

He Romans 8:30-31

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I drive a car. So do you. I get in. I turn it on. I shift it into gear. I put my foot on the accelerator. Down the road it goes. If I were to ask you, *how does your car go down the road?* You may say, it must have gas. The key has to be in the "on" position. You push the accelerator and down the road it goes. If that's all you know, that's all you need to know (along with minor details like braking and speed limits). Hundreds of millions of people drive their cars each day and that is about all they know about how a car goes down the road.

But if you ask a car mechanic or an engineer at GM, *how does a car go down the road?* you are going to get a much different answer. My dad was lead engineer on John Deere's number one worldwide engine. If you asked him, *how do tractors go down the field?* He could get utterly technical and share things you and I have never thought of or heard of. Most of us are glad our tractors go down the field and our cars go down the road.

How God makes sinners righteous before him and how God turns sinners into eternal saints is like your car. There's a minimum you need to know and believe in order to be counted among God's people and to be given the inestimable gift of eternal life. A simple summary would be John 3:16 (ESV), "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*" Lots of people will be saved and the depth of their understanding is not much deeper than that. Praise God the gospel car will take you to heaven.

But if you really want to drive a car, if you want to love a car, if you want the maximum performance and experience of a car, you have to know how it works. Romans 8 ends by opening God's gospel engineering and explaining in depth how God makes sinners righteous forever. Should we be surprised to discover there's some hard-to-understand dimensions to how the infinite God did this? No. Our text is Romans 8:30, but it's part of a paragraph. Let me read it.

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

These verses conclude a section begun in verse 18 which highlights that our present sufferings are not to be compared with the glory that is coming. Suffering now. Glory then. Pain now. Glory to come. It reaches its crescendo in verse 28 that if we are God's people, God works all things together for good. What good, might we ask? See the flow, because the good of verse 28 is the conforming to Jesus in verse 29 and the glorified of verse 30. These are all part of the same promise of God sovereignly working good for those who are "*called according to his purpose.*" (verse 28)

Our passage today summarizes how God does it. Four works of God given in their sequential order. The end game is glorification. The starting point is predestination. In between are calling and justification. Not included are important aspects like regeneration, adoption,

sanctification, and others. So, this is a highlight list. The primary works of God to secure our final and eternal salvation.

Let's walk through these:

He Predestined

"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 8:30)

"Those whom he predestined." We talked about predestination last week and the simple reality that predestination is a Bible word. Some people pretend not to believe in it, but that is not a position a biblical Christian can take. It's in the Bible. How we define it is our challenge. The word means what it says, *pre-* (before-hand) *destinate*. *To predetermine a destination*. In biblical categories, this is a predetermined eternal destination for us. Heaven or hell. As I said last week, we will spend lots of time in Romans 9 on the thornier questions of election and predestination and the mystery of God's sovereign work and our willful choices. Stay tuned.

For now, notice it's past tense. *Predestined*. It is something God did long ago. When?

"Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." (Ephesians 1:4-5)

Election. Predestination. Foreknowledge. These are all activities of God before time began. As 1:4 says, before the foundation (or creation) of the world. There's past tense and then there's really past tense. God purposing to create a loving, saving relationship with sinners falls in the category of pre-time, pre-creation, pre-everything but God.

Past tense. Who did it? He. Where am I in this?

He Called

"And those whom he predestined he also called." (Romans 8:30)

The biblical concept of "call" is a bit confusing because the word is used in two different ways. The general call of God is God's universal offer to any sinner to trust in Christ and believe. As Jesus said, *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* (Matthew 11:28) The gospel is offered to everyone including each of us here today.

But that is not the call referred to here. The call here is referred to as the effectual call. The summoning call of God in the sinner's heart which moves the sinful, rebellious heart to trust and treasure Christ as Savior. Why is the call of God necessary?

We are born with spiritually dead hearts. Just like Lazarus would never have come out of that tomb if Jesus wouldn't have called, *Lazarus come forth*, our hearts would never be "resurrected" to believe if God did not summon us. God's call through the gospel creates what it calls, like when God said, *"Let there be light."* (Genesis 1:3) God's Word and will create whatever they purpose to create.

You and I can try that all we want. I read the true story of a Hindu leader who announced that he would walk on water. A date was set, and a huge crowd arrived to watch him do the

feat. He came to edge of the water and dramatically stepped in only to plunge in over his head. He came up sputtering and struggling and shouted to the crowd, *One of you is an unbeliever!*

Our will or words don't create the supernatural or the miraculous. But God's Word never returns void. It always does what God purposes and creates what God calls.

- *"But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."* (1 Corinthians 1:23–24)
- *"Those whom he predestined he also called."* (Romans 8:30)

We see a pattern developing, don't we? Each activity of God is indissolubly and indestructibly linked to the next saving activity. In fact, this verse is referred to as *The Golden Chain* of salvation. *"Those whom he predestined he also called."*

Called is also past tense. Who did it? *He*. Where am I in this?

He Justified

"And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified." (Rom. 8:30)

Now we are on more familiar footing because if Romans has enriched anything to our appreciation it is justification. What is it? Justification is God's declaration of the sinner as righteous before him. This comes by faith, although our faith doesn't accomplish justification. Our faith is not a meritorious work. Jesus' death on the cross is the all-sufficient means by which God can declare us righteous. Jesus' righteousness is reckoned to our moral account and our sin is attributed to him. Justification is God's promise to treat us as righteous as Jesus forever.

