



When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

“The Double Trouble of Predestination”

Romans 8:29-30

One Bible commentator said that the library at his theological seminary contained 10,000 books on the single subject of the Doctrine of Predestination. After centuries of debate, there is no lack of disagreement, even division, regarding predestination and the other major subject of these verses, God’s foreknowledge.

That’s not to say we can disregard these words, these subjects, these doctrines. It **is** to say that I will not solve this tonight or ever in my lifetime. **Neither will you.**

What we can do is adopt a perspective on predestination and foreknowledge that is biblical without becoming so dogmatic that we arrive at awful conclusions about God.

The place to start talking about verses twenty-nine and thirty is verse twenty-eight where we read,

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

We said in our last study that “those who love God” is a synonym for “believers in Jesus Christ.” It means those who are saved, born-again.

If you are a believer, you are “the called according to His purpose.” Now the next two verses, twenty-nine and thirty, are the explanation of that statement. They tell us what it means to be “the called” and what is God’s “purpose” for those who are “the called.”

Romans 8:29 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.

Let's hold our comments on God's foreknowledge and predestination for a moment and see just what is God's "purpose" for the believer.

God's purpose is that every believer "be conformed to the image of His Son," Jesus Christ.

I remind you that this entire chapter has as its theme the sanctification of the believer. It's *not* about how you get saved. Paul talked about salvation in the earlier chapters. This chapter - indeed chapters six, seven and eight - are all about living out the Christian life day-by-day.

What is simply but wonderfully being taught by the words "be conformed to the image of His Son" is that God will continually perform His work of making you more like Jesus Christ until the day you are either resurrected or raptured and His work is completed. He who has begun this work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

The technical term, "firstborn among many brothers," applies to Jesus Christ's new position after His resurrection from the dead. He became the first of all those who would be raised from the dead never to die again.

The "many brethren" are all those who believe in Him; all those who are saved. As the "firstborn among many brothers," Jesus has eternal priority; yet He is not ashamed to call us, who follow Him, His brothers and sisters.

God is therefore conforming us to the image of Jesus. This is what the apostle John understood when he wrote. "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (First John 3:2).

Now that we know God's purpose for believers we are in a better position to discuss foreknowledge and predestination. Let's talk predestination first.

“Predestine” means *to determine something beforehand*. Read the words again and you’ll see exactly what was determined beforehand. You are “predestined to be conformed into the image” of Jesus Christ.

It’s another way of saying that what God has begun He will perform and complete. There is no thought here of you being predestined to salvation. No, you are predestined with regard to your sanctification. God has determined beforehand that everyone who believes in Jesus will become like Him.

So, for me, biblical predestination has nothing to do with initial salvation. It is about your sanctification. Once you are saved, you are then predestined to be conformed into the image of Christ.

The word “predestined” occurs two other times in the New Testament. Let’s look at them.

Ephesians 1:5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says,

The emphasis of predestination is more on the *what* than the *who* in that the believers’ predetermined destiny is their being adopted as full-fledged sons of God through Jesus Christ, the Agent of the adoption.

This is in perfect agreement with what we said about predestination in Romans 8:29 & 30. It describes what God will definitely do in the lives of those who are saved.

Besides that, who are the “us” in Ephesians 1:5? The answer is in verse one, “the saints who are in Ephesus.”

The other occurrence of predestination is a few verses later in Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,

Again this seems to be describing God's purpose of conforming believers into the image of His Son.

What does, "whom He foreknew" mean? What is God's foreknowledge? Hang on a little while longer, please.

Romans 8:30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

We've just seen that "whom He predestined" refers to God's certain, continual work in the lives of believers. If you are a believer it is because you were "called." When you responded to that call, you were "justified." One day you will be "glorified."

I added the 'one day you will be' to the idea of being "glorified." Why? Because that is our earthly perspective. We think in a linear manner, bound by time and space.

I'll use myself as an example. I heard the Gospel in 1979 as a 'call' to salvation. I responded and was immediately "justified." I was saved; I was born-again. It began the process of sanctification which will, in my future, result in my being "glorified" when I am resurrected or raptured.

Notice, however, the verse does not say "these He **will** glorify." No, it declares God has already accomplished this.

How is that possible? It's not only possible, it is true because God is not restricted by time.

God's "foreknowledge" is, from our perspective, a knowledge of what will happen in the future. But from God's perspective **there is no future!** He knows all things at once simultaneously. He sees my entire life all at once.

From all eternity God saw me getting saved. He knew in advance whether I would receive or reject Jesus Christ. He knew my choice before I made it. And he sees me as already "glorified" even though I am still, from my perspective, in the process of sanctification.

