

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

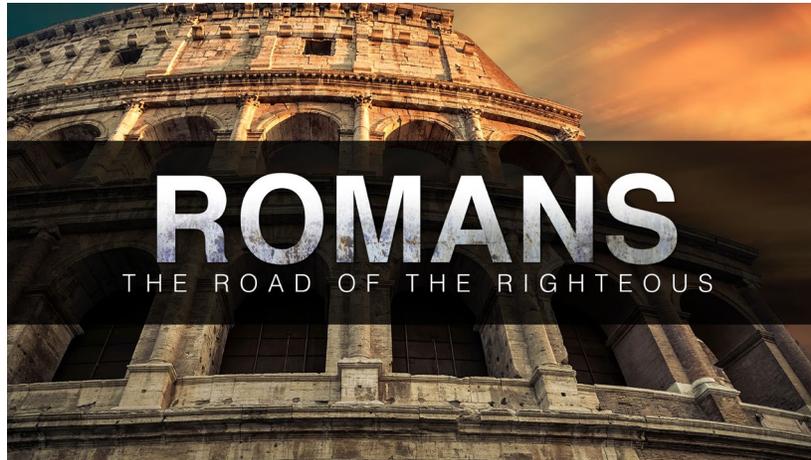
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 8:28-30

Written By

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While attending Dallas Theological Seminary from 1981 to 1985, I worked for the commercial division of Allied Van Lines. Believe me, I think I've been in many of the skyscrapers in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

Of all of the commercial moves we did, I'll never forget the day they hired a bunch of us seminary students to move a bank. Why did they hire us? Because we were responsible for moving the safe deposit boxes and vault contents to the new high rise bank located just next door.

My boss for this interesting and heavy job put me on the safe deposit box team. Our job was simple: unbolt the various sections of the steel boxes, which were still full of valuables, and use hydraulic lifts to move them up a small hill to their new home. To make sure we would be safe throughout the day, tall Texas police officers, with shotguns and gun belts, lined the way of our movement.

Do you think we lost any content of those locked up safe deposit boxes that day? No. They could not have been more secure. First, seminary students were not about to steal anything, even though they probably needed money for tuition . . . we all understood the eighth Mosaic commandment, "You must not steal" (Ex. 20:15). Second, who would dare try and take on linemen-sized police officers, sporting heavy weaponry?

Our salvation is, in many respects, like the safe deposit boxes we moved. It is so secure, so locked up tight, so guarded by the promises and character of God, there is no way your daily battle with the world, the flesh, and the Devil will ever assail it to the point of destroying it. This can, and will, never happen. How do I know this? Because of what Paul teaches in Romans 8:28-30. Mark well the apostle's wrap up counsel in this argument he introduced starting in verse 18:

²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; ³⁰ and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified (Rom. 8).

From this inspired passage Paul gives us a main motif we must restate:

Stay Hopeful In The Fight With The Flesh (Rom. 8:18-30)

True, the battle with the flesh certainly has its moments, as Paul detailed in chapter 7; however, we should never forget his teaching concerning all the reasons why we should remain hopeful in this life:

- Reason #1: Trials Lead To Triumph (Rom. 8:18).
- Reason #2: Cosmic Degradation Leads To Cosmic Transformation (Rom. 8:19-22).
- Reason #3: Personal Consternation Leads to Personal Transformation (Rom. 8:23-25).
- Reason #4: Your Praying Is Buttressed By His Praying (Rom. 8:26-27).
- Reason #5: Providence Always Provides Positive Provision (Rom. 8:28).

To these wonderful, uplifting concepts and reasons, we add a sixth.

Reason #6: Providence Has A Particular Redemptive Purpose (Rom. 8:28-30).

Before we dig into the theological meat of this passage, permit me to make a few foundational observations.

First, this is one of the most theologically complex pericopes in Paul's writings. In three short verses he introduces us to five intriguing and comforting doctrines: Divine foreknowledge, predestination, election, justification, and glorification. If you feel like you just jumped into the deep end of a deep diving pool, you are correct.

Second, the propensity of Bible students is to so drill down so deep into these lofty, mysterious, and exciting doctrines they completely forget, or miss, the major spiritual application intended by Paul (been there, done that). I say this to counsel you not to get so tied up in the theological enigmas and paradoxes of this passage that you, too, fail to apply Paul's central point of this intricate theology to your life.

