And it is ours who are predestined to adoption as sons and daughters of God. How can we possibly complain about being predestined to that?

Yet the adoption as sons and daughters of God with its inheritance is only one of the things we are predestined to. The same plan and purpose of God that predestined Christ to go to the cross, that predestines us to adoption, is the same plan and purpose of God set forth in Christ to unite all things in Him. Our redemption and the forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ is what reveals to us the mystery of the ages, the mystery of God's will which is to unite all things in Him. It is all part of the timeless eternal plan of God to unite us in Christ through the redeeming power of His blood. And He does it all by lavishing His grace upon us.

There is one more thing we are predestined to in this Ephesians passage. Verses 11 and 12 say that "In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory."

We have been predestined according to God's purpose which is that we who hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. You see when God chose us to be conformed to the image of His Son He chose us to be examples of His great grace so that all of creation would praise His glory. God demonstrates His great

love in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). The very existence of our hope in Christ is testimony to the great love of God. When we demonstrate in our lives the hope we have in Christ we bring praise to His glory.

This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote these words to Timothy. “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life. To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1 Tim 1:15-17).

Paul is saying that the mercy that he, the chief of sinners, received is an example of Christ's perfect patience and seeing it we should give glory to the King of ages. The fact that Christ would die for the likes of us is praise to His glory.

The same idea is demonstrated in God's purpose for choosing Israel. Paul writes, “For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.' And again it is said, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.' and again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him'” (Romans 15:8-11).

And of the nation Israel and the city of Jerusalem Jeremiah writes, “I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. And this city shall be to

me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it" (Jer 33:7-9).

Just as Israel was to bring praise to God's glory, so are we. It is quite a destiny that we have. And it is amazing to realize that it was set in the mind of God before He even formed the world.

We are predestined to be more like Jesus, to be His adopted brothers and sisters, to be holy and blameless before God, and to be a praise to His glory.
Thanks be to God!

Chapter 3 - Calling

By now Romans 8:29-30 should be quite familiar to you. Once again the central idea is that those whom God foreknew, He also predestined, and those He predestined He called, and those He called He justified, and those He justified He also glorified.

When we considered predestination as it is used in this passage we noted that the same people who were foreknown in the first link of this chain were also predestined to become more like Jesus. Today we see that the same people who were foreknown and predestined are also called. God chose or foreknew His own people according to His own purposes for His own reasons and then He predestined this group of people, known in the Bible as the elect, to be conformed to the image of Christ.

It is interesting to note that God both foreknew and predestined His elect before the foundation of the world. Today we reach the center link of this five link unbreakable chain and we cross from the mysterious time before time into the time domain that we all inhabit. This step of calling is something that God does on a very personal and individual level. Since none of us were born yet, it does not really matter whether God foreknew us as a group. And since we share a common destiny which is to be more like Christ, we all could have been predestined at once.

But now we come to the call. God both foreknew us and predestined us before we were born, but He calls us during our lifetime. There are several things about this call that need to be understood. First, let's not forget the context of the

call. It goes out specifically to those whom God foreknew and predestined.

Furthermore, those who are called will be justified and glorified. In other words the call that is in view here is a call that only goes out to the elect and 100% of those being called will answer.

Immediately then we see that this is not a general call that goes out to all the world. God has been calling out to the world from the beginning. He has made Himself manifest in His creation. He has provided all people everywhere with an inner awareness that He exists. "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking..." (Romans 1:19-21).

God's call has gone out to the world in His provision. "... He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mat 5:45)".

And of course the call goes out in the course of time in that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The call in Romans 8:30 is a much more specific call. It differs in two ways from the general calling above. First, it only goes out to those who are foreknown and predestined. Second, everyone who receives this call answers it in faith. Contrast this with the general call that goes out to everyone and is refused by many. The call in Romans 8:30 goes out to a specific group, namely the elect, and

is answered by the entire group with not a single one lost.

This call is irresistible. Since every person receiving this call gets justified, and justification is by faith, then every person who receives this call responds to it in faith that leads to justification. No one who receives this call turns it down. If a single person refused this call, the entire chain would be broken.

Some of the confusion about the call of God in Romans comes from the fact that there are different types of calls in the Bible. For example Abram was called to leave his home and his country. Joseph was called to see his family through a famine. Jonah was called to preach to Nineveh. John the Baptist was called to introduce the Christ. Paul was called to be an Apostle. Judas was called to betray Jesus. There are many types of calls but in our Romans passage we are concerned with the call of the elect to saving faith.

One of the passages that causes some confusion in this regard is Matthew 22:14 which says, "... many are called, but few are chosen."

That verse is at the end of our Lord's parable comparing the kingdom of heaven to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. Those first invited would not come. So the king opened up the invitation to others. Finally the feast came and there was a man there who was not wearing the wedding garment and he was thrown out. And then we come to the verse that says, "many are called but few are chosen."

The first call in the parable was to the Jews. The second was to the Gentiles. But in the end, only those who are chosen by the king are allowed in. When you compare this idea with our passage in Romans we can quickly see that the calls that went out in this parable are very different. First, these calls went out to

everyone the king's men could find. Second, the calls were obviously resistible as many refused them. Third, not all who were called and answered were justified, but only those who were in the provided wedding garments, the chosen.

In our Romans passage the call goes out to those who were foreknown and predestined. In Romans the call is irresistible because everyone who is called answers in faith. And in Romans all who were called were previously chosen. What we see by comparing these two passages is that Christ's death provided more than enough payment for everyone to be redeemed but only God's elect will put on the provided garment of salvation.