Does that mean that my choice to receive Jesus Christ in 1979 was determined ahead of time? Does that mean I had no free will in the matter?

Not at all! God's foreknowledge does not cause me to receive or to reject Jesus Christ. He has not by foreknowledge already chosen for me. He is sovereign and I am free to choose.

Dr. Norman Geisler, in his excellent book *Chosen but Free*, does a great job showing that God's foreknowledge of my actions does not mean God causes them. God can remain sovereign and ordain that my free choice *is* the means by which I receive or reject Jesus.

Remember I said I would not resolve this issue tonight. I haven't resolved it. What I've done is given you a perspective on God's foreknowledge and on your predestination that is biblical and that does not dogmatically lead you to awful conclusions about God.

That is the second time I've used the term "awful conclusions about God." What do I mean?

There are those who believe that the Bible teaches you are predestined to salvation. R.C. Sproul articulates the Reformed view of predestination like this:

The Reformed view asserts that the ultimate decision for salvation rests with God and not with man. It teaches that from all eternity God has chosen to intervene in the lives of some people and bring them to saving faith and has chosen not to do that for other people. From all eternity, without any prior view of our human behavior, God has chosen some unto election and others unto reprobation. The ultimate destiny of the individual is decided by God before that individual is even born and without depending ultimately upon the human choice.

The word that probably caught your attention was "some." God chose to save "some," but not others and not all. He could have chosen more or all but He didn't. In fact, He has chosen some to "reprobation," which means they will be eternally suffering in Hell.

This is sometimes called ‘double predestination’ and while some who believe God predestines you to be saved say He does not predestine anyone to be lost, that’s not really an option in Reformed theology. Sproul very honestly writes,

If there is such a thing as predestination at all, and if that predestination does not include all people, then we must not shrink from the necessary inference that there are two sides to predestination.

A lot of people believe predestination is to salvation and that it is double. They have many intelligent sounding arguments to defend their position, claiming it to be the one, true ‘grace’ message of the Bible with regards to salvation.

Let’s put this in an illustration. I came across this in a book called *Whosoever Will*, by David Allen and Steven Lemke. (I highly recommend it!). It takes a non-Reformed approach to this subject, as do I.

Here’s the illustration:

Imagine a fireman who goes into a burning orphanage to save some young children because they are unable to escape by themselves and can be saved only if he rescues them. Only he can save them because he has an asbestos suit. He comes back in a few minutes bringing out 3 of the 30 children, but rather than going back in to save more children, the fireman goes over to the news media and talks about how praiseworthy he is for saving the three children.

Indeed, saving the three children was a good, heroic deed. But the pressing question on everyone’s mind is, What about the other 27 children? Since he has the means to rescue the children and, indeed, is the only one who can save the children since they cannot save themselves, do we view the fireman as morally praiseworthy?

I suggest that we would not. In fact, probably he would be charged with depraved indifference. He had the means to help them, but he would not. If we do not find that praiseworthy in a human, why would we find it praiseworthy in God?

If the Bible clearly and unequivocally taught that God acts like this fireman with regard to the human race, then we would have to believe it.

Godly men, scholarly men, intelligent men, disagree with the Reformed view of predestination *not* because they haven't studied or because they don't know the original languages of the Bible or because they don't like it, *but because they don't see it unequivocally taught in the Bible.*

You *can* believe that God is a malicious fireman. But why would you want to since there **are** scholarly, accurate alternatives that are biblical?

That is what I meant when I said "awful conclusions about God." I *can* believe the worst of Him, that He's awful for predestinating people to Hell whom He could have chosen. I can act like that is praiseworthy somehow since God was under no obligation to save anyone.

But why would I want to believe such a thing if I don't have to?

I don't have to. So I don't and I won't.

One author summarized predestination and foreknowledge like this:

The goal of predestination is sanctification ("to be conformed to the image of His Son"). The believers, those God foreknew from eternity, He predestined (predetermined) that these would grow in sanctification. And verse thirty tells us that the end of the road is glorification. This passage states that the path of the believer is predestined. But where does it ever tell us that [God] predestined some individuals to believe? Rather, context states that those He foreknew (who would love God, Romans 8:28) are predestined to sanctification (and glorification). This verse says nothing about God predestining certain ones to believe... From this verse at least, it seems as if sanctification and glorification are predestined, *not* the faith of the individual.

I wish I could say, "Problem solved! Debate over!" That's not gonna happen.

Hopefully I've given you enough from the Scripture to show that God is not a fireman who could have saved all but chose to only save some and then said it was to His glory.

No, His salvation is available to all, to "whosoever will believe." He is "the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe" (First Timothy 4:10).

He's the fireman who died for *every* lost soul.