

God's Unbreakable Chain

The First Link

Romans 8:29-30

January 24th, 2010



In the last message, we shared that Romans 8:29-30 gives the *why* of the *what*, for the *who*. It teaches that "*all things work together for good.*" If you think it through logically and you are a person who loves God and has been called according to His purpose, then there is nothing that can ever happen in your life that could ultimately cause your life to turn out bad. Bad would be to not spend eternity with God in Heaven. Isn't it comforting to know that every suffering I find myself in, nothing can happen to me to ever cause me to be separated from Christ? This is teaching about God's security. The foundation of that truth is in the five actions of God that we covered in the last message, which is clearly and simply presented in this passage. We are going to look at the first link in God's unbreakable chain.

Scripture

"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."

Who is God?

Before we get into the first link, let's remember who the He is. It is clear from verse 28 that "He" is none other than God Himself. So God is the actor of the five actions in verses 29-30. Now, who is God?



Holy, Holy, Holy

At the very core being of who God is, there is only one description about Him in Scripture that has ever been elevated to the third superlative. In the Old and the New Testament, God is holy, holy, holy. In Isaiah 6:3, the seraphim say:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

In Revelation 4:8, the four living creatures, as they minister day and night in the presence of the eternal God, say:

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

I do not know if Isaiah ever got over the vision of the Lord high and lifted up. I don't think he did because in Isaiah 57:15 it says:

"For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

Look at Exodus 15:11:

"Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"

In Isaiah 55:8-9, God is giving a reason for the action He is doing toward the nation of Israel:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

God gives a defense for why He is going to do what He does in Hosea 11:9:

"I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath."

- **Light**

1 John 1:5 tells us that God is light. It teaches that He is a God of revelation. He is a God who wants to be known, and has made Himself known. All we can know and believe about Him is what He has revealed to us. Our God must not be a figment of our imagination; He must be the holy, holy, holy God of the Bible. Because He is holy, holy, holy, He is the wholly other One.

- **Transcendent and Imminent**

There are two things to remember about God. First, He is transcendent. He is above and beyond creation, meaning He is beyond and above space and time. He is also imminent, meaning He is also in space and time. We have to comprehend that. God is beyond and in space and time at the same time, wow! Therefore, do not be surprised when Scripture presents a divine side of salvation that is beyond time, and a human side that is completely in time. If you do not get this, you will do some weird things with the Bible. On the divine side, it is done, absolutely done. It is determined, it is fixed. But catch this, on the human side, it is still going on, it is still real. The choices we make are real and have eternal consequences to us. You cannot ever forget that Scripture presents a divine side and a human side of salvation. You need to remember this: **The divine side of salvation never negates, minimizes, or trivializes the**

human side of salvation. So, the Actor in the five actions is not like us. He is beyond us, yet He is near us. He is holy, holy, holy.

You know, sometimes on the farm I put my boots on to do a job. I put my rubber boots on when I am going to wade through something that I don't want to get on me. What gets on the rubber boots is easily washed off when you are through. As your pastor, I want to make sure you understand this metaphor. When I approached this passage, I did not put my rubber boots on. I have waded through so much literature and I did not have my boots on, I even took my socks off! I wanted to get it all over me, even what people who do not agree with me believe. I didn't just want to know what someone was saying so I could easily wash off what they believe and prove them wrong, I really want to know the truth.

There are a lot of opinions in the Church that are different from what I teach. I will always be respectful to what others in the Church hold to be true. I hope that we can have the same spirit that John Wesley and George Whitfield had. These two men go down in Church history as among the greatest. They were contemporaries with opposite views of this verse and the doctrine of salvation. Yet, they agreed on the fact that no one will be saved until they hear the gospel and put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Even though they may disagree on some other things, those two guys never let anything divide them in their fellowship and friendship towards another. They kept an open relationship toward each other throughout their whole lives, and sought what God was teaching. They never came to an agreement, but it was never divisive in their hearts and lives. I pray that will be the attitude we have toward each other if you disagree with this teaching. But I must say that I cannot see Romans 8:29-30 in any other way than it telling us why we are eternally secure. There is a cause and effect relationship in these actions of God. We are going to look at the first cause of why we are eternally secure.