So what is Paul's main pragmatic thrust and here, without getting too ahead of him? Here it is: *God's providence so forms the basis of our salvation that it is like a locked up, impregnable safe deposit box in a heavily guarded bank. Ostensibly, this means since our salvation is providentially secure, we have but one main duty: to live like our Savior each and every day.* The fact of this divinely ordered and providentially sustained salvation should, by definition, breed inexorable hope in our lives. How so? No matter how hard the spiritual battle, no matter how fierce the sinful foe, Jesus will not lose one of His saints the battlefield (John 10:28-29). They are summoned to fight the good fight all the way to

the end (2 Tim. 4:7), but no soldier should ever fear God's purposes to redeem him/her could ever be thwarted. If God's providential program to save could be circumvented, then God is not God for these very verses demonstrate the iron-clad nature of said redemption. Simply put, if God purposes to save, His purposes can and will stand.

The Presence of Divine Purpose (Rom. 8:28c). Life is not a haphazard arrangement of unrelated, chance-oriented events, nor are we, as God's children, free to live as we want until He calls us home. Divine providential purpose is the bedrock of our daily lives, as Paul articulates:

²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. (Rom. 8:28 NAS)

“Work together” here is from the Greek *sunergeo* (συνεργέω), from which we get our word synergy. According to Dictionary.com, the word means, “the interaction of elements that when combined produce a total effect that is greater than the sum of the individual elements.”¹ Think of epoxy glue. A tube contains one spout but two channels feeding this spout. One channel contains epoxy resin, while the other contains a hardener. When combined the epoxy become a glue of all glues. This is synergy. Applied to life and our spiritual walk the message is clear: God, who is providential, will take all of the events of your life and synergistically combine them to produce something intrinsically good and spiritually jaw-dropping.

This divine providential purpose is directed, as Paul teaches, toward God's children, whom he identifies as those who love God (1 John 4:16, 19; 2 John 1:6). If you are a believer, you cannot help but love the One who first loved you and gave His only begotten Son to be your sin-sacrifice (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). And just how did you become God's child? He called you. How did God call you? First, He called you, as He does, all people, with a general call, “*Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*” (Matt. 11:28). Some hear the call and disregard it. Others, who are destined for salvation, hear the call and respond to the inner, effectual call of the Spirit. We see this dynamic in John 1:

¹¹ He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, ¹³ who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (Jn. 1).

Verse 11 covers the general call of God, while verses 12 through 13 speak of the internal call, the tugging of the Spirit of God on your heart and mind which convinces you of your sin and need of the Savior (John 16:8-10). If you are not a follower of Christ right now, you probably now understand what is happening to you as you sit through sermons like this. You are either offended and/or bothered by the absolutist teaching about the gospel which saves, not to mention the concept that you are a sinner (Rom. 3), or you will walk out of here unconvinced you need to make a faith decision. On the contrary, there are those who know, right now, that God is speaking loudly and clearly to you . . . and you know it.

When you, by faith, trust Christ as your Savior (John 5:24-25), never forget that the same providence which guided you to the Savior is the same providence which tells you He has a definite purpose for your life. No longer is your life about you, your hopes, and your dreams. Now your life should be focused like a laser beam on God's providential purpose for you. Paul is clear

¹“Synergy, *Dictionary.com*, accessed Mach 21, 2019, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/synergy>.

on this point. He who has called you has called you to His purpose, not yours. The Greek is *prothesis* (πρόθεσιν), which is the word denoting the showbread of the table of showbread in the Tabernacle (Heb. 9:2, Σκηνὴ γὰρ κατασκευάσθη ἡ πρώτη, ἐν ἣ ἦ τε λυχνία καὶ ἡ τράπεζα καὶ ἡ πρόθεσις τῶν ἄρτων, ἥτις λέγεται ἄγια), speaks of something which has a definite plan or design. Hence, as the showbread of twelve loaves on the table in the Tabernacle demonstrated God's provision for twelve tribes, our lives are redeemed by God for a similar expressive purpose. Paul identifies this purpose in the next section of His argument.

