

# Called According to His Purpose

## Romans 8:28-30

The Gospel is so simple that even a child can understand it.

**John 3:16** <sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world,<sup>1</sup> that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

God makes an incredible promise to save us if we believe in his Son. Believe in Jesus and you will have eternal life. Every time the Gospel is preached the call is given to whoever is present: Turn from your sin and believe in Jesus Christ to save you, and He will most certainly will. Some believe...

Many do not.

Those who believe are saved. Those who choose not to believe remain under God's Holy wrath. But for those of us who are believing, God has also told us that we have been predestined. One of the sad facts about modern Christianity is that the majority of those who believe in Jesus Christ deny predestination. You may be one such person. If you are here today and you get nervous when you hear the word "predestination", I want you to know that I get where you are. I wrestled for several years resisting the doctrine of election. I could not see how the Gospel call of "whosoever believes" could possibly be consistent with the idea of God choosing us before the foundation of the world.

And yet, in the end, I could not evade forever the words of Scripture. Predestination is not a term that men have invented. The word Trinity has been created by men. I believe in the Trinity. One God existing in Three Persons. I am glad that men invented that term. It conveys accurately and helpfully the truth that we find in the Scripture. But the word is not found on the pages of the Bible.

The same cannot be said for the word "predestination". This is not a word that men devised in some dark room and then presented to the world. The very word is "God-breathed." God explicitly says to the person who loves him, "you have been predestined". To resist predestination is to resist God and his Holy Word.

This is important to understand because predestination is not an optional accessory to salvation. It is not some "add on" that some Christians accept while others simply do without. We might work out the meaning of predestination differently. But everyone who accepts the Bible as God's Word must also accept predestination.

Many who believe in Jesus Christ do reject predestination, but in doing so, they are denying the sovereign grace upon which their salvation depends. Make no mistake, no one is ever saved except by the Sovereign, electing, predestinating grace of God.

Read Romans 8:28-30.

The confidence that “all things work together for good” can only be possible if God is absolutely sovereign over all things. If there can be found anything that is outside of God’s sovereign control, then the whole building collapses.

ESV **Romans 8:28**

And we know  
that

for those who love God  
all things work together for good,<sup>1</sup>  
for those who are **called according to his purpose.**

It is because God is absolutely sovereign, even over the most terrible of situations, that we can know that “all things work together for good.”

Not everyone has the right to have this assurance. Only those who love God. The love of God is basic to what it means to be born of God. Every true Christian loves God. That love may not yet have come into its full bloom. But it exists, however imperfectly, within the soul of every true Christian.

Do you love God?

Then you can be confident that everything that ever happens to you, is being used for your good. And by good, I mean that it is being used by God to fulfill his purposes for you.

Now, if you look closely at verse 28, you will see the words “for those who...” used twice. The clauses that follow are parallel to one another. In other words, they make up the same class of people, viewed from two different perspectives.

We have already discussed the first clause: for those who love God.

Paul describes the redeemed from their own experience. What is my attitude towards God?

But in the second clause, Paul describes those same people from the perspective of the eternal plan of God: those who called according to his purpose. If you truly love God, however imperfectly, then you have also been called according to the purpose of God.

In order to understand the purpose of God, we need to first ask “What is purpose?”. Purpose is having a plan, a design with an intended goal.

Paul speaks of God’s plan in other places: <sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 9:11** though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad - in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call –

God's plan is connected with election

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 1:11** In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

God's plan to predestinate individuals to salvation is one aspect of his larger plan to work all things to the counsel of his will.

-Predestination to salvation is connected with God's Sovereignty over all things.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 3:11** This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,

God's plan is an eternal plan, and it is realized in Christ Jesus. Jesus is at the center of the plan.

<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Timothy 1:9** who saved us and called us to<sup>1</sup> a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.<sup>2</sup>

God's plan is joined with God's grace/his love/his affection – towards us. We only know of God's plan because God has revealed it to us. Without his telling us the plan we would not discover it for ourselves.