The First Cause of our Security: Foreknew

In verse 28, "*Those who are called according to His purpose*" are who Paul is referring to when he said, "*For those whom He foreknew...*" in verse 29. It would have been much easier if Paul had just said, *for those whom He called according to His purpose, He justified. Those whom He justified, He glorified.* Wouldn't that have been awesome? Then Paul would have kept salvation 'in time', and all of us who are 'in time' know what follows a call to salvation, and that is justification. Then glorification follows justification, and we Baptists would have been tickled to death if he had said it this way! But Paul didn't start there. I have to believe it is because he knew this is not the first cause of our salvation, or the first cause of our security. The first cause of our security is the phrase, "*For those whom He foreknew.*"

Now, I will not show you why I am right by disproving all of the other people in Church history who I disagree with; that is just not my way of doing things. I am just going to show you what I believe the Bible teaches. Under the priesthood of the believer, I pray you will study and agonize over this and come to believe what is true concerning your security in Jesus Christ.

My dad just added a shed onto his barn. He put sticks in the ground at the corners where the shed would be and tied nylon string around them to mark it off. He had measured and re-measured, and before we ever started digging postholes, he made sure the building was square. If you start it out wrong, you will be making a lot of adjustments down the road. So you need to take the time to get the first thing right. So, we are going to take the time now to get this first thing right.

This first thing is: What does it mean when it says that there is a certain group of people (who are made up of individual people) that God "*foreknew*", and thus, when He "*foreknew*" them, it had a causal effect on them and what He would do next? According to verse 29, He then "*predestined*" them. What is the cause of predestination? According to Scripture, it isn't our belief; it is that He "*foreknew*" us. I wish I could tell

you that the effect of foreknowledge was also calling, but Paul did not say that. Paul did not say, for those He foreknew He also predestined and called and justified and glorified. He said, "*For those whom He foreknew He also predestined...*", then he stops and starts again with predestined. He said, "*...and those He predestined He also called...*", which means predestination has an effect. The effect is a calling. The cause of a calling is predestination, and the cause of predestination is foreknowing. It continues this way to the end of the verses. You have to make sure you get the first cause right.

In many regards, modern science is in trouble in many places today because we have an effect of the world, but the world doesn't want to admit who the first cause is. The first cause of creation is God, and the first cause of redemption is God.

- **To Know**

"*Foreknew*" is the Greek word ***proegnō***. But scholars only talk about the root form of that word, which is ***proginóskó***. It is a compound word meaning "before and to know." In other words, it is to know before. This word, as a verb and a noun, is used seven times in the New Testament.

The noun form of the word is ***prognosis***. We use this word in English when we are looking for a prognosis from a doctor. Sometimes we get a ***diagnosis***, meaning "through and knowledge." In other words, the doctor has arrived at a conclusion because he has done a thorough investigation. A prognosis is when the doctor tells you what is wrong with you and you think he should run some tests. When a doctor gives you a prognosis right off the bat, you are banking on, or counting on, him and his prognosis.

But, ***proginóskó*** is the word we are dealing with. Now, ***Pro*** means "before." ***Ginóskó*** can mean one of three things.

1. To know facts
2. To know events
3. To know persons

God's ability to know facts, events, or persons "before" is going to have a causal effect on this group of people, because He will predestine everyone that He foreknows. So, this causes us to ask some questions. What does God know about the people in the group that causes Him to predestine them? Does He know facts, events, or does He simply know people? Remember, you cannot bring God down to our level, because He is holy, holy, holy. He is in time and beyond time, at the same time.

Ginóskó is also used in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, most of the time the scholars translated the word **Yada**, the Hebrew word for "to know", with **Ginóskó**. There are other ways it is used in the New Testament, but I want to give you some examples of the way it is used which are relevant to the passage and context of Romans 8:29.

In Genesis 4:1, the Bible tells us that Adam "*knew*" his wife and she conceived. Adam knowing her had a causal effect. Now, knowing her was not that he knew facts or an event about her, he knew her in an intimate way. He knew her as a person, and it denotes sexual intimacy.

Matthew 1:25 says:

*"...but **knew** her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus."*

Joseph did not have intimate relations with his wife. Therefore, we know Jesus was born of a virgin.

In Luke 1:34, the King James Version says:

*"Then said Mary unto the angel, how shall this be, seeing I **know** not a man?"*

I am just saying that **Ginóskó** can mean more than just having knowledge of something. As a matter of fact, in Jeremiah 1:5 God said:

*"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."*

I assume that God knew facts about Jeremiah, but if you read the context of the verse, God is saying far more. He is saying he knows Jeremiah in a personal way. He knew him, or had prior knowledge of him, before He had ever formed him in the womb.