There are several passages that do illustrate the effectual call that we are talking about. One is in John chapter 6 beginning in verse 35. "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out'" (John 6:35-37).

Let's pull the logical premises out of this text. Jesus said, "whoever comes and believes shall never hunger or thirst." All through the new testament, coming to Christ means coming to Him with faith. It means that we come believing. It is not enough to simply show up as we will see here.

So Jesus says, "whoever believes will never thirst." Then in verse 36 He says, "but you have seen Him" - that is you have seen the evidence that He is the Christ - "yet you don't believe." And then He says, "All that the Father gives me will come to me."

So it goes like this. Whoever comes to me believing will never hunger or

thirst. You don't believe. All the Father gives to me will come to me believing.

Conclusion: the Father did not give you to me.

In case you think I am only seeing what I want to see, in John 6:44 Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

You can also tell that Jesus is talking about God's effectual and irresistible call because Jesus says in various ways in verses 37, 39, 40, 44, 47, 51, 54, and 58 that each and every person whom the Father sends will not only come but will be preserved by Jesus and raised on the last day.

What happened next is that Jesus talked some more about eating His flesh and drinking His blood and a lot of the people who had been following Him were not happy about it. They did not understand what He was saying because they did not believe that He was the Son of God. Skipping down to verse 63 Jesus said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe... This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

Then we read in John 6:66, "After this many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him."

Some who were not called showed up and left. All who were called showed up and stayed. The difference involves belief. Jesus said, "some of you do not believe." Coming to Christ in faith can only be granted by the Father. Those to whom it was not granted turned back and no longer walked with Him.

Three times in this passage in John 6 Jesus combined these ideas. in verses 36 and 37 the ideas are: you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me believing. Conclusion: you do not believe because the Father did not give

you to me.

In verses 40 and 44 we learn that everyone who believes has eternal life. No one can come to me believing unless the Father draws him. Conclusion: I can tell the Father has drawn you because you believe.

And in verses 64 and 65, some of you do not believe. No one can come to me believing unless it is granted him by the Father. Conclusion: Belief is granted by the Father.

So we see that the Father grants belief to His chosen and the Father gives His chosen to Jesus. And all who are drawn to Jesus by the Father will come to Him believing and will have eternal life. The call is both irresistible and effectual. All who are so called respond, and they all respond in saving faith.

Those who are foreknown and predestined are then granted, given and drawn. This is the calling of God in Romans. When God's elect are called they come to Jesus in faith and then they are justified.

God loves to demonstrate doctrinal truth with physical events. One passage that illustrates this nicely is the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. You know the story. Lazarus died. Jesus went to his sisters, Mary and Martha. And Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

They took Jesus to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone," (11:39) and they did. And then Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out"(11:43). And Lazarus who had been dead four days came out alive.

This is a great illustration of the irresistible call of God. Lazarus was dead.

He was not seeking Jesus. He was dead. And Jesus called him and called him specifically. He said, "Lazarus come out." And Lazarus came out.

It was a specific call to a specific person who was dead and he came to life and came out of the tomb.

Consider how this physical example demonstrates a spiritual truth. In Ephesians 2 Paul wrote, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Eph 2:1, 4, 5).

Just as Lazarus was physically dead when Jesus called him, we were spiritually dead when God called us.

Jesus made Lazarus physically alive. God made us spiritually alive.

Lazarus could do nothing about his condition. He was physically dead. We could do nothing about our condition. We were spiritually dead.

Just as Lazarus was regenerated to physical life when God called, we are regenerated to spiritual life When God calls.

We must be called to spiritual life from our spiritual death. It is God the Father who does the calling. It is God the Son who paid the price of redemption. It is God the Holy Spirit who does the regenerating.

Every spiritually dead person whom God effectually calls is regenerated by the Holy Spirit and responds in faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Do you see how boasting is excluded? None of us can claim anything over anyone else. We were all spiritually dead. Faith is not a work of man, it is a gift from God. Receiving that faith is not a work of man, it is granted by the Father. We

were all children of wrath. But God chose to make some of us alive for His own purpose. He called us out of death and made us alive in Christ.

There is one more thing I want to point out. There is a difference between being elect and being saved. Remember that the call comes at some point in our lives. Up until that point, if we were to die, we would die in our sins and go to hell. But God has even made provision to make sure that never happens.

In Hebrews chapter one there is a discussion about the supremacy of Christ. The discussion turns to the angels to show that Christ is even higher than they. The author of Hebrews takes the trouble to tell us a few things about angels. And in the last verse of chapter one we read of angels, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?" (Heb 1:14).

The Contemporary English Version of the Bible says, "Angels are merely spirits sent to serve people who are going to be saved."

In other words, God has provided guardian angels to insure that His elect live to hear His effectual call.

Let me tell you a story of an angelic miracle that my wife and I experienced. We were one of three couples in a minivan going out to a ballroom dance. Donna and I, and our friends Nick and Mary Ann all had a saving relationship with the Lord. Our friend Ross who was driving did not and his wife, a former nun, was on the fence. And it was something that we talked about regularly. So Ross is driving and we are going down this two lane country road and it was a really dark night. And at the same instant we all realized that right in front of us was some kind of huge farm machinery with no lights, and no reflectors. It was big and we were

coming up on it impossibly fast. And Ross kind of screamed and yanked the wheel to the left only to find a pair of oncoming headlights that had been concealed by the machine impossibly close to us. And the next thing we knew, we were in front of the farm machine and we did not hit either it or the oncoming vehicle. And I am telling you, it was not just a close call. It was impossible. We all sat in that van for a while in stunned silence. And when Ross could speak, he said, "I am sure lucky that you guys were in the car."

