

# **Romans: The Good News of God**

## **Five Undeniable Affirmations**

*Romans 8:29-30*

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# Five Undeniable Affirmations

## Scripture

The first verse of the greatest chapter in the Bible—Romans 8:1—says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Everything else that follows in the rest of Romans 8 tells us *why* there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

There are a number of reasons why there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. First, because there is *no condemnation from the law* (8:1-4); second, because *we have been delivered from the flesh* (8:5-11); third, because *we are now the children of God* (8:12-17); fourth, because we have *the hope of future glory* (8:18-25); fifth, because of *the intercession of the Holy Spirit* (8:26-27); and sixth, because of *five unshakeable convictions* (8:28).

Today, we see a seventh reason why there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and it is because of *five undeniable affirmations*. We see this in Romans 8:29-30.

Let’s read Romans 8:28-30, in order to see the context:

<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> **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.** <sup>30</sup> **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)

## Introduction

When we studied Romans 8:28 last week, I said that this verse is one of the most comforting statements in the entire Word

of God. The reason is obvious. It tells us that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” That is, God has a great and good purpose for all Christians, and he is working in all the many detailed circumstances of our lives to achieve it.

Wonderful as that verse is, the verses that follow are even more wonderful, for they tell us *how* God accomplishes this purpose and remind us that it is God himself who accomplishes it.

Some time ago I came across an amusing but apparently true story. In 1966 the Hindu “holy” man and mystic Rao announced that on a certain day he would walk on water. This attracted a great deal of attention, and on the day set for the feat a great crowd gathered around a large swimming pool in Bombay, India, where it was to occur. Rao prayerfully prepared himself for the miracle and then stepped forward to the pool’s edge. A solemn hush fell over the assembled observers. Rao glanced upward to heaven, stepped forward onto the water, and then immediately plummeted into the pool’s depths. Sputtering, dripping wet, and furious, he emerged from the pool and turned angrily on the embarrassed crowd. “One of you,” he shouted, “is an unbeliever.”

Fortunately, our salvation is not like that, because if it were, it would never happen. In spiritual matters we are all unbelievers. We are weak in faith. But we are taught in these great verses from Romans that salvation does not depend upon our faith, however necessary that faith may be, but rather on the work of God.

## Lesson

Romans 8:29-30 tells us that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because of five undeniable affirmations. The five undeniable affirmations in these verses constitute an unbreakable chain of five links. Each affirmation points to something that God has done for us, and stresses God’s sovereignty in our salvation. The five undeniable affirmations in this chain of God’s sovereign acts are foreknowledge, predestination, effec-

tual calling, justification, and glorification. Let us look at each one of these five undeniable affirmations in more detail.

## I. Foreknowledge (8:29a)

The first undeniable affirmation is foreknowledge. Paul says, “**For those whom he foreknew. . .**” (8:29a).

Foreknowledge is the most important of these five terms, but it is also the most misunderstood.

The word “**foreknew**” is composed of two separate words: “**fore**,” which means “beforehand,” and “**knew**.” Thus it means “to know beforehand.”

It has been taken by some to mean that God knows all things. Therefore, God knew beforehand who would believe on him and who would not. The result of this knowledge is that God predestined to salvation those whom he foresaw would believe on him. In other words, what he foresaw or **foreknew** was our *faith*.

But this explanation does not do justice to our text. For one thing, the verse does not say that God **foreknew** what certain of his creatures would *do*. It is not talking about human actions at all. On the contrary, it is speaking entirely of God, and of what God does.

Each of these five terms is like that: *God* foreknew, *God* predestined, *God* called, *God* justified, *God* glorified. Besides, the object of divine foreknowledge is not our *actions* but us *ourselves*. In this sense it means that God has fixed his special attention upon us.

This is the way the Hebrew word “to know” (*yada*) is used in the Old Testament. For example, Genesis 4:2 says, “Now Adam *knew* Eve his wife.” That is, Adam fixed his love upon Eve. One sees this language throughout the Old Testament. In a similar way, foreknowledge has to do with God fixing his love upon certain individuals. It has nothing to do with God knowing their actions ahead of time; it has to do with God loving them personally.

There is another problem. If all the word “**foreknew**” means is that God knows beforehand what we will do in response to him or to the preaching of the gospel and then determines our destiny

on that basis, what could God possibly see or foreknow except a fixed opposition to him on the part of all people? If our hearts are as depraved as Paul has been teaching that they are—if indeed “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God” (Romans 3:10-11)—what could God possibly foresee in any human heart but hardened, unchanging unbelief?

Commentator John Murray puts it this way: “Even if it were granted that ‘foreknew’ means the foresight of faith, the biblical doctrine of sovereign election is not thereby eliminated or disproven. For it is certainly true that God foresees faith; he foresees all that comes to pass. The question would then simply be: whence proceeds this faith, which God foresees? And the only biblical answer is that the faith which God foresees is the faith he himself creates (cf. John 3:3-8; 6:44, 45, 65; Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 1:29; 2 Peter 1:2). Hence his eternal foresight of faith is preconditioned by his decree to generate this faith in those whom he foresees as believing.”

