

God's Purpose Expounded

📖 Romans 8:29-30

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📅 May 24, 2015

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Last time we worked with Romans 8:28. Romans 8:28, God works all things together for good, is one of those great promises to claim when applying the faith-rest drill in a suffering situation. If you recall, the faith-rest drill basically has three steps. First is to recall some Scripture, some story, some fragment, whatever you can grab on to when everything starts to fall apart. Second is to connect the Scripture to your situation, find some connection, which is why it's so much easier to do this when you know more Scripture, you have more situations that might parallel your situation from which to draw strength. Third is the rest. You can rest when you're suffering if you can contain the suffering inside the bigger picture of Scripture. So, we remind ourselves of the faith-rest drill when we see a verse like Rom 8:28, because a promise like God works all things together for good for those who love God, is appropriate in many suffering situations. The reason that all things work together for the good of believers in a fallen world is the fact that God has a purpose for us. When we speak about "the purpose" we're talking about the ultimate plan of the Creator for our lives down here in creation. Since the purpose for our lives comes from the Creator Himself then nothing in creation can thwart that purpose. Now we may come to know this in part from our own experiences and looking back and seeing how God worked things together for good, but our lives are still in process and we can't see how everything works together for good. That's what's so great about the stories of saints revealed in Scripture. God selected certain stories of saints because they cover the range of human experience and so rather than rely on our own limited experiences we can turn to Scripture and find the whole range of experiences. We mentioned the experience of Paul and Barnabas who sharply divided over the issue of John Mark but God worked it for good. We mentioned the experience of Job who lost everything except his life and how God worked it for a good outcome. And we mentioned the experience of Joseph who faced great hatred from his own family members and injustice in prison and yet God worked it together for the saving of many lives. It is the Joseph story that sticks out the most in my mind. He stated the Romans 8:28 of the OT which is Gen 50:20, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." God had an ultimate purpose, the purpose included the evil that his brothers did to him, but God Himself was not responsible for the evil, He only weaved it together for good. The humans involved are always responsible for the evil but God is sovereign over it and can use it to bring about some good end. If this is true, and it is, then on

a finite level there can be those who are against us, but because God is on an infinite level and He is for us then those who are against us are really of no substance.

Today in Romans 8:29 we begin to unpack God's purpose. In other words, last time we said that the word "purpose" in 8:28 refers to the plan of God and the five words in 8:29-30 are a delineation of that plan. I drew a box and said that the box is God's purpose and what's in the box is foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification and glorification. So the bigger concept is God's purpose and these various terms are smaller concepts which unpack the purpose. The important thing to grasp is that there was a before time plan that unfolds in time and secures our future.

Some refer to this entire discussion under God's decree and within the single decree they discuss the order of the decrees. There are a couple of ways to discuss the decree and the order of the decrees; one is with respect to the Creator and the other is with respect to the creature. In other words, the discussion can be looked at from two different perspectives; from eternity and from time. Thus, there is not just one way of looking at the decree and the order of decrees. If we try to look at them together then we are blending time with eternity and that violates the Creator-creature distinction. That's the fundamental reason these discussions get hairy. People tend to be weak on the Creator-creature distinction, they may hold it in theory but in practice they are constantly trying to get these together under their rationality and then there are problems. So this distinction must be maintained in the discussion. From the standpoint of the Creator, the decree and the order of decrees is not according to time but according to logic, and when I say logic I mean God's logic, or what may be termed meta-logic, not human logic; human logic is a finite derivative of God's logic. So there is an ultimate logic but it's not our logic, at best our logic is limited because our parameters are limited, it's finite because we can't have all the factors together simultaneously and beyond all that, we're fallen, subject to sinful distortions. So we have to depend upon Scripture. In the decree of the Creator we have a term used of His counsel which is *βουλη*, and I'm using this as an example of how to understand what the word counsel means with respect to God. When we think of a counsel we think of coming together to deliberate and come to a decision. Now that word is used of God's counsel before time when the Triune God; the Father, the Son and the Spirit deliberated to come to a decision about who would do what. Now, how is that to be understood? Are we to really think that God sat down and among the members within Himself had a discussion and arrived at a decision? God is outside of time and not subject to time or in need of deliberation or learning to decide something. So we can discuss God's decree as a singularity and the order of God's decrees logically, but even here we are limited. Logically speaking, in the order of decrees what Paul lays out first is foreknowledge and then predestination and then calling and then justification and then glorification. The relationship is logical, not sequential with respect to God because God's decree was made in eternity, not in time even though parts of it have a relationship to time. That's why, technically speaking, all the verbs in verse 30 are aorist indicatives, meaning they are all viewed as accomplished facts. From God's perspective you and I are already glorified. A.T. Robertson says it this way, "The glorification is stated as already consummated (constative aorists, all of them), though still future in the fullest sense. 'The step

implied in *He glorified* is both complete and certain in the divine counsels' (Sunday and Headlam)." Alford comments, "He did not merely, in His premundane decree, acquit them of sin, but also *clothed them with glory*: the aorist being used, as the other aorists, to imply the completion in the divine counsel of all these, which are to us, in the state of time, so many successive steps,—simultaneously and irrevocably."¹ And that shows you the difference between the decree and order of decrees from the Creator's perspective and the creature's perspective. For us, foreknowledge and predestination precede time and calling, justification and glorification occur in a sequence of time. But not so for God even though He can also view it from the standpoint of time and does accomplish it in time.

