

ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD

TEXT: ROMANS 8:28-32

INTRODUCTION:

1. This is one of the most wonderful texts in the Bible. It has been called "the golden chain of redemption."
2. R.A. Torrey called Romans 8:28 "a soft pillow for a tired heart."
3. The Bible does not say "all things are good." Certainly we know many things in this wicked, sin-loving world are not good.
4. The Bible says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God..." (Rom. 8:28).
5. This limitation -- "to them that love God" -- is very important because we know that all things are not working together for good to them that are lost.
 - (1) There is the comprehensiveness of the working -- "all things work."
 - (2) There is the harmony of the working -- "all things work together."
 - (3) There is the beneficence of the working -- "all things work together for good."
 - (4) There is the limitation of the working -- "all things work together for good to them that love God." (W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Romans*)
6. I like the illustration of the ingredients that a cook puts into a bowl, that are not appetizing by themselves -- flour, vanilla extract, baking powder, etc.
7. But when the cook puts all the ingredients into a bowl and stirs them up, we know that all these things work together for a good cake!
8. Our lives are not controlled by chance, or good luck or bad luck, or fate, etc. but by the unseen hand of God. And God is working.
9. Jesus said in John 5:17, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."
10. The providence of God is working (8:28), though we often do not see it right away. And yet Romans 8:28 says, "And we know..."
11. If we do not know from personal experience we should know from the Word of God. And if you have been saved for any length of time then you should also know by experience.
12. Joseph said to his brothers, "So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God...But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Genesis 45:8; 50:20).
13. This is a good Old Testament illustration of Romans 8:28.
14. Psalm 37:23 says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD." George Muller said, "And the stops of a good man are ordered by the LORD also."

I. FOREKNOWLEDGE (8:29)

1. This has been called "the golden chain of redemption," and the first link in this golden chain is "foreknowledge."
2. We know that all things work together for good to them that love God because of God's foreknowledge. God has everything under control.
3. "Foreknowledge" simply means, "to know beforehand." God is omniscient; He knows all things. And God's knowledge is perfect; it is certain. It was foreseen by God that His people would believe, and be saved.
4. The Lord knows and sees everything in advance and His will is carried out in accord with His plans and purposes.
5. "There is nothing, therefore, in regard to them that is contingent, or subject to doubt" (Albert Barnes).
6. A.T. Robertson said, "Paul accepts fully human free agency but behind it all and through it all runs God's sovereignty" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*).
7. Strictly speaking, there is no past, present, and future with God because God sees everything in the present tense.
8. When we look at these verbs in Romans 8:29 and 30, we see they are all in the past tense. From God's perspective, all of this has already been accomplished.
9. Bible prophecies describing the second coming of Christ are often described as if they have already taken place because God sees everything in the present tense.
10. Everything from predestination before the world began, to glorification at its end, is in God's view already accomplished.
11. Acts 15:18 says, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."
12. In Psalm 139:6, David says, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." It is beyond man's comprehension.
13. The omniscient eternal God has given us His assurance that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.
14. First Peter 1:2 says, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." God's election is based upon His foreknowledge.
15. God's foreknowledge does not conflict with man's responsibility. Peter said to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23).
16. A similar statement is made in Acts 4:24-28.

II. PREDESTINATION (8:29)

1. Predestination is based on God's foreknowledge. Foreknowledge comes first. God has predestinated "them that love God...to be conformed to the image of his Son" (8:28, 29).
2. Predestination means that God has an eternal purpose that is determined long before it is brought to pass.
3. Many people confuse predestination with election, but they are different altogether.
4. Some preachers teach that God has predestinated some people for heaven and some for hell. John Calvin taught this and he has many devoted followers, but the Bible does not teach that.
5. Second Peter 3:9 says God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."
6. First Timothy 2:4 says God "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."
7. If God not willing that any should perish, but that all should repent and get saved, then surely He has not predestinated them for hell!
8. This has vexed Christians for two thousand years. If it is God's will to save sinners, then why are so many sinners going to hell?
9. God never forces Himself on anyone. Our Lord said in John 5:40, "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."
10. In the Bible, the word "predestinate" is never used in reference to lost sinners. The word is found four times in Scripture -- here in Romans 8:29 and 30; and in Ephesians 1:5 and 11.
11. None of these verses is in reference to the unsaved. These Scriptures are all in reference to "them that love God." Romans 8:29 teaches that "them that love God" have been predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ.
12. Ephesians 1:5 says, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption..." Adoption as it is used in the Bible is not precisely the same as it is used in the world, i.e., the legal transaction whereby a child (usually an orphan) is brought into another family.
13. Adoption is not the same thing as regeneration. When I received the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour I was born again. I became a child of God. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). That is past. Adoption is future.
14. Adoption takes place when I receive my glorified body (cf. Romans 8:23). In the meantime, those of us that are saved have "the Spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8:15), i.e., the Holy Spirit.

15. Ephesians 1:11 says Christians have been "predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."
16. God is working all things together so His people can be conformed to the image of Christ. This is sanctification.

III. CALLED (8:30)

1. All who are predestinated in eternity are called in time.
2. The word "called" is used different ways in Scripture.
Oftentimes it refers to the Gospel call (invitation) that goes out to sinners near and far.
3. For example, Proverbs 1:24 says, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded."
4. How sad that sinners ignore God's call!
5. But here in Romans 8:28 and 29, this call goes out "to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (cf. Rom. 1:6).
6. "Called" in Romans 8:28 and 30 refers to those who have accepted God's invitation to salvation.

IV. JUSTIFIED (8:30)

1. The next link in this golden chain of redemption is "justified." Predestination precedes and secures our calling, and our calling precedes and secures our justification.
2. "Justified" simply means "declared righteous." The moment a person believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, he is justified instantaneously by God.
3. God forgives our sins, imputes to us the righteousness of Christ, and declares we are now in righteous standing before Him.
4. "Justified" means "declared righteous," not "made righteous" -- that is sanctification, being conformed to the image of Christ (8:29).
5. Romans 8:28-30 teach the eternal security of the believer -- foreknowledge, predestinated, called, justified, and glorified. From beginning to end we are safe and secure (8:35, 38, 39).
6. Romans 8 begins with "no condemnation" and ends with "no separation" (8:35).

V. GLORIFIED

1. There are three aspects of sanctification -- positional, progressive, and final sanctification, which is also called glorification.

2. Though glorification is still future, Paul speaks of us as "glorified" in the past tense. This is because it is already an accomplished fact in the mind and purpose of God.
3. Those who were foreknown by God will all be glorified without loss of a single one. This is the basis of the doctrine of eternal security.

CONCLUSION:

1. The words "conformed to the image" in Romans 8:29 refer to an inward change and not merely to a superficial conformity.
2. The Greek word translated "image" is used of Christ as the very image of God the Father (II Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15).
3. This refers to "the gradual change in us till we acquire the likeness of Christ the Son of God so that we ourselves shall ultimately have the family likeness of sons of God" (A.T. Robertson).