And I said to him, "no, you have it backwards. We know where we are going when we die. You don't. We are alive because you are in the car and God is not done with you."

Now I have not talked to Ross in a long time but I believe that he is in that interesting position of being elect but not yet saved.

I believe that God has a prearranged relationship with Ross and that he is predestined to adoption in God's family and that one day, he is going to receive the irresistible call of God and the Holy Spirit is going to regenerate him and he is going to come to Christ in faith and be saved. And until that day, the angels will preserve him.

And it's is all in the hands of God.

Chapter 4 - Justification

So far we have looked at foreknowledge, predestination, and calling. Now we will look at justification. God is the subject of this passage in Romans 8:29-30 and it is God taking the action. God foreknew and predestined His elect before the foundation of the world. At some point in each elect person's life God calls him or her with an effectual, irresistible call through the gospel of Jesus Christ. That call is accompanied by regeneration from the Holy Spirit and the gift of faith in Christ from God the Father so that each and every called person will begin a new life in Christ. That life is begun at the moment one is justified.

I want to start with the simplest definition of justification that I can come up with. Justification is a declaration by God that a person has been made forever right and acceptable to Himself.

God declares that a person is in right standing before God. It is like a judicial determination rendered by God which can never be overturned. God is perfectly just and that His actions and decisions will never compromise His character. In the matter of declaring a sinful person to be made right, the problem for God is that His justice cannot be violated. Or put another way, how can a just God justify a sinful man and still be just?

Socrates who died in 399 BC, is commonly quoted as saying, "It may be that the Deity can forgive sins, but I do not see how" (work unknown).

Now justification is not forgiveness exactly, but you cannot understand justification unless you understand the terrible nature of sin. God is holy. He cannot abide sin. God is just. Sin must be punished or atoned for. God must be

propitiated or satisfied because all sin is against God. But God is also loving and merciful. Perhaps Socrates understood that. Perhaps Socrates could see that God in His mercy would like to forgive sins, but that God's holiness and justice would be violated if He did so. So he said, maybe God can forgive sins but I do not see how.

But God knew how. In fact God planned it from the beginning. And 400 years after Socrates died, God's answer to his dilemma was made manifest.

In Romans chapter three, Paul is speaking of this very problem. Until Christ, God's righteousness was visible in the law. But the law could not justify anyone because no one could keep it. Here in Romans 3 the relationship between sin, sacrifice, atonement, mercy, love, grace, faith, justice, and righteousness is made clear.

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Romans 3:21-28).

For all have sinned ... and are justified by God's grace ... through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, ... so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Do you see it coming together? All have sinned. Those who are justified are justified by God's grace as a gift that is given through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Jesus is the propitiation that satisfies God's holy justice. So that when it is all put together, God can justify those with faith in Jesus and still be just.

God cannot abide sin because He is holy. God cannot let sin go unpunished because He is just. But sin is so terrible that we cannot ever pay the price ourselves. If we live forever and only do good works, those works can never make up for the terrible wrong done to God by even one sin. If you doubt the terrible power of one sin, you need only consider Adam and Eve. One act of disobedience caused the corruption of the entire creation! Or consider Moses who struck the rock in the wilderness instead of speaking to it as God had directed. Because of that, Moses who had spent 80 years preparing to serve God and 40 years in actual service was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Sin is terrible!

There is only one way that sinners can be declared righteous by God without compromising the character of God. And that is if every sin is paid for and taken out of the way. And the only One who could make that payment was God Himself. But a man had to pay for man's transgressions. Enter the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

Listen to this poem by Albert Midlane.

“The perfect righteousness of God
Is witnessed in the Savior's blood;
'Tis in the cross of Christ we trace

His righteousness, yet wondrous grace.
God could not pass the sinner by,
His sin demands that he must die;
But in the cross of Christ we see
How God can save, yet righteous be.
The sin is on the Savior laid,
'Tis in His blood sin's debt is paid;
Stern justice can demand no more,
And mercy can dispense her store.
The sinner who believes is free,
Can say, 'The Savior died for me';
Can point to the atoning blood,
And say, 'That made my peace with God.'

Do you see it all tied together? God's righteousness, the Savior's blood shed on the cross, God's grace, the terrible nature of sin that God cannot overlook. Jesus Christ taking it all on Himself, bearing our sins away, paying our debt. God's justice is satisfied. God's mercy is set free. And every sinner who confesses Christ as his or her personal Savior can point to that blood, to Jesus' death, and say, "That made my peace with God."

Oh glory, glory.

There are some things that need to be made clear in this Romans 3 passage. First, Paul wrote in verse 25 that God put forward Jesus Christ as a propitiation by his blood. I want you to understand that God is not some malevolent vengeful spirit who can only be satiated by cruel torture. There are many who think that way. Most of the pagan gods have those characteristics. But not the true living God. Propitiation is not the placating of a vengeful God but,

rather, it satisfies the righteousness of a holy God. And that in turn makes it possible for God to show mercy without compromising His righteousness or justice.