The Plan of Divine Purpose (Rom. 8:29-30). Studying this plan is like dropping, in a figurative fashion, into the extreme 35,362 foot depths of the Mariana Trench located in the western Pacific off of Guam. Descending into the depths of the Mariana Trench would crush you because water pressure is 8 tons per square inch, which is 1,000 more times the pressure at sea level. It's also like having 50 jumbo jets dropped onto your chest.² That's what Paul's teaching may intellectually feel like here, but, please, do not be dismay for the Spirit of God, who is your teacher (John 14:26), will make sure you understand what He wants you to so you can move onto applying the purpose of your salvation to your life.

Speaking about the providential nature of our divine calling from a process perspective, Paul makes this powerful, mind-numbing statement:

²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;³⁰ and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified (Rom. 8).

Scholars typically call these verbal concepts the links in the golden chain of salvation, and rightly so. In two verses, Paul skims quickly over five complex and somewhat perplexing doctrines: the doctrine of God's foreknowledge, the doctrine of predestination, the doctrine of election, the doctrine of justification, and the doctrine of glorification. From our perspective, it appears that each doctrine logically follows the one before it. Let's consider them in the order Paul presented them. Let us also say there is no way we can effectively and exhaustively plumb the depths of each one, nor can we explain all of paradoxes they present to us either.

First, at the end of the day, we must bow with Moses who said,

²⁹ The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law. (Deut. 29).

Finite, limited thinking must humble itself before infinite, unlimited thinking which belongs to God. He has revealed much to us in this life through the Word; however, there is much He has not revealed to us, nor has He explained everything to us so all of our questions are answered. For instance, He tells us the Devil is real and that man sinned in the Garden of Eden, but we do know learn where sin and evil actually came from, our how it came about.

Honest, probing minds, seeking to understand these various deep doctrines will always terminate in the words of Moses. God has secrets and He has not disclosed the answers to those

²Becky Oskin, "Mariana Trench: The Deepest Depths," *Livescience.com*, accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.livescience.com/23387-mariana-trench.html>.

secrets to us . . . and He many never do so. So, we bow in humility before the God of secrets as we touch upon these theological concepts forming the flow of salvation.

Second, we also recognize that His thinking is always far beyond ours. We could have the IQ of Terene Tao (225-230), or Marilyn Vos Savant (228), or Kim Ung-Yong (210), and still be intellectual pigmies before the God who said through Isaiah's pen:

⁸ For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. ⁹ For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55).

God's IQ is not even calculable, so why do we think we can ever completely understand Him and His ways? At the National Apologetics Conference, Liz and I attended a class on the molecular structure of DNA and how this intricate complexity points to a personal designer. About twenty minutes into the class, neither one of us knew what this human scientist was even talking about. How can I, or you, ever think we can FINALLY nail down all the answers to the depths of these wonderful but fathomless doctrines? The point is we won't, and it surely won't happen in the next few minutes. This, of course, does not mean God can't and won't give us some much needed insight so our hope is strengthened as we head toward our heavenly home.

Third, we cannot escape the limitations of our three spatial dimensions of length, width, and height (or depth), nor the fourth non-spatial dimension we call time. God created this dimensional world, but His dimension is most certainly beyond anything we can wrap our minds around. What would a 300 dimension world be like, or a 1,000 dimension one? Even an eight dimension world would not compute in our limited three dimensional world. Hence, when God says He gives us free will on the one hand, but elects and chooses who shall be saved on the other, both are true from His dimensionality, even though they seem to be logically incongruent in our minds. I don't know about you, but I try and keep all these points in minds as I dive into these particular doctrinal waters. So, come with me.

When Paul says that God "foreknew" believers, he used the Greek word *proegno* (προέγνω), which is made emphatic by wedding the preposition *pro* (προ) to the verb *to know* (γινώσκω). Here are how three Greek lexicons define the word:

Fri] **προγινώσκω** 2aor. προέγνω; (1) *know* something *beforehand* or *in advance* (2P 3:17); (2) *know* someone *previously* (AC 26:5); (3) *select in advance, choose* or *appoint beforehand* (RO 8:29)

Gingrich, *Greek NT Lexicon (GIN)*

[GING] **προγινώσκω**

προγινώσκω *know beforehand* or *in advance, have foreknowledge (of)* 1 Pt 1:20; 2 Pt 3:17. *Choose beforehand* Ro 8:29; 11:2. *Know from time past* Ac 26:5.* [pg 167]