Foreknowledge means that salvation has its origin in the mind or eternal counsels of God, not in man. It focuses our attention on the distinguishing love of God, according to which some persons are elected to be conformed to the character of Jesus Christ, which is what Paul is about to say.

## II. Predestination (8:29b-c)

The second undeniable affirmation is predestination. Paul says, “For those whom he foreknew **he also predestined**” (8:29b).

The chief objection to this understanding of foreknowledge is that foreknowledge and predestination mean the same thing and Paul is therefore redundant. But the terms are not synonymous. Predestination carries us a step further.

Like foreknowledge, predestination is also composed of two words: “**pre**” meaning “beforehand,” and “**destined**” meaning “destination.” It means “to determine a person’s destiny beforehand,” and this is the sense in which it differs from foreknowledge.

Foreknowledge means “to know beforehand,” in the sense of fixing one’s love upon someone. It does not tell us what happens to those upon whom God has fixed his love.

This is what predestination supplies. It tells us that, having fixed his love upon certain individuals, God then appointed them **“to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers”** (8:29c). He does this, as the next terms show, by calling, justifying, and glorifying those thus chosen.

Bible teacher Dr. R. C. Sproul says that a woman once asked him, “Does the Bible teach the doctrine of predestination?”

Sproul said that his answer to her was not a simple, “Yes,” followed by a lengthy explanation. Rather, his answer was much more emphatic.

“Of course the Bible teaches the doctrine of predestination,” he said. “I say that as dogmatically as I possibly can because the assertion is indisputable. I don’t know anyone who has ever read the Scriptures, or particularly the book of Romans, who has tried to argue that the Bible has no doctrine of predestination.”

You see, the term “predestination” is a biblical term. The Bible clearly teaches the doctrine of predestination. Now, what people disagree over is the kind of predestination that is in view. Arminians argue that God predestines people to salvation on the basis of foreseen faith in the sinner. Calvinists, and I am one of them, argue that God predestines people to salvation on the basis of knowing certain individuals beforehand on the basis of his love.

### **III. Effectual Calling (8:30a)**

The third undeniable affirmation is effectual calling. Paul says, “And those whom he predestined **he also called**” (8:30a).

The next step in this golden chain of five undeniable affirmations is what theologians call effectual calling. It is important to use the adjective *effectual* at this point, because there are two different kinds of calling referred to in the Bible, and it is easy to get

confused about them.

One kind of calling is external, general, and universal. It is an open invitation to all persons to repent of sin, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved. It is what Jesus was speaking of when he said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Or again, when he said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink” (John 7:37).

The problem with this type of call is that, left to ourselves, no one would ever respond positively. We hear the call, but we turn away, preferring our own ways to God. That is why Jesus also said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. . .” (John 6:44).

The other kind of calling is internal, specific, and effectual. That is, it not only issues the invitation, it also provides the ability or willingness to respond positively. It is God drawing to himself and bringing to spiritual life the one who without that call would remain spiritually dead and far from him.

There is no greater illustration of this than Jesus’ calling of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, who had died four days before (John 11:1-44). Lazarus in his grave is a picture of every human being in his spiritual state: dead in soul, bound with grave clothes, lying in a tomb, sealed with some great stone.

Let us call to him, “Lazarus, come out. We want you back. We miss you. If you will just get up out of that tomb and return to us, you’ll find that we are all anxious to have you back. No one here is going to put any obstacles in your way.”

What? Why won’t Lazarus come? Doesn’t he want to be with us?

The problem is that Lazarus does not have the ability to come out. The call is given, but he cannot come.

Ah, but let Jesus take his place before the tomb. Let Jesus call out, “Lazarus, come out,” and the result is quite different. The words are the same, but now the call is no mere invitation. It is an effectual calling. For the same God who originally called the creation out of nothing is now calling life out of death, and his call is

heard. Lazarus, though he has been dead four days, hears Jesus and obeys his Master's voice.

That is how God effectually calls those whom he has fore-known and predestined to salvation.

#### **IV. Justification (8:30b)**

The fourth undeniable affirmation is justification. Paul says, “. . . and those whom he called **he also justified**” (8:30b).

The next step in God's great chain of saving actions is justification. We have talked a lot about justification already in this series on Romans, so we need not discuss it in detail here.

Briefly, it is the judicial act by which God declares sinful men and women to be in a right standing before him, not on the basis of our own merit, for we have none, but on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done for us by dying in our place on the cross. Jesus bore our punishment, taking the penalty of our sins upon himself. Those sins having been punished, God then imputes the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ to our account.

What does need to be discussed here is the relationship of effectual calling to justification. Or to put it in the form of a question: Why does Paul place calling where he does in this chain? Why does calling come between predestination and justification?

There are two reasons.

First, calling is the point at which the things determined beforehand in the mind of God pass over into time. We speak of “fore” knowledge and “pre” destination. But these two time references only have meaning for us. Strictly speaking, there is no time frame in God. Because the end is as the beginning and the beginning is as the end, “fore” and “pre” are meaningless in regard to him. God simply “knows” and “determines,” and that eternally.