John Stott writes that propitiation "does not make God gracious...God does not love us because Christ died for us, Christ died for us because God loves us" (The Cross of Christ p.174).

God's perfect nature includes love, mercy, holiness, grace, wrath, justice, and so on. All of these characteristics of God are perfectly balanced. He is motivated by His love for His creation. "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10).

It is not that God had to be satisfied and Jesus was the unlucky One who got to pay the price. God's motivation is His love and that motivation is strong that He sent His own Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Perfect love is established. Perfect justice is achieved. Perfect mercy is poured out. Perfect grace flows down. God's holiness is never damaged.

When one begins to understand this, one immediately realizes that it had to be Jesus, there is no other, and there is no other way. He had to be a man, but a sinless man. Sin is passed through the male, from Adam. Jesus had to be born of a virgin to avoid original sin. But no man could bear the punishment for even his own sins let alone someone else's. So He had to be God as well.

Only Jesus, perfect man, perfect God, fits the bill. The lie of every other religious system is exposed because without Jesus, there is no path to God. Jesus

was not only uniquely qualified. He also fulfilled all of these requirements at a specific time in history. Throughout the gospels you can read things about Jesus like His time had not yet come. You can really give yourself a headache trying to understand how God, who is outside of time altogether, could enter time in a human body. I don't know how that works but it does. I bring it up here because another possibly confusing part of this Romans passage is the second half of verse 25. God put forward Christ as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. And then Paul writes, this was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

This makes it sound as if God used to ignore sin but that is not so. Neither does it mean that God once accepted animal sacrifice but then decided it wasn't good enough. Some people erroneously teach that the Jews were saved by animal sacrifice. In fact, this verse teaches the opposite. You see it was God looking ahead to the perfect sacrifice on the cross that let Him postpone judgment on the sins of the Old Testament believers. Those believers look ahead to the cross just as we look back to the cross. Please understand this. If Jesus did not die on the cross, no person would have ever been saved and it does not matter when that person was born. What Paul is saying in verse 25 is that the providing of Jesus Christ paid for past sins as well as future sins. Paul is saying is that the atoning death of Christ proves that God was righteous to temporarily pass over those sins committed in the past because God saw them paid for at the cross just as surely as if it had already happened.

So Paul can write that the death of Christ which happened at a particular point in time demonstrated God's righteousness for all time. It also made it

possible for God to be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

There is a verse that is found in Habakkuk, Galatians, Hebrews, and here in Romans that says it all. "The righteous shall live by faith" (Hab 2:4, Rom 1:17, Gal 3:11, Heb 10:38).

That leads to another point that we must be clear on and that is the idea of imputed righteousness. You see, we are not righteous because we believe in Jesus as if we have done something that merits righteousness. Nor are we righteous in ourselves. We have not earned righteousness by having faith. What has happened is that God has reckoned or accounted the righteousness of Christ to our account. We stand in His righteousness, not ours. It is in Christ that we are justified and not on our own.

The Bible speaks of some just or righteous individuals but not in this sense. There are people who are righteous people by human standards but that is not the source of justification. No one can stand in his or her own righteousness before God.

Isaiah wrote that "... all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Isa 64:6). God does not bestow salvation or justification upon us because of something we do. Rather He counts our faith as righteousness in Christ. He credits our account with the righteousness of Jesus. This way when God looks at us, He sees the righteousness of His Son. Jesus' sacrifice paid our debt.

I mentioned animal sacrifice earlier because many believe that God saved the Jewish people through that ritual but that is not so. Only the perfect sacrifice by the perfect man, Jesus, could ever take away the sin of the world.

Think of it this way: if animal sacrifice could save, there would be no need

for Jesus to die.

Animal sacrifice did not save but it did have a purpose. Animal sacrifice was to point the way to the perfect sacrifice. It was an illustration of what the Messiah would provide. It also taught the people over the ages about the seriousness of sin and that sin requires a blood sacrifice to be forgiven - even if only temporarily as in the sacrificial system. "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb 9:22).

However, the salvation of those people born before Christ was found the same way as our salvation. That is in the grace of God through the redemption in Christ which is appropriated by faith. There is a wonderful illustration of that idea here in Romans three. The word propitiation in verse 25 is the same word that means mercy seat in the Old Testament. That is to say that the Old Testament word in Hebrew that meant mercy seat is translated into a Greek word with the same meaning and then into our English word propitiation. But it is all the same word. It goes back to the ark of the covenant. The ark had a lid on it that was called the mercy seat. Paul is calling Jesus Christ our Mercy Seat.

So what, you say? Ah, but listen. In the Holy of Holies - the inmost room of the tabernacle and later the temple - stood the ark of the covenant. And in the ark were the stone tablets written on by the finger of God and delivered down the mountain by Moses. Those tablets contain what we call the ten commandments. They are in the ark. The ark is covered by the mercy seat. On the ends of the mercy seat are two gold angels or cherubim with their wings arched toward each other. And there between the angels above the mercy seat God met with Moses.

That is where the glory of God appeared.

You can learn about this in Leviticus chapter 16. Here is my summary.

Once a year on the day of atonement, the high priest was to enter that most holy place to make atonement for himself and the people. The high priest would offer a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering and then he was to do a rather strange thing. He was to take two male goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tabernacle and there the high priest would cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for a scapegoat. And the priest would present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD as a sin offering, but the scapegoat was presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

This is how it worked. The priest would take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat seven times. And he would kill the goat of the sin offering and do the same with its blood, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. This was to make atonement for the priest and the people. And when that is done, he presents the live goat to God and lays his hands on its head, and confesses over it all the sins of the people. In that way he symbolically transferred those sins to the goat and then send it away into the wilderness. So the goat bore away all their iniquities.