Now the first two words of 8:29; foreknowledge and predestination, are highly controversial. Before we look at them note that 8:30 puts them together in a great chain. None who are foreknown are not glorified and none who are glorified are not foreknown. This is known as the great golden chain of redemption and it is to give us the sense of security, that God is for us and nothing can separate us from Him. That's why I say, words like foreknowledge and predestination are not designed to cause controversy but to comfort. They are explaining why all things work together for us and not for unbelievers. The first word is **foreknew. For those whom He foreknew.** Before we do the word study let's look at the context to see what we can learn about this word. The immediate context is the ultimate decider of a word; not another context. Context is king, we say. There are two critical points about foreknowledge in this context. First, foreknowledge is limited to believers. In other words, God does not foreknow all men; He only foreknows believers. How can that be? Because verse 29 says it is the same group that God foreknew that **He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.** Those groups are number for number identical and since that group is not all men but only believers then God only foreknew believers. This immediately casts some important light on the meaning of the word **foreknow.** The word does not simply mean "to know in advance," even though that is what the word means in its parts. The word is *προγινωσκω*. The prefix *προ-* means "before" and the verb *γινωσκ-* means "to know." So "to know before" or "in advance" is often touted as the meaning. However, doesn't God know everything in advance? Isn't God omniscient? Of course. From omniscience point of view God knows all things in advance. But this verse is not saying that. This verse is saying that God foreknows believers, not all men. So foreknowledge is a subset of omniscience, not equivalent to omniscience. Constable says, "Notice that it is only those whom He foreknows that He predestines, not everyone. This indicates a "limited" foreknowledge, not just general knowledge of everyone and everything."² This is an interesting observation and helps clarify what foreknowledge really means. Foreknowledge is a subset of omniscience and is limited to believers, a critical point. Second, what God foreknew is believers, not what believers would do. The text says **those whom He foreknew**, using the personal pronoun, masculine gender. This means He foreknew the people. Under omniscience God does know what a person will do but that is not foreknowledge. Foreknowledge is the knowledge of a believer. This is another important distinction to grasp because it is very common to hear in theological discussion that God foreknew who would believe and on the basis of foreseen faith He chose them. That is not a biblical idea. It confuses time

with eternity and bases God's knowledge on time, a very damaging error. God's knowledge is independent of time. Further, it actually misses the richness of the word foreknowledge. What Paul is saying is not God foreknew who would believe but God foreknew believers. This casts additional light on the meaning of the word **foreknow** because now we see that the kind of knowledge in mind is relational knowledge, not intellectual knowledge. Intellectually God knows everything before time, that's omniscience, but relationally God only knows believers in advance. Witmer in the BKC says, "Believers are those God foreknew. This does not mean simply that God foreknows what believers will do, but that God foreknows them."³ So putting the first two contextual observations together we learn that foreknowledge is limited to believers and it is a relational knowledge. Third, the word study confirms these conclusions. The verb foreknow is *προγινωσκω* and is used five times in the NT; the noun foreknowledge is *προγνωσις* and is used two times for a total of seven uses. The first verbal usage is Acts 26:5. Here Paul uses it of the Jews intimate knowledge of him. In his defense before King Agrippa he says "all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem." Then he says, "since they have foreknown me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion." If you think about that verse, it does not just mean they had intellectual knowledge about Paul in advance. It means they knew Paul personally, they had relational knowledge of Paul from his youth up and how he lived as a Pharisee so that they could give an accurate testimony in a court of law. So the use here is an intimate, close knowledge of Paul based on observation of Paul's prior life. The second usage is 1 Peter 1:20. Here Peter uses it of God's knowledge of the Son. He says, "...knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God..." The idea of foreknowledge here is clearly not that the Father had mere intellectual knowledge of Christ before the foundation of the world. It is the idea of the Father's personal knowledge of the Son before the foundation of the world, a close, intimate knowledge. The third usage is 2 Pet 3:17. Here Peter uses it of his reader's thorough knowledge of the future dissolution of the present heavens and earth and how that should influence them to not get carried away by evil people but to walk with God. He says, "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness." This usage is the closest to simply "knowing in advance." But even here it is probably more along the line of having a thorough knowledge in advance. The fourth usage is in Romans 11:2. This usage is God's foreknowledge of His people Israel. In this passage Paul says, "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." Note that there is only one people whom God foreknew. That people is Israel. This obviously does not mean that God only intellectually knew about one people on earth. It means that He only had intimate relational knowledge with one people on earth. The OT teaches this same truth in Amos 3:2 where God says of Israel, "You only have I known among all the families of the earth." The word translated known is the Hebrew *yada*. This word means to