But what he thus decrees in eternity becomes actual in time, and calling is the point where his foreknowledge and predestination of some to salvation find concrete manifestation. We are creatures in time. So it is by God's specific calling of us to faith in time



that we are saved.

And second, justification, which comes after calling in this list of divine actions, is always connected with faith or belief, and it is through God's call of the individual that faith is brought into being. God's call creates faith. Or, as we could perhaps more accurately say, it is the call of God that brings forth spiritual life, of which faith is the first true evidence or proof.

Romans 8:29-30 does not contain a full list of the steps in a person's experience of salvation, only five of the most important steps undertaken by God on behalf of Christians. If the text were to include all the steps, what theologians call the *ordo salutis*, it would have to list these and in this order: foreknowledge, predestination, calling, regeneration, conversion (which consists of faith and repentance), justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. The full list makes the point. After predestination, the very next thing is our calling, out of which comes faith that leads to justification.

The Bible never says that we are saved *because* of our faith. That would make faith something good in us that we somehow contribute to the process.

But it does say that we are saved *by* or *through* faith, meaning that God must create it in us before we can be justified.

## V. Glorification (8:30c)

The fifth undeniable affirmation is glorification. Paul says, “. . . and those whom he justified **he also glorified**” (8:30c).

Glorification means “to be made like Jesus Christ,” which is what Paul said earlier.

But notice this. When Paul mentions glorification, he refers to it in the past tense (“**glorified**”) rather than in the future (“will glorify”) or future passive tense (“will be glorified”), which is what we might have expected him to have done.

Why is this? The reason is that he is thinking of this final step in our salvation as being so certain that it is possible to refer to it

as having already happened. And, of course, he does this deliberately to assure us that this is exactly what will happen.

Do you remember how he put it in writing to the Christians at Philippi? He wrote, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). That is shorthand for what we are learning in Romans. God began the “good work” by foreknowledge, predestination, calling, and justification. And because he never goes back on anything he has said or changes his mind, we can know that he will carry it on until the day we will be like Jesus Christ, being glorified.

### **Conclusion**

I have a simple conclusion. It is to remind you again that these are all things that God has done. They are the important things, the things that matter. Without them, not one of us would be saved, or continue in that salvation.

Do we have to believe? Of course, we do. Paul has already spoken of the nature and necessity of faith in chapters 3 and 4. But even our faith is of God or, as we should probably better say, the result of his working in us.

In Ephesians Paul says, “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” (Ephesians 2:8-9). When we are first saved we think naturally that we have had a great deal to do with it, perhaps because of wrong or shallow teaching, but more likely only because we know more about our own thoughts and feelings than we do about God. But the longer one is a Christian, the further one moves from any feeling that we are responsible for our salvation or even any part of it, and the closer we come to the conviction that it is all of God.

It is a good thing it is of God, too! Because if salvation were accomplished by us, we could just as easily un-accomplish it—and probably would! If God is the author, salvation is something that is

done wisely, well, and forever.

Robert Haldane, one of the great commentators on Romans, provides this summary:

In looking back on this passage, we should observe that, in all that is stated, man acts no part, but is passive, and all is done by God. He is elected and predestinated and called and justified and glorified by God. The apostle was here concluding all that he had said before in enumerating topics of consolation to believers, and is now going on to show that God is “for us,” or on the part of his people. Could anything, then, be more consoling to those who love God, than to be in this manner assured that the great concern of their salvation is not left in their own keeping? God, even their covenant God, has taken the whole upon himself. He has undertaken for them. There is no room, then, for chance or change. He will perfect that which concerns them.

Years ago Bible teacher Harry A. Ironside told a story about an old Christian who was asked to give his testimony. He told how God had sought him, found him, loved him, called him, saved him, delivered him, cleansed him, and healed him—a great witness to the grace and power and glory of God.

But after the meeting a poorly-taught brother took him aside and criticized his testimony. He said, “I appreciated all you said about what God did for you. But you didn’t mention anything about your part in it. Salvation is really part us and part God. You should have mentioned something about your part.”

“Oh, yes,” the old Christian said. “I apologize for that. I’m sorry. I really should have said something about my part. My part was running away, and his part was running after me until he caught me.”

We have all run away. But God has set his love on us, predestined us to become like Jesus Christ, called us to faith and repentance, justified us, yes, and has even glorified us, so certain of completion is his plan. May he alone be praised! Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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**PRAAYER:**

O Lord our God, we thank you for these five undeniable affirmations.

Your Word teaches us that in eternity past you set your love upon certain individuals, which Scripture says is a great multitude that no one can number (Revelation 7:9).

Then you determined the destiny of those upon whom you set your affection to be conformed to the image of your Son.

Your Spirit opened our spiritually dead hearts to hear your truth, and you enabled us to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior.

You justified us by declaring us, “Not Guilty!” The Lord Jesus Christ bore the punishment for our sin, and we have received his righteousness.

And just as surely as you have foreordained, predestined, called, and justified us, you will also glorify us so that we will be made like the Lord Jesus Christ and be with you for all eternity.

And for all of this we give you thanks in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.