Here in 8:30 we see the link to calling and predestination. *"Those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified."* We see that there are not some he predestined who were not called or justified. There are not some he justified who were not predestined or called. All he predestined he called. All he called he justified. There is not one person lost in the progression from predestined to justified.

This is also past tense. Who did it? *He*. Where am I in this?

He Glorified

"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 8:30)

Of all the words in this verse, this one is the shocker and contains the main point of the whole thing. Why?

Glorification is the Bible word for the future of the Christian. This includes our resurrection and promised glorified body. It includes our full sanctification to moral purity. This insinuates our future destiny which is heaven until Jesus returns and ultimately our forever with God on the new earth. All the future wonder and blessings that await us are summarized by glorification. It's all future.

Yet what tense is used in verse 30? The tense we would expect would easily be the future tense. So, the verse would say, *Those whom he justified he also will glorify*. But that is not what it says. It says, "*Those whom he justified he also glorified*." Past tense. Past tense? How can a future promise be described in a past tense?

I remember once doing a wedding. I was in the back with the groom and groomsmen. I was peeking out the door watching the bridesmaids come down, and we were about to walk out when the groom whispered in my ear, just so you know, we got married three months ago. Da, Dum Da Da.... I walked out on stage completely confused and not sure what to do. How do we talk about what it means to get married when you are already married? Single people, don't do that to your pastor.

But it gets at this point. There is a grammatical tense known as the *prophetic future tense*. A prophetic future is speaking of something in the future that is so certain that you talk about it like it's already happened. So, the bully on the playground looks at his next victim and says, *you are dead meat*. What is that? He is exercising a prophetic future tense. *I am so confident that I'm going to destroy you that I'm speaking of you as if it has already happened*.

Larry Bird famously walked into the All-Star locker room right before the 3-point shootout and told his competitors, *You guys are fighting for second*. He was speaking of a future reality as if had already happened.

Why does that matter in Romans 8:30? Because our salvation from first to last is so certain to be accomplished that God describes it in the past tense. Those he justified he also *glorified*.

Who can say that? Does the bully actually know that the skinny kid isn't secretly a third-degree black belt? Does Larry Bird know he's going to win the three-point contest? No. No human can speak of anything in the future with any actual knowledge. We can pretend, plan, and playact. But we don't know what our next second of life holds for us much less eternity future.

But with the God who works everything according to the purpose of his will, everything future is as certain as everything past. God doesn't wish. God doesn't hope. God doesn't wait to see how things pan out. No circumstances overwhelm him. No efforts of sinners or Satan confound him our surprise him. There is nothing from beginning to end that doesn't fall within the sovereignty of our God who is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Only God can speak of the future as if it's already a done deal.

What is the point? Everything about our salvation is grounded in the eternal character and purpose of God. We can join God's certainty that all who call on the name of the Lord were saved (predestination), are saved (justification), and will be saved (glorification).

Where is Romans 8 going? It's heading into the greatest section of assurance of God's saving love to be found in the Bible. The very next verse is, "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" (Romans 8:31) That's next week.

Who is the repeated doer of each saving work? *He*. God. The beginning was God. The end was God. All of it for the good of those called according to HIS purpose. God's purpose is unchangeable, unalterable, undeniable, invincible. Therefore, our salvation is unable by any power in heaven or earth to be dissuaded, dissolved, or defeated.

[See video at 32:23 for visual of this illustration] I need some help. Everyone help me figure out who appears to be the strongest man in the room. Look around. Any nominations? Just point to him.

OK. I have a small chain here and I'm going to ask the strongest guy in the room to break it. [He breaks the chain with virtually no effort].

One of our church members runs the unloading docks for the iron ore ships of Lake Michigan. I asked him if I could borrow the biggest dock chain we reasonably could get in the room. [Steve asks the strongest guy in the room] Please lift this one. [It's a massively large chain. Steve says] Please break it. [The strongest guy in the room asks] Are you going to help? [Steve gets two other guys to help. Steve says] All of you lift it and try to break it. [Steve says] You can't break it? [They can't break it.]

Some of you are living your Christian life and seeing the promises of God like this small chain. You tremble wondering if God will come through. Maybe I won't make it. Life is hard. You are living small chain Christianity.

But God wants us to be Great Lakes Shipping Chain Christians and to realize that if God loved us before the foundations of the world and sees our glorification as a done deal, he will work everything in our today together for good too. Can you see the struggle you brought into this room as interwoven into the massive chain of God's purpose to save you?

All of it, even the worst of it, God will bring to a final good and glory. I want you to consciously apply the massive chain of God's promise to your present-day trial. The burden on your heart. The fear. The loss. The past pain. Even the future. What should we be thinking as we lay on our death bed? Small chain? Great Lakes dock chain?

What is the repeated word? He. He. He. He. Who does all this? God. Some of you insist you are contributing somehow to your salvation. Look at the summary of salvation. It's all he, there's no me. This got me thinking about he and me and I penned this little poetic reflection.

*I started my journey very much about me,
But the gospel made me ask, how did I come to see?*

*The glory of he dying for me on that Tree,
Surely I would not see if it were not for he.*

*I looked to the Cross to see more of me,
But all I could see was the sacrifice of he.*

*I looked to my faith as coming from me,
But me wouldn't believe, 'twas only from he.*

*Surely my walk and where it goes is me,
But looking back I see each step was from he*

*What of my future, can its destiny be of me?
Yet I'm only today, there in the future is he.*

*He or me? More I see it's not me,
For how would me be if it were not for he?*

"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 8:30)

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