have an intimate or close knowledge. It obviously does not mean that God didn't know about all the other families of the earth intellectually. Of course He did. But He did not have an intimate or close relational knowledge with them. He only had that with Israel. So the word is used of a relationship. In a marital context, Genesis states that Adam "knew" his wife Eve and she bore Cain using the same Hebrew word *yada*. The concept is that of a close, intimate relational knowledge in every context it is used. It never means mere intellectual knowledge about what someone would do. In other words, it does not mean "to foresee," which would have been *προβλεπω* or "foreperceive" which would have been *προοραω* or *προειδω* or "foreordain" which would have been *προητοιμαζω* or "foresay" which would be *προλεγω* or to "foreconsider" which would have been *προνοεω*. All of those words were available for Paul to use and yet Paul did not use those words. The word he used was *προγινωσκω*, a close intimate knowledge of believers. The two nouns are also interesting. The first noun usage is Acts 2:23. This is Peter's sermon to the house of Israel on the Day of Pentecost and it refers to the plan to reject the Messiah. He says here, "this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." This verse brings other words into the picture like "predetermined" and "plan" which are *οριζω* and *βουλη* respectively. According to the grammar the Granville-Sharp construction is here equating "predetermined plan" with "foreknowledge of God." This means that the reason Jesus was nailed to a cross was because relationally that was the role Christ was to play in the plan of God from all eternity. An important thing to note is that this did not remove the human responsibility of those who nailed Him to the cross. They were fully responsible. In other words, people often say, "Well, if God determined it then men were merely doing what they had to do and can't be responsible for it." God disagrees with that reasoning. Those who nailed Him to a cross were doing exactly what they wanted to do and they are responsible for it. If you say, I don't understand how then welcome to the club. Whoever said that for something to be absolutely true it has to conform to limited, finite, corrupt human reasoning? Did you ever consider that your reasoning machine isn't operating correctly? Most people never consider that as a viable option. They presuppose they are reasoning without error. They presuppose they are God. The second noun usage is 1 Pet 1:2. This verse brings another word into the picture, election, which we won't deal with much now but we will later. It is enough here to see that election is based on foreknowledge in the logical order of decrees. In 1 Pet 1:1 Peter says, "To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." In other words, the choice was based on the fact that God had an intimate, relational knowledge with Peter's audience from all eternity. The section goes on into all that God has done for us and shall do for us to keep us secure so that in verse 6 we are to "greatly rejoice" in these things, not become mentally vexed over them.

That about covers foreknowledge. In the context of Romans 8:29, **those whom He foreknew** are *believers whom He had an intimate, relational knowledge of before creation*. For clarification, it is not knowledge of who would believe (which would be classified under omniscience). It is a close, intimate knowledge of believers themselves.

Now we come to predestined, another controversial word. Zodiates says, "The peace of the Christian Church has been disrupted due to the misunderstanding which surrounds this word. It behooves the Church to consider the divinely intended meaning of this word by carefully examining the critical passages where it is used."⁴ Most commonly people think this word means that God chose who would be saved. From this they often logically rationalize that God also chose who would not be saved. This is called double predestination. That is not what the word means. Before we get too far into it we should observe that in this context it is the same group that are foreknown that are predestined. So it is another word referring to believers. Believers are those whom He foreknew and believers are those whom He predestined.

The word **predestined** is from *προοριζω*. *Προ*- meaning "before" and *οριζ*- meaning "horizon, to mark out, a boundary." We get our word horizon from this word. If you look at the horizon it appears as a boundary. When coupled with *προ*- the word means "to mark out a boundary beforehand." The word is used six times in the NT (Acts 4:28; Rom 8:29, 30; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:5, 11). The first usage is Acts 4:28. In this passage Luke is narrating the response of the early church to Peter and John's boldness before the Sanhedrin. In verse 27 he says, "For truly in this city," Jerusalem, "there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur." In other words, the plan was always for Jesus Christ to go to the cross. That wasn't made up after the Fall of man. God always had Jesus Christ going to the cross. But notice, just because that is true did not relieve the human responsibility in verse 27 for crucifying Him. Herod and Pontius Pilate and the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel were all responsible for nailing Him to the cross. Predestination doesn't remove human responsibility. Never has and never will. The second usage is 1 Cor 2:7. In this passage Paul is contrasting human wisdom with God's wisdom. He says in verse 6, "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory." In the context God's wisdom in a mystery is the NT Scripture, and particularly verse 2, Christ and Him crucified, that was God's wisdom kept hidden until it was time to be revealed through apostles and prophets who were marked out beforehand to be the recipients of divine revelation. So in this usage predestined refers to the apostles and prophets as recipients of the hidden wisdom of the cross. God revealed to them by His Spirit the great truths of Christ and Him crucified so that we could know them. The third usage is Eph 1:5. In this passage Paul is discussing the work of God the Father as the architect of the plan of salvation. In verse 4 He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world," that is He chose us in connection with Christ, a dative of connection. And what did He choose us in connection to? To "be holy and blameless before Him. Then He says, "In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will" or according to the good pleasure of His will. So in view here is His marking us out beforehand to our full status as adopted sons by way of our connection to Jesus Christ. The fourth usage is Eph 1:11. The context here is Paul discussing the work of God the Son as the executioner of the plan of salvation. The translation is not good so I'll

