

Five Gold Links to Glory 3

Romans 8:29-30

I did give serious consideration to having a message on Thanksgiving today. I thought about it for about a whole minute, and came to the conclusion we should be especially thankful that we serve a sovereign God who saves.

We also have some momentum here that we want to finish up.

We have worked our way backwards or outwards, from the leaves of glorification and being conformed perfectly to Jesus; to what we saw last time – the trunk of this tree which is effectual calling and being justified freely by faith.

We come today to the root of the tree – everything in creation begins first in the mind of God.

So foreknowledge and predestination are from eternity past. Calling and justification are applied in time. And all of this saving action carries us into eternity future – the eternal glorification of all of God's people. God saves us in time. God saves us to eternity. God has saved us from eternity!

These are only two of the words used in the Bible to speak of God's plan from before the foundation of the world.

There is God's *good pleasure*, His *eternal counsel*, his *eternal will* and of course the word *election*, or sometimes rendered *chosen*. Then there is also the word *foreordination* which is similar predestination.

We find many of these words in the first chapter of Ephesians. Verse 4 says “just as He *chose* us in Him before the foundation of the world.” Verse 5, “in love He *predestined* us to adoption as sons”, and again, the same verse, “according to the *good pleasure* of His will.” A little later in verse 9 Paul speaks of “the mystery of His *will*, according to His *kind intention* which He purposed.” And in 11 – “having been *predestined* according to His *purpose* who works all things after the *counsel* of His will.”

Two other big words must not be kept out of sight. First, we are saved according to grace, *eternal* grace, grace before the foundation of the world. And you have heard of the word, “love,” right? We are loved by God with an everlasting love, love without beginning as well as without end.

Now one thing they all have in common is they are all purposeful, directive. They are parts of the plan of God. And we can see orderliness in these words.

Speaking of election, or choosing, we find terms out of which election flows (such as God’s good pleasure, or His will). He elects according to his kind intention, his decision. Then there are other words which flow out from election, like predestination. So see this: 1. what precedes Election; 2. what is identical with election; and 3. what election secures, that is predestination.

All of this is gracious. We might see here *Designing* Grace, what ‘precedes’ election, which is God’s good pleasure, His love, His foreknowledge. Then *Distinguishing* Grace – the election or choosing itself, the marking out of His people. And lastly *Determining* Grace, what election secures, predestination to salvation and to glorification.

All of these are sovereign and gracious in quality. They are the acts of the eternal God, the sovereign potter over the clay.

Let us start with the less controversial word, *predestine*. This a compound word, *pro*, or before with *horidzo*, from which we get the word horizon, means to “to come to a definite decision or a firm resolve; to decide, to determine, to resolve, says Louw and Nida.

It is clear from several texts that predestination is founded upon God’s will, good pleasure, and God’s choosing. Thus, this term is the determining purpose of God.

It is the word, “foreknowledge” that becomes the point of discussion. It too is compound word. *Pro*, meaning before, and *gnosis*, and we have the English word, prognosis, an early determination.

There are two possibilities for how this word can be understood in the Bible, but there is only one that fits as you will see.

First, the word foreknowledge can mean to know before hand; to foresee. In 2 Pet 3.17 *You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard ...*

God certainly is omniscient and sees the end from the beginning.

So there are those who say God fore saw who would choose Jesus and be saved. And based on man’s choice, God predestined them to choose Jesus, to be called and justified.

Election then becomes an act first of man, and not of God. But everywhere in the Bible, it is God and not man who acts, and acts sovereignly. Think for instance of that great passage in Isaiah 46: ⁹ "Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, ¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not

been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'. (Isa 46:9-10)

We really run into some crazy problems if we try to read it so in Romans 8. Let me highlight them briefly for us.

First, foreseeing loses the quality of *purpose*. The whole passage begins because of the end of verse 28 – who are called according to His purpose. It is God's will being exercised. These are the nuts and bolts of God's purpose to redeem us. But instead, man becomes active and God becomes passive. God recognizes man's faith ahead of time. But surely we don't redeem ourselves!

Second, if you have God foreseeing something in time – and He certainly can – what is it He foresees except what He himself has planned and willed! As one writer put it, "God foreknows what will be, by determining what will be." (Haldane) You are not going to say he foresees something in history that His own hand hasn't done, right?

Third, what is being snuck in is the idea that man can exercise faith out of his own free will. But everywhere in the Bible we are told men of themselves cannot choose God, do not seek after God, are rebels who are stuck in their sins, love darkness rather than light, and God must give a new heart, must give faith and repentance, as well as the Spirit to do all of the above!

So it is the second and only possible understanding to be read here. Foreknowledge is not foreseeing; it is fore-loving.

This keeps the purposeful quality of a gracious God setting about to save a people to all eternity. We can feel that in Acts 2:23: *this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.* See how more than pre-knowing, foreknowledge is parallel with the predetermined plan and purpose of God.

