

God's Unbreakable Chain of Salvation

Romans 8:29-30

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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. ³⁰ 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, ESV

For Andrew's tenth birthday, he and I took an overnight trip to New York City and, while we were there, we saw the Statue of Liberty. Now suppose I stood up and told you about a group of people on a trip to the Statue of Liberty like this:

- Those who had tickets got on the bus.
- Those who got on the bus took their seats.
- Those who took their seats arrived safely in New York City and got off the bus.
- Those who got off the bus then got onto the ferry boat and rode out to the Statue of Liberty.
- Those who rode out the Statue of Liberty got off the ferry and saw the Statue and were amazed.

What could you then safely conclude about those who had tickets? Did they all get to see the Statue of Liberty?

How do we gain true assurance? Real confidence?

How can our confidence stand strong in the face of difficulty, hardship, struggle and battle?

Paul has been building assurance and confidence against every obstacle and objection in Romans 8 in several different ways.

Against the reality of our ongoing struggles against sin, which Paul clearly confessed and displayed in Romans 7, he brings the good news proclamation: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1)

Against the power of the flesh, Paul brings the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who lives in and leads believers through this life.

Against our suffering – both our suffering for Christ and our general suffering – Paul brings assurance that the coming glory to be revealed to us will far surpass any suffering we endure in this life.

Against our weakness, Paul brings the help of the Holy Spirit.

Against our inability to pray, Paul brings the intercession of the Holy Spirit.

Against our fear of the circumstances and trials of life, Paul brings the assurance that “for those who love God, all things work together for good.”

Ah, yes, but all of these assurances have been brought for those who love God, for those who belong to Christ, for those who have the Spirit, for the adopted children of God.

And this is when doubt rears its ugly head and threatens to sweep the whole mounting case of assurance out the door . . . How do we know if our faith is truly saving faith? How do we know if we love God enough? How do we know if we really have the Spirit? What about those times when our faith falters and our love fails? What then?

At the end of verse 28, Paul began to bring assurance to counter our doubts, when he said that those who love God are “those who are called according to His purpose.” Now, to make our assurance and encouragement in the face of doubt even clearer and stronger, Paul clarifies exactly what he means by “called according to His purpose.” Using five terms, linked together in an unbreakable chain, Paul offers us one of the strongest pictures of our salvation and God’s purposes found anywhere in Scripture.

Now, let’s go back to my opening story about the people going to the Statue of Liberty. The chain of events means that all those who have tickets ended up at the Statue. But the fact that their having tickets comes first in the chain means that this is the real cause of their being able to end up at the Statue, right? All those with tickets ended up at the Statue because they had tickets.

I. Eternity Past

Paul begins his chain of salvation way back in eternity past. Foreknew and Predestined are terms that indicate what God did for our salvation before we were born – in fact, before the world was created. Before the beginning when God said, “Let there be . . .” He foreknew and predestined those who would later be called and justified.

a. Foreknown

So what does Paul mean when he says “those whom he foreknew”? What does it mean that God foreknew us?

Well, we should know first that it’s not just Paul who uses this term and teaches this truth. Peter opens his first letter, 1 Peter, with these words:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: - 1 Peter 1:1-2, ESV

So, Peter says we are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, which is similar to what Paul says when he says “those whom he foreknew he also predestined.”

So what is this “foreknew” or the “foreknowledge of God the Father”?

Two views have been put forward about what this term means:

1. God foreknows in the sense of fore-sees. God looks into time from eternity past and sees who will come to faith in Jesus Christ, and then predestines or chooses us based on that fore-knowledge (in the sense of fore-sight). Is this what Paul and Peter mean? Well, on the surface of it, it presents a problem: If God chooses based on what He sees is going to happen, then why does He need to choose? In other words, what would be the point of God electing or predestining those who were going to choose Him anyway? But also, this verse doesn't say that God foreknew something about us but that He foreknew us, that He knew us ahead of time.
2. The second interpretation focuses more on what the Bible means when it says that God knows someone. For example . . .
 - a. Consider what God says about Abraham in Genesis 18:19: *“For I have known him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”* What does God mean? That He knows who Abraham is? Doesn't God know who everyone is? What is the significance of knowing that He has known Abraham?
 - b. Or consider what God said to the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:5: *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”* Does God mean that He knew who Jeremiah was or that He set Him apart and chose him? Here we're helped by Hebrew parallelism: “Before you were born I consecrated you” means the same thing as “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.”
 - c. Or how about what Jesus says in John 10:14: “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.”

What we can see from these and other examples is that for God to know someone is for Him to love them and even to choose them in love. Put simply, to “know” someone in this Biblical sense is to intimately love them.

Now think about what Paul and Peter are both saying: If you belong to God through faith in Jesus Christ, God loved you personally and intimately before He ever created the world. Before He said, “Let there be light,” He knew you- He loved you, intimately and personally, as His own. Based on His love for you before the foundation of the world, He predestined you . . .

b. Predestined

So what does it mean that God “predestined” us? To “predestine” means literally to mark out ahead of time.