correct. Paul says, "also we have been obtained as an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will..." In other words we are God's inheritance. He has obtained us as His inheritance because He predestined us to be His inheritance according to His purpose; purpose is the word we saw last week, *προθεσις*, the plan. In other words, He has made us His inheritance because He marked us out beforehand when He made the plan.

The fifth and sixth usage are in our passage, Rom 8:29 and 30. This passage is saying that our conformity to the image of Christ is certain. In other words, a boundary was marked out for believers beforehand. We don't have to guess what that boundary is. Paul tells us. Our boundary is **to become conformed to the image of His Son**. That has always been God's plan. The word **conformed** is *συμμορφος* and is only used here and in Phil 3:21. There it says he "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory..." It is probably referring to the transformation of our body here too. The word itself means "similar in form" and in the resurrection we will be similar in form to Jesus Christ in His resurrection body. The use of the word **image** confirms this idea. We are to be conformed to what? **To the image of His Son**. What's the **image of His Son**? It's the image of God that was lost in Adam but will be restored in the resurrected Christ. So God did not predestine us to believe, that's not the point, the point is God predestined believers to be raised into Christ-likeness. This is an important truth because it assures us that God is going to complete our salvation. He's going to take us all the way to resurrection. There is no way if we are believers we cannot ultimately be resurrected. We will be conformed to the image of His Son. Now what's interesting is that while that occurs at glorification it does not happen in sanctification, the very reason sanctification is not mentioned in 8:30 but it is mentioned in 12:1ff, since the step-by-step daily conformation to Christ-likeness occurs as we are transformed by the renewing of our mind such that we live by the Spirit. But no matter how far we are transformed in sanctification by the Spirit one day we will be glorified like Christ because we are predestined to that boundary. It's part of the plan of God for believers.

The purpose for this predestination is then set forth as **so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren**. Jesus is the firstborn from among the dead. In other words, He is the first to be resurrected. We are viewed here as his brethren who are to also be raised from the dead, and so become His **brethren**. A. T. Robertson says, "Christ is "first born" of all creation (Col. 1:15), but here he is "first born from the dead" (Col. 1:18), the Eldest Brother in this family of God's sons, though "Son" in a sense not true of us."⁵ Of course not in a sense true of us, but Christ is the Son of God and we are sons of God; Christ is the eldest brother and we are all His younger brothers. Christ as the firstborn is the heir of a double portion and we as born are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. His destiny is therefore our destiny. This is eternal security to the nth degree. There is no way we can lose our destiny because it was marked out beforehand by God Himself in His eternal purpose. And if we could lose our destiny then Jesus Christ could lose His destiny. Our destiny and His destiny are that closely knit together. We are all brethren. The relationship can never be severed, the very point Paul is taking us to at the end of the chapter.

In Romans 8:30 then, he puts it all together in the golden chain of redemption, meaning that not one who is foreknown will be lost so as not to be glorified and he views it from God's perspective as already completed. This is the decree of God as viewed as a singularity, as logical only. **And these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.** He did it in every case for the exact same group. Each is an aorist tense, viewed as a completed action. That is because in God's eternity the actions are complete. He is not subject to time. It would be foolish to think that any of these is true apart from Christ. He is the firstborn or the heir of all. They are true of us because of our connection to Him. None are foreknown apart from Christ, predestined apart from Christ, called apart from Christ, justified apart from Christ or glorified apart from Christ. It is by virtue of our connection with Christ that we are all these things from all eternity. So then, if God is for us from before time, in time and into eternity then who of any substance can really be against us? I'd say we are quite secure. That we have eternal security like you never imagined. Eternal security is not about what we do or about who we are; it's about what God does and about who He is.

¹ Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), Ro 8:29.

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 8:29.

³ John A. Witmer, "Romans," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 474.

⁴ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

⁵ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ro 8:29.