

## All Things for Our Salvation

Romans 8:26–30<sup>1</sup>

### According to the Will of God.

As we considered last Lord's Day, as with all the numerous activities of the Holy Spirit listed in Romans chapter 8,

<sup>26</sup> Likewise...

(in the same way)

...the Spirit helps us in our weakness...

and the Spirit gives this help in a very specific way. Paul wrote,

<sup>26</sup> ...For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

So, the Spirit helps us, by interceding for us,

<sup>27</sup> And he who searches hearts...

that is, God the Father,

...knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints **according to the will of God.** Romans 8:26–27 ESV

So, we ask for what we want, but beneath, or perhaps in and through, our prayer, the Spirit Himself is interceding, and the Spirit **always** prays the will of God. We, inevitably, ask for what we want, and this is a very human thing. When faced with the cross, Jesus Himself prayed,

<sup>39</sup> ...“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me...” Matthew 26:39 ESV

that is what He wanted in His humanity and in the moment. Like He said in the Gospel of John,

<sup>27</sup> “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? ...” John 12:27 ESV

We often pray this way as well. “Father, give me what I want...” (“O Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz...”). The thing is, when Jesus prayed, in the latter instance He went on to say,

<sup>27</sup> “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? **But for this purpose I have come to this hour.** <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name.”... John 12:27–28 ESV

And in the former:

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture citations, unless noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me...” Matthew 26:39 ESV

Then He added,

... “**nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.**” Matthew 26:39 ESV

It’s worth noting that Jesus was not praying in a vacuum. He knew the will of God. He knew that He was going to the cross. He knew that it was for that very purpose that God had brought Him to that time and place. So, when He prayed, “nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will,” it was not a prayer of surrender to blind chance. It was a prayer of complete submission. He was committing Himself to the will of God even as He acknowledged that the cross was not something that any human being would choose for Himself.

Sometimes we do the same—it’s undoubtedly something that we should do all the time—but even when we don’t—even when our weakness would turn us away from God’s will—we have the assurance that the Spirit helps us by interceding for the saints, and always, “according to the will of God.” The Spirit, then, always prays, “Your will be done.” The Spirit always, always, prays for God’s glory, and whatever glorifies the Living God is ultimately for our good. Jesus prayed, “Let this cup pass from me...” but ultimately, it was the will of the Lord that He go to the cross, where

<sup>5</sup> ...he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53:5 ESV

That was the will of God, and there has never been any act in history that brought more glory to God and more benefit to His people. So, the Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God, and this is very good, because, as difficult as this is to see at times,

<sup>28</sup> ...we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28 ESV

Or, as we find it in the New International Version,

<sup>28</sup> ...we know that in all things... Romans 8:28 NIV84

—rain *and* drought, fruitful *and* lean years...health *and* sickness, prosperity *and* poverty<sup>3</sup>—in **all things,**

...God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28 NIV84

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> CRCNA (Christian Reformed Church in North America), ed., “The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 27”, *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Publications, 1988), 23.

## The Golden Chain.

But what is the purpose of God for those whom He has called? What is the will of God for which the Spirit intercedes? Well, God's purpose for His people is revealed to us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in verses 29 and 30.

<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 ESV

This is sometimes referred to as the golden chain of salvation, beginning with foreknowledge, with each successive doctrine forming a link that brings us *from* the work of God in eternity to the work of God in eternity. In other words, while this focuses on the people of God—those whom He has called—it's not about our work. It's all about the work of God. The golden chain binds those whom God foreknew, to an eternal weight of glory that will one day be revealed in and through them—

<sup>4</sup> ...to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>1</sup> Peter 1:4–5 ESV

## Foreknowledge and Predestination.

The first link is found in the words,

<sup>29</sup> For those whom he **foreknew**...

—that's the first link—and those whom He foreknew...

...he also **predestined**...

—there's the second—

...to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:29 ESV

Now, some have taken this idea of foreknowledge in a very simplistic sense, as if Paul were writing that God has predestined and then called those whom He knew in advance were going to choose and accept Him, and we could spend a lot of time here, but we don't have a lot of time. The Canons of Dort speak to this in a straightforward fashion, teaching that election, the sovereign choice of God,

...took place, **not on the basis of** foreseen faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, or of any other good quality and disposition, *as though it were based on a prerequisite cause or condition in the person to be chosen*, but rather **for the purpose of** faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, and so on...As the apostle says...

