

Romans 8:28-30 (NKJV)

28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

We dealt with most of verse 28 in the last 2 weeks. What a wonderful promise we have. What a tremendous truth. And what a firm foundation we lovers of God have when we face the best and the worst of the “all things” we can experience on this planet.

Verse 28 ended with the fact that the Children of God are those who are called according to God’s purpose.

So what is God’s purpose? What is God intending? What is God pledged to accomplish? What is it, in this world that keeps spinning, that God really wants? At the end of the days, what is it that God will have for Himself?

Those are big questions. But they are the right questions.

I referred once before to someone in the face of the horror of World War II who said something like, “God is either all powerful and not good or He is good but not all powerful.” That was spoken by a person who does not understand God’s purpose.

God’s purpose is not that all humans live on earth in relative prosperity, void of diseases and hardship and discomfort. The simple fact that it was God who cursed the earth tells us that much. There are many who evaluate God as if that is God’s assumed purpose. They place man on the throne and it is God’s job to work out a good existence for man. Well in order to know God’s purpose, we must know what God says he wants. It may have nothing to do with what WE say WE want.

I have lived long enough to take some side roads due to misunderstanding God’s purpose. I have actually preached sermons on how Christians should cut down on their consumption of meat so the rest of the world can have more grain. I cringe to think of it, but I did. I have lived through the phase where it was being preached that it was God’s will that we take over the arts and fight the devil’s system on that front. I have lived through the idea that it is God’s purpose for Christians in America to take back the government from the godless people who are now making the decisions. Without a doubt we have some obligations and

responsibilities on some of these fronts, some much greater than others. And we are given clear instructions of what we should do on these issues.

But these things are not the core purpose of God for human history. We will see this morning what IS core to God's purpose. And by seeing it, we should have a much clearer direction for how to use our minds, our thoughts, our time and our resources. Our lives should be aligned with God's purposes.

Let's lay out the outline here for how we will cover verses 29 and 30, keeping in mind that they are revealing God's purpose in salvation mentioned in verse 28.

The revelation of God's purpose concerning His adopted children

The revelation of God's purpose concerning His only begotten Son

The five link chain of God's method in accomplishing His purpose

Foreknowledge

Predestination

Calling

Justification

Glorification

I will be approaching the topics in these verses out of the order they are presented in but will try to keep them always in their proper context.

So what IS God's purpose concerning His adopted children? Note here that there is no mention in these verses of those who people who are not God's children. Essentially we find in scripture that God uses those outside His family to accomplish those things He desires inside His family. That is their primary purpose. Their purpose is subservient to the children of God. Now that is not how those without Christ experience their lives. Pharaoh certainly didn't feel like a pawn in God's plan. Pharaoh probably saw himself as a very powerful person. But ultimately he was simply playing a part in God's planned exodus for His people. And God needed a person like Pharaoh to accomplish those ends. So when the world talks about their theories about God and their disappointment in His involvement in this planet, don't be at all surprised. For the most part they have no idea what God's purpose is. They only know what they wish God would do for them.

So, back to what is God's purpose concerning His children?

God's purpose is that His Children would **be conformed to the image of His Son**.

What does that mean?

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NKJV)

18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Let's look at a couple of words here. The first is the word "image". This is the same word used about Christ Himself in this next verse.

2 Corinthians 4:4 (NKJV)

4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

The word image here means more than likeness. This is not the kind of likeness where two complete strangers may look very similar to one another. It is the kind of likeness where a son looks very similar to his father or a daughter to the mother. It is a derived likeness. When a one dollar bill is minted, it has this kind of likeness to George Washington. The bill was produced from a portrait of Mr Washington, a likeness. It is not an accidental likeness or a coincidental likeness. It is a fully intentional likeness derived from the original.

So when this verse says that we are transformed into the same likeness as Christ, it means that we are going to look in some way very similar to the author of our salvation.