Amos 3:2 says:

*"You only have I **known** of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."*

That passage does not mean the only nation of the Earth who God had knowledge of was Israel. Therefore, it cannot mean facts, or events. It can only mean that Israel is the only nation He had established a covenant relationship with. Therefore, He was going to punish them. He had that right because they were His children. "*Known*" is used as a personal relationship with Israel. Richard C. H. Lenski defined **Ginóskó** as "a knowing that places the knower in a personal relationship with the one known."

In Matthew 7:23, Jesus tells a group of people:

*"And then will I declare to them, 'I never **knew** you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"*

God is keeping a record of everything people do. There is no way this passage can mean He didn't know anything about them. It can only mean He had never had an intimate relationship with them. He had never known them in a personal way.

John's definition of eternal life in John 17:3 is:

*"And this is eternal life, that they **know** you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."*

We know that to have eternal life you have to have more than facts about God. John is using this word to refer to an intimate, personal relationship. That is what eternal life is; it is a relationship with God. Over and over, in a clear, unmistakable way, the Bible uses ***Ginóskó*** to refer to a relationship. It is a knowing that goes beyond fact. Yes, there are numerous other passages where it talks about a personal fact. You cannot just look up a word in a dictionary and know exactly what it is meaning in a certain passage; you have to know the other possibilities.

But when the Bible teaches that God foreknew the ones He called according to His purpose. Based on the context of this verse, I believe those who are believers, those who love God and have a personal relationship with Him, are in that relationship because they were called according to His purpose. Something happened before He stepped into your life and called you, a call that determined you would be justified, and justification that would determine you will be glorified; He foreknew you. God, who is holy, holy, holy, knew you in a personal way and established a love upon you before He ever founded the world. I cannot begin to comprehend that. But that does not mean that because God loved me before the foundation of the world that I do not make a real meaningful choice at my salvation. It means that God did not suddenly, personally love me when I believed in Jesus, He personally loved me before I ever believed in Jesus.

If that bothers you, you have to consider that the One we are talking about is holy, holy, holy. Is it fair and just for God to establish a covenant relationship with a certain group of people before He ever created the world? The answer is yes. Does this violate other Scriptures? The answer is no. It gives meaning to Ephesians 1:4, which tells us that He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. It gives meaning to Revelation 13:8 and 17:8, which tells us there is a group of people whose names were not written in the Lamb's Book of Life before and from the foundation of the world. As a matter of fact, in 1 Peter 1:1-2, Peter is writing to the elect

exiles that were scattered, and said their election was according to the foreknowledge of God. It is used as a noun in this verse.

- **Personal Knowledge**

I read a lot of literature, but there are scholars who know much more Greek and Hebrew than I. I am going to quote some of these scholars, but that doesn't mean they believe what I do, or vice versa.

The messianic Jew, Arnold Fruchtenbaum says about 1 Peter 1:1-2: "However, the word foreknowledge means more than to merely know ahead of time. It means to know beforehand because of preplanning." They were foreknown by God because God planned them by virtue of electing them to salvation.

Spiros Zodhiates said, "In Romans 8:29 and Romans 11:2, the word foreknowledge is used of persons to foreknow with approbation, to fore approve or make a previous choice of."

Richard C. H. Lenski says on foreknowledge, "To know (foreknow) with affection and with a resultant effect."

The theological dictionary of the New Testament says, "The verb means to know in advance, and in the New Testament, it refers to God's foreknowledge as election of His people."

I do not believe Romans 8:29 teaches that God is foreknowing something about you or something you were going to do, and therefore He predestined you. I think the Bible teaches that God, who is holy, holy, holy, set His covenant love upon you based totally on who He is, and not on anything in you. Ultimately, that choice of you and your security is to the praise and the glory of His grace. The blessing of that is you will spend eternity with Him forever, and ever, and ever.

Over the next few lessons, we will see that this view of salvation is the way for the most to get saved. If it was any other way, no one would be saved. It is the divine side of salvation that guarantees your eternal security. Paul

does not write this verse to be negative, so don't let your mind get negative. He writes it to be positive. As a matter of fact, the first thing he talked about in Ephesians 1 was election and predestination. And he tells us it is to the praise of the glory of His grace. This is not a doctrine to be feared. It is a doctrine to be adored and to cause us to fall on our faces before God and give credit to Him who alone as the originator of our salvation. You can trust your wife, your kids, and your grandkids to a God who is holy, holy, holy.