God wants us to see our redemption from his perspective, to see the working out of his eternal plan. If he did not want us to think about predestination, he would not have told us of it. From your perspective, salvation began when you believed in Jesus Christ, at the moment when you began loving Jesus Christ.

But from God's perspective your redemption began long before. It involved God's design and his intentional activity. He was very purposefully working to take you from being dead in sin all the way to his determined goal – your enjoyment of glory with him. That was the plan: God desired to save people from their sins and bring them to experience glory with himself. The members of the Triune God had an eternal conference in which they were in perfect agreement upon the plan. Each member of the Godhead would have their own roles to fulfill in accomplishing the plan. No member would ever act independently of the others. They would all work in concert with one another, harmoniously.

All those who will stand with Christ in glory have each been called according to this eternal plan, this eternal purpose. In two short verses, Paul lists 5 sovereign acts of God.

Foreknowledge, Predestination, Calling, Justification, Glorification

It is important to see that Paul connects each of these in an unbreakable chain. They are distinguishable acts. But they are not separate acts. They are all linked parts of the same plan of redemption.

All those whom God foreknew, he predestined.  
Only those whom God foreknew, did he predestine.  
All those whom God predestined, he called.  
Only those whom God predestined, did he call.  
All those whom God called, he justified.  
Only those whom God called, did he justify.  
All those whom God justified, he glorified.  
Only those whom God justified, did he glorify.

If there were 100 people whom God foreknew, then there will be 100 people whom God will glorify. There are none who are lost along the way.

Jesus alludes to this very thing in John 6.

**John 6:37-39** <sup>37</sup> All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. <sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup> And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.

There is a logical order to the plan, but the whole plan works together as a whole. God is accomplishing in salvation the plan that he designed from all eternity. We only see glimpses of this plan now, but when we get to glory, we will see the full picture of what God has done to bring us to glory.

His sovereign grace will be on full display. There are many things we will do in glory, but one ongoing blessing will be watching our salvation, and the salvation of everyone else, as God's sovereign grace constantly accomplishing the goal for which it was designed.

Only when we get to glory will we really understand how much we owe to the sovereign grace of God.

Let's walk through each of the five links in the unbroken chain.

<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew  
God foreknew the people whom he would glorify.  
Foreknew = knew beforehand.

proe,gnw

The Greek word “ginoskow” has a very broad meaning depending on the context. It can refer to simple intellectual awareness. (I know that I am standing here preaching to you.) It can imply the process of coming to know something. (I recently came to know that I may have French ancestry.) It can refer to experiential knowledge. (You don’t know if you like something, unless you try it.) It can even refer to sexual knowledge.

The Greek word is used to translate the Hebrew word “Yada”. Adam is said to have “known” Eve, referring to marital intimacy including the sexual relationship. The question is what meaning did Paul intend as he used it in this context.

It is very unlikely that Paul intended it to mean God’s “intellectual awareness” of the facts. It is obviously true that God knows everything. He has all knowledge. He is omniscient. But it is very difficult to see how God’s omniscience is linked to glory. God surely “foreknew” those who will spend eternity in hell as well.

It is also very unlikely that Paul intended it to mean that God looked down the corridor of time and saw who would respond to the call of the gospel. Of course, God does have this knowledge. He does see the end from the beginning. But if Paul meant this then he is working against his own argument. Paul’s larger point is that Christians have been chosen by God before the foundation of the world. But if in God’s own mind, man’s choice preceded God’s choice, then it makes essentially meaningless that God has chosen us “before” we chose him.

God’s foreknowing must refer to his personal intimacy and affection. Some theologians have spoken of “foreloving”.

Paul writes in Ephesians 1:

**Ephesians 1:4-5** In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us<sup>1</sup>

To say that God foreknew means that he had complete and perfect understanding of who you were and also true affection towards you.

Let me give you two illustrations:

The first is from marriage. It is often said that you really do not know someone until you get married to them. Without a question, the longer you live with someone, for better or for worse, the more you get to truly know them. Marital love includes knowledge, but it also includes affection and commitment.

When God foreknew you, he felt affection towards you. And from this affection sprang true commitment.