The two goats fulfilled two requirements. One paid the penalty for the sins of the people. The other bore those sins away so that the people were separated from their sins.

Now consider Christ at the cross. He is represented by both of these goats. He is at once our atonement, dying to pay for our sins, and he is also the one who

bears away our sins. Those are two very distinct things. He paid a price that was sufficient for all the sins of all the people of all time - but only those who place their faith in Him have their sins born away and remembered no more.

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Col 2:13-14).

Our record of debt is canceled by the death of Jesus and then set aside (born away) by being nailed to the cross. “As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us” (Psa 103:12).

Everything in the Old Testament points to Jesus Christ. God provided His only begotten Son to pay the price of redemption and to carry away the sins of those who believe. He paid the penalty and He bore the burden. And by doing so He satisfied God's holiness, and God's justice, so that God's mercy could flow down in His grace and justify the sinner who is in Christ Jesus.

Look at the picture of that ark in the holy of holies. There is God, looking down through the blood stained propitiation at His broken law on the tablets of stone. And at the cross is God looking down through His blood stained Son at us who have broken His holy law. And God counts Christ's righteousness to our account. He looks at those who believe through the broken, bleeding body of His Son and Christ becomes our righteousness.

We stand in God's grace, not by any work that we could possibly do, but by faith in the work Jesus did on the cross. There is no boasting there, only repentance. And if the Holy Spirit is convicting you today of your sin, then confess

it to God. Repent. Turn from your sin and turn to the Lord who died for you. This may be the day God calls you from darkness to light. Answer the call of God and be justified and live.

Chapter 5 - Glorification

We started our exploration into God's sovereign plan of redemption in eternity past. God foreknew His own people before the foundation of the world. And He predestined those people, called His elect, to be conformed to the image of His Son Jesus Christ. Before the foundation of the world God predestined His people to be adopted as sons and daughters so that Jesus would be the Firstborn of many siblings. Then we moved from eternity past into the mortal life of each elect person and learned that at some point in their lives God effectually and irresistibly calls His own to Jesus. We know that calling was effective and irresistible because every single person who was called answered by coming in saving faith to Jesus Christ and they were all justified. So we were foreknown and predestined before the world began, and we were called and justified at some point in our mortal lives and now we move into the future and learn that everyone God justifies He also glorifies.

I truly love the fact that God uses the past tense of this verb, glorified. Being in the church, I know that I will receive my resurrection body at the rapture. And since my body is obviously not glorified (trust me), I have either missed the rapture or it is still in the future. But God says, those whom He justified He also glorified. In God's mind it is as good as done. When people use the expression as good as done, it does not mean much. But when God treats something as if it is done, it is done!

Martin Luther wrote a book titled "The Bondage of the Will" that explores this idea. Luther's logical conclusion is that once something is known by God, it is

certain. Since God's knowledge is complete and perfect, He cannot know a thing that then fails to be. And it gives me tremendous comfort to know that the job God started in me will be completed. It is so certain that God speaks of it in the past tense. Those whom He justified, He also glorified.

If you are a Christian, you need to understand the significance of this. We should live for Christ boldly, without fear, knowing with certainty that the world can never take away what God has promised. "If God is for us, who can be against us" (Romans 8:31)?

As for the future nature of glorification, Paul wrote that he suffers and counts the loss of all things as rubbish so "that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Php 3:11-14).

From God's point of view, it is finished. From our point of view, we must press on, but do so knowing that Christ Jesus has already made you His own!

If you are in the faith, then you have been justified and you will be glorified. It is a certainty. But it begs the question, how do we know we are in the faith? Praise be to God, we don't need to guess about that either. Paul writes "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? --unless indeed you fail to meet the test" (2 Cor 13:5)!

Examine yourselves. If Jesus Christ is in you, then Hallelujah, you have eternal life. If Jesus is not in you, or if you are not sure, then for heaven's sake, literally for heaven's sake, repent and turn from your sin and turn to Jesus who died in your place on that cross, and was buried, and rose again from the dead and ask Him to forgive you and to be the Lord of your life. Then take the test again. This is not something you want to leave to chance. Make sure!

Those whom God justified, He also glorified.

What does it mean then to be glorified?

One part of it is that we will get to exchange this mortal body for an immortal resurrection body. In First Corinthians chapter 15 Paul is talking about the resurrection of Jesus Christ and how important it is to Christianity. Without the resurrection of Christ, there is no Christianity! Paul then establishes that just as Christ has been raised from the dead, so too all who are His people will be raised from the dead. Jesus said to the Sadducees who didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, "And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living" (Mat 22:31-32).

So the dead are raised. "But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ" (1 Cor 15:23).

And then beginning at verse 35, Paul writes, "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' (36) You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. (37) And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. (38) But God gives it a body as He has chosen, and to each kind of seed its

own body. (39) For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. (40) There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. (41) There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. (42) So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. (43) It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. (44) It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (45) Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. (46) But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. (47) The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. (48) As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. (49) Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (50) I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable" (1 Cor 15:35-50).

As you can see, comparing our earthly bodies to our heavenly bodies is like comparing a seed to the full grown plant. We will still be somehow physical as seeds and plants are both physical, but no longer will we be flesh and blood because "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (v. 50).