(in Ephesians 1, verse 4),

...“He chose us” (*not because we were*, but) “so that we should be holy and blameless before him in love”.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, the foreknowledge that we’re speaking of here is not mere prescience—the ability to see into the future and know what’s going to happen. This is foreknowledge of the kind God described to Jeremiah,

<sup>5</sup> “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you...

and, in Jeremiah’s case,

...I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Jeremiah 1:5 ESV

God didn’t consecrate Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations because He knew that Jeremiah would do this anyway. Jeremiah became a prophet to the nations because God, by sovereign choice, set him apart for that very purpose. As John Calvin wrote,

...the foreknowledge of God, which Paul mentions, is not a bare prescience, as some unwise persons absurdly imagine, but the adoption by which he had always distinguished his children from the reprobate.<sup>5</sup>

So, those whom God foreknew—those whom He adopted to be His own from before the foundation of the world—He did also predestine, and this means exactly what it sounds like. The destination—the outcome—is predetermined.

Now, there’s no such thing as a perfect analogy, and this is especially true when speaking of divine sovereignty, but imagine someone who is on board an airplane that is bound for Toronto. Assuming that all goes according to plan, that person, and everyone else on board, is predestined to arrive in Toronto. Now in human terms, there’s a lot that could go wrong there, and the plane might land elsewhere, but in terms of divine sovereignty,

<sup>19</sup> ...God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his...”  
2 Timothy 2:19 ESV

and all those whom He has foreknown, He has predestined, and the predetermined destination is defined for us right here in Romans chapter 8.

<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. Romans 8:29 ESV

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<sup>4</sup> CRCNA, ed., “The Canons of Dort, First Point, Art. 9”, *Ecumenical Creeds*, 124, italics mine.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin and John Owen, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 317.

That's the destination. That's the outcome of God's sovereign choice. God has chosen people to be conformed to the image of His Son, which is to say, God has chosen people for salvation. As the apostle John wrote,

<sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him...

(we shall be conformed completely to His image)

...because we shall see him as he is. <sup>1</sup> John 3:2 ESV

### Calling, Justification, and Glorification.

But for that to be true, we also have to be called by God, and this is the next link in the chain.

<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son... <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called... Romans 8:29-30 ESV

So, we have to be called, and we have to be called in such a way that despite being dead in our trespasses and sin, we will hear, believe, confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, and be saved. And again, there is a whole sermon in each of these points, and I can't do this justice in the next 5 minutes, but think of Lazarus lying dead in his tomb after 4 days. He could not hear the weeping of his friends and family. He could not be moved by them. He could not change his situation, and had no desire to do so. His sisters might have stood at the entrance to that tomb crying, "Lazarus, come forth!" for the rest of their lives, and nothing would have happened.

Then the Lord Jesus Christ appeared, and they took away the stone, and then the Son of God, the Creator of all things, the one

<sup>21</sup> ...gives life to whom he will... John 5:21 ESV

<sup>43</sup> And...He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." John 11:43 NASB6

And this was an effectual call. In this call, Lazarus was given life. In this call, Lazarus was given the power to actually obey, and so, he did. And this illustrates the effectual call of the gospel—the call extended to all those whom God has foreknown and predestined—the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of all those whom God has chosen to belong to Him. And we know Romans 8 is speaking of an effectual call, because

<sup>30</sup> ...those whom he called he also justified... Romans 8:30 ESV

Those who are effectually called inevitably come to salvation. Their sins are forgiven, not because of any righteousness in themselves, and not because they were able in themselves to choose Christ, but all because of God's sovereign and amazing grace. We've been talking about this since we began this study in the book of Romans.

...and those whom he justified he also glorified. Romans 8:30 ESV

### All Things for Our Salvation.

If the Lord is willing, we'll look at this more next Sunday, but for now, let me read it one more time.

<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 8:28–30 ESV

This is the golden chain—the order of salvation—but for this morning notice exactly who is at work here. **He** foreknew. **He** predestined. **He** called. **He** justified. **He** glorified. You may notice a theme there... This golden chain is the work of God and God alone. It begins with the work of the Spirit, and it ends there.

<sup>4</sup> ...when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> **he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy,** by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4–7 ESV

And this is the good news that we proclaim. And truly, it is good news. Left to ourselves we would die in our sin. Left to ourselves, we would face a righteous judge and stand condemned. But, even though our conscience accuses us of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without our deserving it at all, **out of sheer grace**, and for no other reason at all, God grants and credits to us, and to all those whom He has foreknown, predestined, and called, the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if we had never sinned nor been sinners, as if we had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for us.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and *this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God*—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8–9 NIV84

This is the gospel; this is our hope; and this is our only comfort in life and in death. Please say it with me. "What is your only comfort in life and in death?"

That I am not my own,  
but belong—  
body and soul,

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. CRCNA, ed., "The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 60", *Ecumenical Creeds*, 38.

in life and in death—  
to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,  
and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

He also watches over me in such a way  
that not a hair can fall from my head  
without the will of my Father in heaven:  
in fact, **all things must work together for my salvation.**<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> CRCNA, ed., “The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1”, *Ecumenical Creeds*, 13.