Now let's look at the word **transformed** in the Corinthian verse. It is from a Greek word we get the word metamorphosis from. It means "to change into another form". So it is one form being rendered into another form. So, while it is true that when we expressed faith in Christ we were not like Christ, we are being changed into his likeness, a likeness that was very different from what we were. Then let's look at the word **conformed** in our Romans text. "having the same form as another" or maybe more accurately- to bring to the same form as another. It means an inner likeness, not an external conformity.

Putting these words together we understand that this image is not one of just appearances. It is one of essence. We don't just look like Christ physically. We become like Christ essentially. Who we really are will resemble Christ. We will bear Christ's stamp upon us and will be fundamentally and truly changed from what we were, to being like Christ.

That is God's purpose. And that is what we are called according to. So what does that mean for us? What implications are there?

Well what comes to my mind first is that there is no room for a Christianity that does not change a person. This idea that evangelism is simply the process of

getting people to say “yes” to Jesus is dangerous. Any evangelism that appeals to people to pray the sinners prayer because Jesus died for them... and poor Jesus stands with His hat in his hand waiting for them to respond... that evangelism misses the whole point. Any evangelism that presents the removal of the penalty of sin without mention of the removal of the power of sin over a believer misses the purpose in salvation. True evangelism appeals to people when God has made them sick of their sin. They want free of its penalty. They want free of its power. And they want free of its presence. Only that person is ready to receive what Christ has to offer. What God has in mind in saving a person is changing them from carnal to spiritual. Justification accomplishes the payment for sin once for all. It removes the penalty. Sanctification is the process of growing to be more like that which we were created to be. We say no to sin increasingly as we live. We are free to say no. And glorification fully finishes the process in an instant. We are then completely free of sin’s presence. All of it is included in salvation. Scripture teaches us to evaluate whether we are chosen, not so much by the speed of our growth, but by the direction of our lives. A saved person will grow to be more like Christ. A Christian has been given more than just forgiveness of sin’s penalty. He has been given new life. And that new life changes things. This is far more than a simple profession. It is a process that God has started in a person’s life. And that process reflects God’s purpose. God wants us conformed to the image of His Son. And He will complete that in all believers.

Another implication and application is that if you want to know God’s will for your life, here it is. Conformity to the image of Christ is His will for your life. Anything that fits into that is of highest priority. All other things become less vital. I don’t think believers need to obsess on what car or house to buy or what job to take or what college to attend. Those things need to be decided. But the most important decisions involve trusting and obeying God in everything. So apply God’s principles to your day to day decisions for sure. But don’t get caught in the bind where you think you need a message from God to decide what to do. Live faithfully, but focus on the eternal. You will find that it really didn’t matter whether you had a Toyota or a Ford. But it did matter that you read the word and did what it said.

We have got to keep in mind, too, that we did not call God according to our purpose. Our purpose is not the overriding principle here. Our lives are all about what God wants, not about what WE want. Over time, God works on our hearts so that we want more and more what He wants. And as we want what He wants he gives us the desires of our hearts. But we cannot forget whose purpose is

center stage here. It is God's purpose that is pre-eminent. We may want an easier life. We may want a more agreeable spouse. Or the young people may want a spouse. Or we may want various pleasures or comforts. But **God's purpose** is to conform us to the image of Christ. And it may well be that the things we don't want are far more effective in doing that than the things we do want. Never lose sight of the importance of God's purpose.

So what is the purpose that we were called according to?

God's purpose is that we would **be conformed to the image of His Son.**

Now what is the **revelation of God's purpose concerning His only begotten Son?**

Answer- that Christ might be the firstborn among many brethren

If there were sound effects in scripture this passage would be accompanied with a drum roll. We can't allow how profound this truth is to be lost. This is the great purpose of God from the beginning of creation. A study could easily be made regarding how God had **the salvation that Christ would provide** planned from before he even created the first man and woman. Scripture talks about our salvation being determined from before creation. This has **always** been God's plan. It isn't like the dispensationalists present it. They say that God has reacted to man's rebellion with plan after plan until Christ died. And now we are on the final installment.

It isn't like that at all. The plan was **always** that Christ would die. And the purpose in it all was always that Christ would be glorified. He was always intended to be the first born among many brethren.