And Peter in his first letter, 1 Pet 1.1, 2 *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens...who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.* Foreknowledge precedes the election of grace.

In our text, foreknowledge precedes predestination.

As should be well known, the word ‘*know*’ can have a deeper meaning than intellectual understanding.

To “know” is used in the Bible for the act of marriage. Three times in Genesis 4, “to know” is a synonym for intimate relations. “Knowing” causes conception!

And elsewhere it stands for love. Amos 3:2 is an excellent example. God says to Israel – you only of all the nations have I known. Clearly God knows all things, and the Omniscient One knew all the nations his hands formed. But Israel alone was beloved, chosen, called, and lovingly set apart as his own special people.

God loves you, believer, with an everlasting love, in Jeremiah 31:3. That is a love from everlasting, without beginning, without start, eternally. Does he love you because you first loved him, believed in him, turned to him? Or did his love draw you? You know the answer! If He had not plucked your feet out of the mire of sin, you would have gone on. But He has said to your soul, “I give unto them eternal life, and no man can pluck them from my hand!”

All the saving acts of God unfold from eternity past, from forever. God saves us! WE do not save ourselves! God does not need your help to bring us to heaven. Old Moses Hoge put it well:

*We believe that it was grace that provided a Savior,
that it was grace that paid the price of our redemption,
that it is grace that begins, carries on,
and finishes the sinner's salvation,
so that salvation from its original and from its first ray
of heavenly light which dawns upon the sinner on earth, until a
crown of glory is put upon his head in heaven,
is all grace, pure unmixed grace.*

Now what can we say to the charge that somehow ‘this isn’t fair’ or ‘this is fatalism’?

We might respond to ‘it isn’t fair’ by saying that’s the point. God is not treating any saint fairly, but better than fair. So glad he is not fair or we all must be in hell! The question is sometimes asked, well, why then did he not save others? Or, why did he not save more? When we ought to be asking, why did he save any? If salvation really isn’t earned or deserved.

We confess that such power and sovereignty in the hands of any other, would be a monstrous teaching. But it is in the hands of the only one whose hand can hold it! Our all-glorious and mysterious God, whom to know is eternal life!

We have more of sovereign election in the next chapter when Paul responds, “Who are you, o man?” and resolves God’s choice to his own will.

But we need to see predestination and election are not meant to be hindrances to salvation, but encouragements. Sovereign grace is not a restricting concept, but a positive and powerful draw to the gospel.

It is about salvation from condemnation and wrath and cursed, and not a stick for hitting people with a sovereign reprobation.

Is it not part of the gospel, that those who come to Jesus find such a love, such a grace, such salvation, that stretches not only to the heights of heaven and the depths of depravity, but reaches to an eternal past as well as an eternal future? An everlasting love of God is offered to sinners!

Why each gospel promise of being reconciled to God includes his love from eternity past! Come to the cross and you find all your sins washed away, heaven is your new home, a new life that is good and holy and true, and God's love that has had his eye on you from before you were you! Even from eternity past!

Well how do we know that love is for us if it is only for the elect?

The Bible warns us that the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those which are revealed to us and to our children.

God has not revealed the specifics of who are the elect, but only the means and ways taken for the elect, that is, the gospel.

Ichabod Spencer has made this very helpful remark: "The decrees are God's rules for his own action, not for yours." Repeat.

The gospel is for everyone! Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. But no one can call on the Lord unless they are drawn and have been chosen. Amen. BUT, nowhere is the specific choice known ahead of coming!

But I cannot come without God's help? Amen. But do you find God ever unwilling to receive any who cry out to him for help?

“Everyone can come,” is the message of the Bible. Everyone can change is the message of the Bible. God can save all He is pleased to save. And he is willing to save, he loves to save, he knows how to save, and he gives exactly what we lack, what we need – faith! Repentance from sin!

All are free to come but they do not have a free will. No, they have a God who freely gives his love, everlasting love, and redemption to all who come to Him. And all who come to him will never be cast out or turned back!

And is it not He who helps everyone who does enter! No man comes unless he is drawn by the Father. God will draw you to himself if you will call on him; and he will help you call on him!

He invites you on the simplest and easiest terms, consistent with his highest honor. He urges you to do so; he commands you turn to him; and if you do not you are sinning a great sin! Do you believe He is reluctant to bring you to Himself, when He has not spared his own Son’s pains to open this door to you?

Deal with the revealed will of God in the gospel! All may come, the feast is ready, and God will supply everything, including the appetite.

This is the Calvinist element that goes deeper than the Arminian view. We have a gospel that says, I can change your will!

We are not against the use of means. God’s grace engages the means. But the grace of God refuses to put the power in either the means or in the recipient. God and God alone must have the glory! And God and God alone is to have all of our thanks!