Simply put, God personally and intimately loved you long before you ever came to love him.

The second illustration is from surgery. We have the blessing of X-Rays and MRI’s and Ultrasounds, ect. of being able to see what is inside the human body, even while we are still

outside the human body. But this knowledge is very imperfect. Surgeons will often tell you “I won’t really know what we are dealing with until we open you up in surgery.” Sometimes the situation is not as bad as previously thought and sometimes it is far worse.

There are cases where the surgeon might open up the patient and once he realizes just how bad it is can only close things up and tell the patient “There is really nothing I can do.”

This never happens with God. As a surgeon, he knows exactly how bad sin has affected us. He knows the specifics of your case. You might think that God has bit off more than He can chew in your case, but I assure you He has not. He knew all of your problems in advance. He is not surprised by anything you are dealing with. And knowing you perfectly, He says, “I can handle this case.” He knows the severity of your problem and knowing it full well has committed himself to take you on as his project.

God’s foreknowledge is his “tender affection towards you being fully aware of just how messed up you really are.”

It is correct to connect God’s foreknowledge with his election.

It is from his foreknowing you (electing you), that he has predestined you.

he also predestined

Foreknowledge is to know with love beforehand. (Revealing God’s motivation)

Predestination is to determine the destination beforehand. (Revealing God’s intention)

**proori,zw** *decide on beforehand, determine in advance*

There is no question that the destination that has been determined in advance is the glorification of those whom God has foreknown. God sets his affection upon Mary, fully knowing Mary’s slavery to sin, and decides that He is going to bring her to final glory.

Before something happens, to predestine is to decide that it will happen, and then, to actually make it happen. There is no better illustration of this than the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Satan, the religious leaders and the political leaders were all intending to get rid of Jesus. They set themselves against Jesus. And yet, in crucifying Jesus, they did exactly what God had intended, what God had determined beforehand should take place.

**Acts 4:26-28** <sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed<sup>1</sup> - <sup>27</sup> for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup> to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

It is at this point that I must insert a caution. Because we are not God, we tend to place our limitations upon God as we think about this. If I were to decide beforehand that something should take place, in order to make what I have decided actually happen, I would have to force and coerce others to do what I want. And in so doing, I would have to violate their “free will.” God does not have to violate the choices of men, so as to make them robots.

Herod, and Pilate, and the Pharisees, and even the crowds who yelled, “Crucify him” are all responsible for their choices. Their choices reflected the desires that were in their hearts. And yet, they did exactly what God’s hand and God’s plan had predestined to take place.

Biblical Predestination is not the same thing as fatalism.

Fatalism teaches that things happen regardless of the desires or choices of men. The Bible does not teach fatalism. God does determine beforehand, but he is able to bring to pass his pre-determined plan in such a way that men’s desires and choices still matter. I don’t fully understand how he does this, but he does do it.

If your understanding of predestination leads you to conclude that personal faith and repentance no longer matter, you are no longer believing the biblical doctrine of predestination. And, if your understanding of free will leads you to conclude that God cannot possibly pre-determine who will be saved, then your understanding of free-will is faulty.

God predestines all those whom he foreknew. And, all who believe will be saved. God has predestined his elect to what?

to be conformed to the image of his Son,  
in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

“conformed to the image of God’s Son”

God has pre-determined that his elect will become “like” his son. We will be like Jesus in our moral character. And we will be like Jesus in resurrection glory.

**ESV Philippians 3:21** who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

**2 Corinthians 3:18** <sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,<sup>1</sup> are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

God's plan is to take individuals who have corrupted the original image of God, and to work in such a way in them that they will be transformed into the image of God's Son: Jesus Christ. The result will be that Jesus will have countless brothers and sisters who look just like him in character and glory.

Jesus will remain pre-eminent of course. That is why he is called the "Firstborn". He is not simply the first in time. He is the first in pre-eminence.

ESV **Colossians 1:18** And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

God's foreknowing of the elect speak of his intimate love and affection for those whom he would save. God's predestining of the elect speak of his determination to bring his elect to a specific goal. But now we must consider what it is that God will actually do to bring about the fulfillment of the plan. The first sovereign action of God in the life of the elect is to call them.