Danker, *Greek NT Lexicon (DAN)*

[DANK] **προγινώσκω**

προγινώσκω [πρό, γινώσκω] – 1. 'know before about a matter of moment' – a. through personal familiarity, **be previously acquainted with** Ac 26:5. – b. through

previous receipt of information, **already know about** 2 Pt 3:17. – 2. ‘have in mind as part of a long-standing plan’, **have plans for, know before**, a deeply embedded Hebraic perception 1 Pt 1:20; in Ro 8:29; 11:2, Isaiah 46:8-13 is the matrix for Paul’s use of π . expressing selection of God’s people with purposeful intent for them that awaits certain fulfillment.³

The concept here seems to be that God, who is omniscient, looked down the halls of time, as only He can, and knew who would and would not place their faith in His Son as their Savior. Based on that knowledge, He, then, chose these people to be saved. This seems to be the same meaning when Peter employs the same word in 1 Peter 1:

¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure (1 Pet. 1).

1 Peter 1:2 κατὰ πρόγνωσιν θεοῦ πατρὸς ἐν ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος εἰς ὑπακοὴν καὶ ῥαντισμὸν αἵματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη πληθυνθείη (1 Pet. 1:2 BGT).

Peter appears to say these saints were chosen to be saints by God’s prior knowledge of them, and possibly their faith.

The view is not without issues. Grudem suggests that God didn’t know facts about people, like whether they would have faith or not, but he merely “thought of certain people in a saving relationship to himself, and in that sense he ‘knew them’ long ago.”⁴ He goes on to argue that God electing people to be saved on faith, which He saw in them from His vantage point, would be the start of salvation by works. I don’t agree because faith in Jesus is never presented, especially in John’s gospel, as a work. It’s an event (John 1:7, 12; 3:18; 4:21; 5:38; 8:24, 30, et al.).

It also leads to a number of thorny questions. If God knew who would be saved and who wouldn’t, then why did He create people who wouldn’t come to know Him? Further, does His foreknowledge mean we don’t have a freewill to come to know Him? From His perspective, He knows who His children are (and will be), but from our perspective, we don’t know who will accept or reject His Son, Jesus, as the Savior. Hence, all we can say is there is a theological tension in this regard, and it is showcased in the Bible. Dr. Luke’s words in Acts are a case in point:

²² Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- ²³ this *Man*, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death (Acts 2).

On one hand, God’s foreknowledge knew His Son would be crucified. On the other hand, we see that the people who nailed Jesus on the cross were, from God’s perspective, quite responsible for their actions of unbelief. On one level, God’s redemptive will, based on His perfect knowledge,

³Bible Works, Version 10.0.8.710.

⁴Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 286.

worked behind the scenes of Christ's life. On another level, wicked mankind willfully rejected the person and miracles of Christ and opted to purposefully murder Him. According to God, they would be held accountable for their willful action, even though He knew about it prior. Because we cannot fully understand how God's foreknowledge and our freewill operates doesn't mean it is not operating. We just have limited understanding of what He says is true. Hence, He foresees and somehow chooses certain ones to be saved.

Predestination, then, logically follows divine foreknowledge.

²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; (Rom. 8).

The Greek word here is *proorisen* (προορίζω), and it speaks of planning a destiny beforehand.⁵ Christ's death was predestined or planned before the cosmos was created (Acts 4:28; 1 Cor. 2:7ff; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). Likewise, from God's perspective outside of time and space, He knew who would be saved and He marked them off at that time as His children. Paul develops this very point in Ephesians 1:

⁴ just 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 to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (Eph. 1).

Concerning this mysterious divine activity, Charles Spurgeon once wrote:

That God predestines, and that man is responsible are two things that few can see. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory; but they are not. It is just the fault of our weak judgment. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one place that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and if I find in another place that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other. These two truths, I do not believe, can ever be welded into one upon any human anvil, but one they shall be in eternity: they are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the mind that shall pursue them farthest, will never discover that they converge; but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring.⁶

I couldn't agree more, although I possess many cognitive limitations on the how and why of God's mystery of predestination.

In verse 30, of Romans 8, Paul teaches us that the calling or election of God logically follows His foreknowledge and His predestination of His sons and daughters.

³⁰ and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Rom. 8).

⁵Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986), 312.