We will have physical bodies that do not age or perish. We have natural bodies now but then we will have spiritual bodies. Our nature will be spiritual but

we will still have bodies. And just as we were born in mortal bodies like Adam who represents the fallen human race, we are born again into the promise of immortal bodies like Jesus who is the firstfruits from the dead.

The Bible does not tell us a lot about these new bodies but we do know that they are immortal and imperishable. We also know that we will have a body like the risen Lord has now. John the Apostle writes in 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."

So we will be like Christ. Of course we already knew that since our study of predestination says that we will be conformed to His image, which I think must mean something different than "God created man in his own image" (Gen 1:27).

Someone asked me whether we have to be conformed to Christ's image because Adam and Eve somehow lost the image of God at the fall. That may be part of it but Genesis 9:6 says, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." Here God is speaking to Noah after the flood and communicating an enduring principle. So it seems that all men and women are in view and not only Adam and Eve. So I conclude that being conformed the image of Jesus is something different than being restored to the condition of Adam and Eve although physically that may be involved. At any rate, part of glorification is the receiving of our resurrection bodies.

We also learned that we are predestined to adoption so that we can share in the inheritance with Jesus. And here in 1 Corinthians we read in verse 50 "... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable," meaning that we must get our new bodies before we inherit the

kingdom of God. Which means that contrary to what many teach, the kingdom is not fully here yet.

We also learned in verses 42-44, "... What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."

I would like for you to consider these things because they lay to rest many false teachings. There is a teaching that says that right now we have all the power, but Paul wrote that this mortal seed is sown in weakness and raised in power. There is a teaching that we already have everything we are going to get if we will simply claim it, that whatever is in the spirit realm we can claim in the natural realm. But Paul says that it is sown a natural body and raised a spiritual body. The Mormons teach that we start out as spirit babies floating bodiless in a spirit cloud and then we get physical bodies. But Paul writes (46) it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual.

There are people who want it all now, so they teach that you can have it all now. They are false teachers because there is clearly a lot more to come. You do not have your best life now. Your best life is yet to come and it comes after the resurrection. As to the timing of the resurrection Paul continues, "Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 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. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on

immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (1 Cor 15:51-54). And then in verse 58, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, THEN shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

All of that is to say that there is a lot more to come. As wonderful and indeed as glorious as life in Christ is now, it is only a foretaste of what is to come. The most important thing for us to know right now is in verse 58, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

Since we know what is to come we can work fearlessly, tirelessly, and with boldness for the Lord now. Since our glorious future is guaranteed, we can work for Jesus with confidence, knowing that our labor is not in vain.

Glorification then involves receiving resurrection bodies and realizing the inheritance that comes with being adopted as sons and daughters of God.

But glorification is even more than that. One of the most wonderful parts of glorification is that our sin nature will be removed! Imagine it. We will be the sinless people that God designed us to be. We will be able to stand in the presence of our Holy Lord without shame. We will spend eternity getting to know each other at our very best, and in fact at God's very best. How often have you wished that 'the real you' would shine without the taint of sin? How often have you longed for someone to really know you the way you know you can be? When

Jesus died at the cross He paid the price of redemption and He bore away the sins of all who believed, but when we are glorified we will be rid of our very sin nature. No more will we struggle against temptation. No longer will we battle against lust. Our desires will be pure so all our desires will be ours. Glory, glory, glory.

And then there is perhaps the most glorious part of all. That is that we will forever be in the very presence of our risen Lord. "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord" (1 Thes 4:16-17).

We will always be with the Lord! After Jesus was buried we read in John chapter 20 that Mary Magdalene stood weeping outside the tomb and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni" (from John 20:11-16).

I have long imagined how wonderful that moment had to be when Jesus sweetly called Mary by name and she understood that she was in the presence of the Lord who had defeated the grave. And all she could do was fall at His feet and cling to Him.

My friends, we who belong to Him will each have that moment, and more

than that, our moment with the Son will last forever. We will always be with the Lord! In Revelation 21 and 22 God gives the Apostle John a peek into the heaven of the future.

There John saw the glorified sinless children of God worshiping in the New Jerusalem that came down out of heaven from God. They eat from the tree of life and drink from the river of life. God dwells with them and He will wipe away every tear and there shall be no more death, nor mourning nor crying nor pain anymore.

And nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

And the glorified children of God worship God and the Lamb of God and we will see His face, and His name will be on our foreheads. And night will be no more. We will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be our light, and we will reign forever and ever.

Oh, I don't think we can imagine half the glory to come. Those whom God justified, He also glorified.

Even so, come Lord Jesus!

Chapter 6 - Faith

We have spent the last five chapters considering God's sovereign plan of redemption found in Romans 8:29-30. We learned that God foreknew and then predestined His elect or chosen people before the foundation of the world. God effectually called each of those people to faith in Christ and then justified them. Last week we looked at the last link in this golden chain which was glorification. Those whom God foreknew he also predestined, and those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

It is God's plan from before the beginning to after the end. God purposes and performs these things for His own good pleasure and He has every right to do so. He is the Creator. We are His creation. He is God. We are not.

I take tremendous comfort from the knowledge that my eternity is completely in God's hands because I know that if it were left up to me, I would mess it up for sure. If there was any way for people who have been made righteous in Christ to mess it up, we would. Those who think even for a moment that their continued salvation depends on them are kidding themselves. They also have not read Galatians. "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal 3:1-3).