I was born in Oklahoma City. What’s the mascot of the University of Oklahoma? The Sooners! Why? At high noon on April 22, 1889, the Oklahoma territory was officially opened for settlement. At the firing of a gunshot, people rushed out to settle the land, but some people had gone out ahead of time, “sooner” than they were supposed to. Thus, the best pieces of land in Oklahoma were selected in advance, marked out ahead of time, by the Sooners. (Yes, I was indeed born in a state that celebrates cheaters.)

To say God predestined those whom He called is kind of another way of saying that He called “according to His purpose.” He marked us out ahead of time and then He called us to Himself.

What did God mark us out ahead of time for? The Sooners marked out ahead of time the land they wanted to settle and own. Romans 8:29 says that God marked us out ahead of time “to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

Think about that: Not only did the God of the universe love you before He created the world, but He also marked you out before the creation of the world to look like His perfect Son, to be the younger brother or sister to the eternal Son of God. And then, having marked us out ahead of time to be conformed to the image of His Son, God called us to Himself.

II. In Our Lives

And at the point of calling is where we leave eternity past and enter into the timeline of our lives. We come to know Jesus Christ – to love Him as our Lord and Savior – in response to God’s call.

a. Called

Those whom He called. Called to be what?

This is how Paul addressed the believers in Rome at the beginning of his letter, back in chapter I, verse 7: **“To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (ESV)

It’s also how Paul addresses believer in Corinth at the opening of I Corinthians, “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, **called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**, both their Lord and ours.” (1:2, ESV)

Here Paul says that all those in every place who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ are called to be saints. Literally, it means, we are called to be “holy ones” or we’re called to look like Jesus, to be conformed to His image. The same thing God marked us out for ahead of time is the same thing He has called us to, all according to His purpose.

How do we know if we’re called or not? That’s a very important question. If we’re loved by God before time began and if we’re marked out for Christ-likeness before the world was created, then we’re called. Or, to put it in reverse, we can have assurance that we’ve been foreknown and predestined if we know we’re called. So, how do we know if we’re called or not?

Well, Paul gave us one key indication last week: Those who love God are those who are called. But lots of people in the world claim to love God who aren’t believers, who don’t have Christ. So, how can we know if we’re called?

Let’s turn to I Corinthians 1:18-25 for the answer:

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

*“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”*

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach^[b] to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (ESV)

“To us who are being saved” the word of the cross is the power of God. “To those who are called” Christ is “the power of God and the wisdom of God.” So it’s simple: If you hear the

message of the cross: That the Son of God, Jesus Christ, died on the cross to redeem us from our sins, and the response of your heart is “Yes! That’s true. That’s salvation. That’s the power of God to redeem lost sinners!” then you are being saved and you are called.

Or consider how Jesus Himself spoke of being called in John 10:27-29, “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.*” (ESV)

Do you see that Jesus is teaching the same truth as Paul? Jesus knows His sheep. He loves them. God the Father has given the sheep to Jesus, the Good Shepherd. He’s marked them out ahead of time as belonging to Jesus. Jesus calls us and we hear His voice and follow Him.

b. Justified

Having called us, God then justified us. To be justified is to be declared “not guilty” to be cleared of all charges, released of all condemnation due to us for our sins. Remember how Romans 8 begins, “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” Having been called to Christ through the message of the cross and having come to Christ as our Savior and Lord, we receive forgiveness, freedom from condemnation.

III. Eternity Future

And now we come to the most amazing, unexpected link in this unbreakable chain. Paul takes us from the timeline of our lives in this world, where we are called and justified and takes us into eternity future, where we will be glorified.

a. Glorified

Paul has already spoken of our glorification in verse 18, “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*” He spoke of it again in verse 23, “*And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*” But this time, in verse 30, is very different.

In verse 18 and in verse 23, Paul spoke of our glorification as being yet future – something “to be revealed” and something for which “we wait eagerly.” Now, however, he says, “Those whom he justified he also glorified.”

b. An Accomplished Reality

Paul refers to our glorification as an accomplished reality. How can He do this when were still eagerly waiting for it? Because God has already predestined us for this; He's already marked us out for this destiny. It is the purpose of God and thus it is already accomplished in the mind of God.

Go back to what Jesus said in John 10:27-29, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”* (ESV)

These verses do indeed describe God's unbreakable chain of salvation. It is unbreakable because it has been forged by the purposes of God and it held together by the determination of God. No one and nothing is stronger than God and thus eternal life and our full glorification are finished and accomplished realities, though we are waiting for them to be revealed to us.

The Bible gives us great confidence in the full effect of the finished work of Christ for us:

Hebrews 10:12-14: “when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” (ESV)

1 John 3:1-3: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears^{3a} we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.” (ESV)

Application

God's unbreakable chain of salvation Foreknown – Predestined – Called – Justified – Glorified. Paul wrote this to the Romans to give them comfort, encouragement and hope in the midst of suffering and struggle. God wants us to get the same benefit. This is comfort, encouragement and hope for all who belong to Jesus Christ- to all who hear His voice, to all who believe in the message of His cross, to all who love Him because He has first loved us, to all who have been called and who have fled to Jesus for salvation and eternal life that He alone can give.

If you don't have this hope, this encouragement, this comfort, there's only one thing for you to do: Look to Jesus. Turn to Jesus. Call out to Jesus.

In Romans 10, Paul puts it this way:

if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (10:9-13, ESV)