⁶Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "Sovereign Grace and Man's Responsibility" (sermon 207), *New Park Street Pulpit* 4 (August 1, 1858):337, www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0207.htm.

Those He knows will be saved are those He predestines to be saved, and He they, as sinners, receive His inward call when He draws them unto Himself (2 Tim. 1:9), as He must for them to be saved (John 6:37-44). When they embrace His call to believe in His Son, they, *ipso facto*, demonstrate they were/are called and chosen of God. This is called the doctrine of election.

Does this calling, this choosing by God mean He is unfair, after all He doesn't chose everyone to be with Him in heaven. What would fair be? Fair, from God's perspective, would mean He didn't have to choose one person to be in heaven after man fell in the Garden. Since He is absolutely holy, and man is not, fair would have meant He should have barred all of us from heaven. The fact He has chosen some to be with Him in eternity is an act of pure grace and mercy. How quick we are to condemn God.

Does this mean since He has willed some to be in heaven that He has decreed everyone else is bound for hell? The concept of what is called double-predestination is not taught anywhere in the Bible. This is a mystery in Scripture, and one that no man can adequately explain. What we do know is that all mankind is responsible for what He does with the gospel of Jesus. Will you believe it, or will you reject it? If you believe it, you reveal you are one of His chosen ones. If you reject it, you willfully demonstrate that the divine wrath which will fall upon you in eternity is your choice. As we read from the lips of Jesus:

⁴³Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. ⁴⁴You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. ⁴⁵But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. ⁴⁶Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? ⁴⁷He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God (Jn. 8).

The unbelieving Jews were responsible for their unbelief, pure and simple, and as Paul says in Romans 1:20, they were "without excuse." Election, therefore, rests with God, but somehow in the divine scheme of things, man's willful rejection of Jesus, while portrayed as destined activity (1 Pet. 2:8; Jude 4), is sinful man's responsibility before the holy God who created Him.

The calling, or election of God, is naturally followed by the concept of justification, whereby God declares the repentant sinner righteous in His holy courtroom. And, in Paul's mind, one who is foreknown, predestined, called, and justified is as good as glorified. Interestingly enough, Paul employs the past tense (aorist) here for this verb. Even though he is speaking about the eschatological future when we, as saints, will be transformed into the very likeness of Christ, Paul sees it as a done deal. It is as if it has already happened. It's as if our bodies have already been glorified, or minds have been changed to be like that of Jesus, and we shine as the stars of the heavens.

What assurance this redemptive plan gives to all those who are saved. Your salvation is locked up in God, and nothing will ever take it away from you. Not even the ups and downs of fighting the world, the flesh, and the Devil will ever assail it to the point of destroying it altogether. If this providential salvation doesn't give you hope in this life, I don't know what else will. We should be full of hope, despite the evil which surrounds us and the sin which still resides in our flesh.

In light of all of this rich theological truth, what is the real import of the passage? What difference should it make on my life? This coveted answer is written upon the parchment of verse 29. I call it . . .

The Plan's Purpose (Rom. 8:29). First let's read the text one more time:

²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; (Rom. 8).

Key here is this short Greek phrase, which contains two words you know well:

συνμόρφους τῆς **εἰκόνας** τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, (Rom. 8:29 BGT)

Summorphous, the first word, means to radically change from one form into another, or to have the same nature as something else. The second highlighted word is icon, which, in Greek, means the mirror image of something. Hence, a coin dye merely produces a coins which look like each other. Applied to our relationship to Jesus, our redeemer, all of this means only one thing: The providential provision for our salvation should constantly move us to morph each day into the character of our Savior. We should make Him our lifelong study, seeking to isolate His holy character and then working to make that character our own.

What was He like?

- Compassion consumed Him. (Matt. 9:36).
Where truth was concerned He was fearless (Matt. 12).
- He was the quintessential a servant of servants (Mark 10:45).
- Prayed for others served as His ministry foundation (John 17).
- Ethnic groups had a great place in His heart (John 4).
- When wronged He didn't retaliate (Matt. 26:63).
- He didn't coddle sinners or diminish sin (Matt. 5-7).
- He was a man who . . . well . . . you can fill in the blank.

God doesn't want you to get bogged down in the deep theology of verses 29-30 which no man can ever completely figure out. No, what He wants is for you to work hard each day at letting the Spirit form you into the character of Christ. Morphing. It's what the faith is all about.