So I am eternally grateful that God holds my future in His hands.

Nevertheless, one cannot read these verses in Romans 8 without wondering, “what about faith?” Since God has purposed and performed the saving of His own whom He chose before the foundation of the world, then what does faith have to do with it?

Fasten your seatbelts because what you read here is likely to challenge what you think about faith.

Most of us have been taught that the way it works is that first people believe the gospel and then God gives them eternal life. But I say that faith is something we gain during the process and not before. Read Hebrews chapter. We call it the 'hall of faith' because it is all about the heroic acts of faithful people in the Bibles. When you read it you will see that it is all about the works of obedience of saved people. In fact the Bible never celebrates the 'faith' of unsaved people. In the Bible, believers and saints are synonyms. Everyone who believes is saved and everyone who is saved believes. You don't believe as an unbeliever and then subsequently get saved. You believe because you are saved. As soon as you start to look at the Bible this way, many apparent conflicts will disappear.

What we have been taught about the role of faith in the salvation process gets us into trouble because it encourages us to believe that we merit God's grace on account of our faith. We want to be partners with God in the salvation process. And truth be told, we want to be the senior partner. We want to say, because I believed, God was obligated to give me eternal life.

As we have learned in Romans 8:29-30 however, that is not how it works at all. It is God who does the choosing, the predestining, the calling, the justifying and the glorifying. There is nothing we can possibly contribute to our own

salvation, yet we insist on thinking that we do contribute to it. And most people conclude that the way we contribute is by believing, by having faith. But as we have seen in our little study over the last several weeks, even our faith is a gift from God.

“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake” (Php 1:29).

Belief is granted to us by God as part of the salvation process. So is repentance. When Peter reported to the church in Jerusalem that the Holy Spirit had regenerated Cornelius, a gentile, Acts 11:18 says, “When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life'.”

God even grants repentance.

No matter how plain God makes it that salvation is not earned, we insist on finding a way to earn it. No matter how many ways God says that boasting is excluded, we boast. We look at the unbelieving world and think, well, they don't believe what God says about Jesus so they deserve to go to hell, while we are smart enough to believe God, so we deserve to go to heaven. The fact is that we all deserve to go to hell, but God sovereignly chooses to save some of us. And we just don't want to accept that. We need to change our point of view if we are to understand what faith is really about.

It is not easy to change your point of view, especially when it involves eating a big old slice of humble pie, so to help us get started I propose that we turn to that master theologian, Dr. Seuss.

In 1954 Dr. Seuss wrote a story called, “Horton Hears a Who.” The book tells

of Horton the Elephant who, on the fifteenth of May in the Jungle of Nool, hears a plea for help from a small speck of dust floating by in the air. It turns out the speck of dust is home to an entire city called Whoville, inhabited by microscopic critters known as Whos. The Whos ask Horton, who cannot see them although he can hear them (on account of his large elephant ears), to protect them from harm. Horton agrees, proclaiming that "a person's a person, no matter how small".

For the sake of illustration, please imagine that Horton represents God and the little bitty Whos in Whoville represent us. Imagine what it must be like to be that tiny, and helpless, and completely at the mercy of Horton the Elephant as well-meaning as he is.

Then consider that our entire planet compared to the universe is even smaller than a speck of dust compared to an elephant, and when you consider that God created the entire universe simply by speaking it into existence, you begin to get the idea. God is bigger than big. And the universe He made is amazingly huge. Even with our telescopes and our space probes and our scientists and our high opinion of ourselves, we have barely begun to explore it. And God created all of it with a word. He spoke and it came to be.

The Psalmist wrote, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" (Psalm 8:3-4).

Imagine being one of those little bitty Whos depending on Horton to protect them. If he drops their dust speck in the water they drown. If he shakes it they have earthquakes. If Horton was to get angry with the Whos they would be done for. They are completely at his mercy.

Jeremiah wrote, “But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation” (Jer 10:10).

If Horton drops a drop of water on Whoville, the Whos will have a global flood. If the other animals, who by the way are annoyed with Horton for believing in something they cannot see or hear, get their way and throw the speck of dust into the boiling 'beezlenut juice', Whoville will burn up and the Whos will be toast.

Peter wrote, “... the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and ... by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly” (2 Pet 3:5-7).

On that day “... the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness” (2 Pet 3:10-11).

If you imagine the power that Horton the Elephant, by virtue of his size, has over the Whos in Whoville, and then multiply it by infinity, you might begin to see the power of God over His creation. You might begin to see how small we are and how great God is. And we need to remember that God is great. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Pro 9:10).

So now, if you are feeling sufficiently small we can begin to consider God's greatest work - the justification of sinners by grace through faith in the

redemptive Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We talked a little bit about regeneration when we talked about being called. We must be born again. God makes us alive in Christ. If there is an actual single point in time when we become Christians, when we change from being lost to being saved, it is that point in time when God gives us new life because eternal life cannot be lost. It is the moment at which we are changed forever.

The Bible is not a cookbook and salvation is not the result of following a recipe. Nor can we make a list and tell someone, follow these twelve steps and you will be a Christian. You don't become a Christian by going to church. You sure don't become a Christian by having a member of the clergy dunk you in water. And you don't become a Christian by repeating a prayer.

A man asked Jesus what he must do to be saved. Jesus showed the man his heart problem by telling him to sell all his goods and give the money to the poor. The man went away sorrowful because he was rich.