So here we see the primary purpose of God in our salvation. It is ultimately not about us at all. It is about Christ. Christ will be fully glorified. And so He deserves to be. None of us gave our lives to pay the ransom for anyone's sins. None of us lived a sinless life so we could die for the sins of others. None of us left heaven's splendor to save a bunch of people who had nothing by which to recommend themselves. It is Christ that is to be glorified. But notice HOW he will be glorified because this has a lot to do about God's purpose for us.

We see here that Christ will be the firstborn. Most of us are aware that in the Jewish world the firstborn son had a special place of status. He was preeminent over the rest of his siblings. He represented his father's interest and status in a way that no one else could. He had special privilege and an unusual respect. Christ is that and more. Christ is the only **truly begotten** son. We are adopted sons. While that is amazing and more wonderful than we can even imagine, we can never pretend that we are on the same level as Christ. He is God's only

begotten Son. He has special privilege and special honor. And He is worthy of all glory and honor. So this is all true.

And God had this honor prepared to bestow on Christ from the beginning. It was all prepared ahead of time. The fact that the clock keeps ticking and the world keeps turning is all about **Christ**. You won't hear that on a news broadcast. You won't hear the talking heads saying this. You won't gather it from Fox or CNN or NBC. But it is true none-the-less. They simply are **unaware** of the purpose of God for history. And they are not likely to know until the last trumpet sounds. But that is what world history is all about. History is not cyclical. It is linear. And it is steadily and speedily heading to **one important event**. Christ will be glorified as the first born among many brethren.

But wait here. What is this about "among many brethren"? If we don't find this amazing our hearts are too dull. How can we be included in that sentence? How can we be included in this most important event of all history?

The answer to this riddle is fairly simple. Every believer was chosen before the foundation of the world for this very purpose.

God chooses to have people be a primary means of declaring the glory of the Son.

God chooses to have people be a primary means of declaring the glory of the Son.

Now why would God do such a thing? I don't think scripture answers the question "why". Somehow it pleases God to do so. But it is very clear that this is what God has decided. This is clearly His purpose.

Do you know what this means? God's plan is not accomplished if every chosen brother or sister is not there. Now, do you think the Father will fail to fully glorify Christ? Do you think His plan will be thwarted or interfered with in any way? No. There is not a chance that God's will could be interrupted. So what then is the implication?

A believer's salvation is every bit as secure as Christ's glorification because God in His sovereignty has tied the two together.

Wow. Isn't that encouraging? Isn't that truth amazing? God has tied His people into the glorification of Christ in such a way that the two cannot be separated. The glorification of the children and the glorification of the Son cannot be unlinked.

So we see that the purpose of God is that Christ will be glorified, partly by being surrounded by those who are prepared to share eternity with Him worshipping Him.

Now we will spend a few minutes looking at the next point in our outline. We can't complete it this morning. But we will get a good start.

The five link chain of God's method in accomplishing His purpose

Now that we know God's purpose Paul explains how God accomplishes that purpose. We see this all from God's perspective. It is what HE does. Really we don't get involved until the third point, which is the calling of God. While repentance is **OUR** first step in salvation, it is not **THE** first step in salvation. God has already done a couple of things before we are drawn to repent.

But again, this is not about us. This is from God's perspective. It is important that we maintain that perspective. Some would come to our current passage and come away with a view that our wills never become actively involved in this process. That is a bad conclusion. We must go other places in scripture to see how our wills are involved. This passage is about what **God** does to accomplish his purpose.

Mr. Barnhouse says of this chain that it is a five link chain from eternity reaching us on the third chain and taking us back into eternity.

We will look at Foreknowledge and Predestination next week. I challenge you to come prepared with your understanding of what those two terms mean clearly in your minds. We will then seek to logically show what they must mean given the whole context of scripture.

For today we will finish by covering the last three links of the chain since they do not require a lot of explanation at this point.

Calling- We discussed this a few weeks ago. This is the puppy on the leash illustration where, when God calls us, we come. These are part of the gifts and callings of God that are irrevocable. We looked at lots of scriptures that show all believers are the called ones. So I don't think we need to spend much time on this.

This is the third link of the chain in God carrying out His purpose. He calls us. That is what is seen in heaven. From our prospective it feels like we are fully deciding for Christ. We finally think straight. We think we have come to wonderfully accurate conclusions. We might think we have thought better than we have ever thought in all our lives. We finally see ourselves for who we really are. We see God for who He really is. And we make what we think is the smartest decision we have ever made- far smarter than those around us who do not decide to follow Christ. That is how we experience it. And that is all true. We repent. We really do see our sin and it strikes us with an awfulness that we never saw before. We see our part in all this evil and we know that it is our fault. We

would naturally think that our repentance is the first step in us coming to Christ. After all, that is all we experienced. So we might think it was all caused by us thinking well and making rational decisions. And it is very true that coming to Christ is the most rational thing a human ever does. But we don't yet know the full story. In fact, if God didn't tell us the whole story we would never know it. But God does tell us. He tells us that it is **He** who calls us. And when He calls us, it causes changes that we could never accomplish. Our eyes are opened to truths we could have never seen by ourselves. We wake up to a reality that we would have been eternally unaware of, had God not made the first move. Don't ever think that the Sovereign Grace doctrines we preach mean there is no human interaction or responsibility. There is a world of it. But the human will does not **initiate** the salvation. It is a **response** to what God has already done. The whole issue of Sovereign Grace is the issue of who **causes** salvation. Armenian thought says that man **causes** it by choosing to respond to the outward call of God. Sovereign Grace teaching says that **God causes** by choosing to initiate the effectual **inward** call of God that is 100% effective in every human who is called.

Justification - Seeing that all of Romans seems to be talking about Justification, I don't think we need to spend a whole lot of time here either. Justification is essentially being made right **WITH** God **BY** God. Some say a way to remember what it means is to remember- just as if I'd never sinned. But that is not the most accurate way of stating it. It does however produce much the same result. Our sin is taken care of.

So this is the 4th link in the chain of how God carries out His purposes. God calls us and then He Justifies us. The sin problem is taken care of. The penalty is removed and the power is undone. When Christ died, justification for every believer truly was finished.

Glorification- Note in our text that this is put in the past tense. Notice also that there is no mention of sanctification. At this point we have got to remember that this is all from **God's** perspective. From God's perspective when a person is Foreknown, they are as good as glorified. Repentance is a place where our wills are involved in the salvation process. Sanctification is a place where our wills are involved in our spiritual growth. We are actively involved in the process. But this isn't talking about **our** part. This is describing **God's method** in carrying out His purposes. He does not need to speak of Sanctification. That will most assuredly

happen, but again, from God's perspective, what He has started is as good as done.

And here, when Paul mentions glorification he uses the past tense Aorist tense of once and done. When you are talking about the will of God, there is no room for maybe. It is always "Yes". So if God has **foreknown you** and **predestined you** and **called you** and **justified you**, **glorification** is simply a matter of the right tick of the clock. It is as certain as the glorification of Christ.

So this is the final stage in accomplishing the purpose of God. God will finalize everything one day and we will all experience the glory of Christ with Him, as his brothers and sisters. On that day our salvation will be complete and God's ultimate purpose will be fulfilled.

All lovers of God- those who have been called of God to respond to the Gospel- will **be conformed to the image of His Son,**
And Christ will be glorified as the firstborn among many brethren

What a great day that will be, and worth anything..... and I mean anything.... We might face until that day.

Let us keep in mind this week the purpose of God. It will help us keep perspective in this life. We can **keep in mind** what life is **for**. And we can shape all of our decisions with **that knowledge**. I was thinking about these things this week. I was thinking about my hesitancy to commit myself to aggressive evangelism. And I was reminded that we reap what we sow. If I spend the time that God has given me on stuff that doesn't matter, I am going to have a crop of "it doesn't matter". But if my time is devoted to those things that are part of God's purpose, my life will produce those things that have value to God. God gives us that choice. And we display our love for God, whether weak or strong, by the choices we make. Let's actively decide to devote ourselves to God's purposes this week. Next week we will cover step one and two of God's method in achieving His purpose.