And Jesus said, "'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.'

And the disciples were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, 'Then who can be saved?'

Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God'" (Mar 10:25-27).

What we need to do is stop saying, here is what you do, and start saying, here is what God has done. Our point of view needs to change.

Modern evangelicals have coined a phrase that captures our man-centered point of view. They say you must make a decision for Jesus. Think about that. This

phrase implies that lost, spiritually dead people simply decide to be Christians. It sounds like choosing lunch from a menu.

“Hmmm, hamburger, cheeseburger, steak, fish, chicken, oh I guess I'll have the fish.”

“Hmmm, Islam, Christianity, Mormon, Hindu, Buddhist, oh I guess I'll try the Christianity, please, but leave the guilt on the side.”

“OK, sir, would you like that in Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, or Methodist?”

“Oh, so many choices...., ummm, which one lets me play golf on Sunday?”

People act as if salvation is a matter of being given some information and making a decision. And I think that what is so appealing about that idea is that it implies there is nothing wrong with us - that we do not have sin natures that have corrupted our minds and hearts and souls and wills. It implies that a person who is spiritually dead is somehow capable of making a spiritual decision.

It also implies that we are in control, captains of our own destinies. We can choose something today and change our minds tomorrow. It implies that making a decision about religion is the same as making that decision about lunch.

“Oh today I think I'll try the chicken.”

“Oh today I think I'll try out that new mosque down the street.”

In the end, it turns salvation into an act of man and God's help is not required, thank you. But Jesus said, with man it is impossible.

Until you are changed by God you will treat your religion as simply that - your religion. But when the awesome, all powerful, living God gets a hold of you and changes you completely and makes you spiritually alive when you didn't even

know you were dead - when that happens you won't be looking at a menu and making a decision. You will be on your knees crying out in repentance and begging forgiveness.

This is why the militant Muslims cannot understand how Muslims who become Christians are willing to be tortured and killed rather than renounce Christ. Since Islam is a false religion, being a Muslim is simply a choice and they assume that being a Christian is simply a choice. Choosing a religion is like picking that menu item for lunch.

But to become a Christian is to be changed permanently by God. And someone who is permanently changed by God cannot become unchanged, even if they wanted to - which they won't. It is a God thing, not a man thing. It is a matter of the heart. It is not a matter of our will or our effort or our work or our desires. God speaks to our hearts and makes in us a new creation, just like He spoke into the great void and made the universe.

Faith comes from the changed heart. It is not an intellectual exercise.

“For with the heart one believes and is justified ...” (Rom 10:10).

“So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (Rom 9:16).

So what is this faith anyway? If it is not something that we as lost people work up in ourselves to earn salvation, then what is it? Here is my definition: Faith is the total awareness that everything God says is true.

And I think we receive that awareness at the moment that God brings us to life in Christ. And the mechanism that God uses to create that awareness is the power in the hearing of the gospel.

Now those of you have read the rest of this paper know that God chooses His own before the foundation of the world. So here is a radical thought that I believe will help you understand this whole thing. God does not use the gospel to decide who is in Christ and who is not. God uses the gospel to bring His elect to awareness of His truth so that THEY will know they are in Christ. GOD ALREADY KNOWS!!!

Why do we evangelize? Not to persuade people to believe, but to be there to instruct the newborns who respond to the gospel! When the elect hear the gospel the Holy Spirit awakens them from the dead. He quickens their spirits. He gives them faith in their hearts. He seals them and dwells in them and we who are already changed need to be there to explain what God just did for them.

Paul wrote to Timothy, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, ... as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim 2:8-10).

The ISV correctly translates Matthew 28:19 as "Therefore, as you go, disciple " as opposed to the usual English translations that say, "Therefore, go, and make disciples.." (NIV for example).

We are to disciple or teach everything that Jesus taught. We don't 'make' disciples. We disciple those whom God has made alive in Christ. The Holy Spirit through the power of the gospel, brings the elect to life and our job is to be there to disciple them.

Do you see what is wrong with the model we have been taught? You don't

work up faith and present it to God like a coupon to be redeemed. Having faith does not save you. Having faith means that God has saved you. We don't examine ourselves to see if we believe! We examine ourselves to see if Christ is in us, and then we know we stand in the faith.

What is faith? Faith is having the certainty that God is true no matter what the whole world says, and then living accordingly. And that faith is a gift that we receive at our new birth.

The Bible separates people into two groups. Believers and unbelievers, saved and unsaved, those who have the Spirit of Christ and those who do not, those who have the Son of God and those who don't.

The difference is that believers believe and unbelievers do not. So, if faith is a prerequisite to being saved then there must be a period of time when unbelievers have faith without being a believer. Does that make sense? Obviously not, and it is our point of view that creates these conflicts. As soon as you start to see faith as a gift that God gives as part of the new birth in the salvation process the conflicts vanish.

Our faith is not what we use to convince God to save us. Our faith is there to convince US that God has saved us.

Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me HAS eternal life" (John 5:24) and He said, "Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God" (John 8:47).

So you have to be "of God" to hear and believe the words of Christ. Notice you must *already* be of God to believe. So faith is not something we work up by

our own power so that we can cash it in on salvation. God grants us belief so that WE know we have life in His Son and so that He can justify us and still be just.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:8-10). Faith is what we practice after coming to life in Christ, not before. When you understand that, you will understand why we have nothing to boast about.

It is all part of God's sovereign plan of redemption. Thanks be to God.