30           And  
              those whom he predestined  
                  he also called,

What does it mean that God has called his elect?

It is not what we think of when the outward call of the gospel is given.

We are commanded to preach the gospel and to call all who hear to repentance and faith, whether or not they are elect. God does not tell us in advance who are the elect. The only way we come to know the elect is through their being brought to faith in Jesus Christ. If they are believing then they must be elect, for only the elect can possibly believe.

The outward call of the gospel is given to all who will hear. And many who hear the outward call never respond in faith. The call here in Romans is what we call the inward effectual call that only God can give. This call not only results in justification, but it also results in glorification. It is inward in that God speaks directly to the human heart.

And it is effectual because it effects or accomplishes what God intends for it to accomplish.

The call that God gives is personal. Jesus says that he calls his own sheep by name. And God's call carries with it life-giving power. As sinners we are dead to God. We love ourselves and our sin more than we love God. The hunger and thirst for righteousness just is not present in our hearts. But when God calls the person who is dead in sin, the call itself regenerates the soul. Regeneration is not a separate work of God, it is the working of God in and through his calling them.



The best illustration of this is Jesus calling Lazarus to come out of the tomb after he had been dead for four days. If all that Jesus did was give a verbal call for Lazarus to come out of the tomb, nothing would have happened. Dead people cannot come out of tombs.

But, if in the call itself, Jesus gives life to the dead man such that he is made alive... then Lazarus has the ability to come out of the tomb.

When Jesus calls a person who is dead in sin, he extends life-giving power to them.

WLC 67 What is effectual calling?

Effectual calling is the work of God's almighty power and grace, whereby

(out of his free and special love to his elect,

and

from nothing in them moving him thereunto )

he does, in his accepted time,

invite and draw them to Jesus Christ,

by his word and Spirit;

savingly enlightening their minds,

renewing and powerfully determining their wills,

so as they

(although in themselves dead in sin)

are hereby made willing and able

freely to answer his call,

and

to accept and embrace the grace

offered and conveyed therein.

God's inward and effectual call accompanies the outward call, but it is very different.

This sovereign call of God is given only to the elect. And it always accomplishes its intended purpose, which is to bring the one called to glory.

God's call brings a person from death to life. It brings a person out of darkness into light. There is a new birth that takes place that fundamentally changes a person. They are a new creation. This does not mean that the old creation no longer exists. Remember the egg illustration from a couple of weeks ago.

and

those whom he called

he also justified,

We do not need to go into our justification. Paul extensively expounded this doctrine in chapters 3-5.

### WSC 33 What is justification?

Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Every individual that God sovereignly calls he also justifies. Since only those who have faith are justified, it necessarily means that God's sovereign call itself produces faith in the one called. God doesn't believe for us. We must believe. But his call does not leave our believing to chance, or to some independent free will.

God chooses whom he will set his saving love upon. He then determines in his heart to actually save this person. Then he sovereignly calls this person – the call itself effecting new life and faith and repentance. Then he declares this person righteous, such that he has a right to all of the blessings of God's children.

And then...

and  
those whom he justified  
he also glorified.

Glorification is the goal of predestination.

Glorification is so certain, so guaranteed because of the sovereign will of God, that Paul uses the language of past tense, even though it has not yet happened.

No saint has been fully glorified. Even the saints in heaven, while their souls have been made perfect in holiness, have not yet received their glorified bodies. All those whom God has foreknown will be glorified together on the Final Day.

God absolutely committed to continuing to sovereignly work in the lives of all of his elect until he has brought them all to glorification.

Why is predestination important?

1. It is important because it glorifies God in the salvation of the elect.
  - a. Men do not save themselves.
  - b. We are saved by God's free grace alone.
  - c. God alone saves. Any conditions that God requires of man – such as faith and repentance and growth in holiness – his grace produces.
2. It is important because it reveals God's eternal love for the elect as the true source of salvation.
  - a. I am being saved because God has loved and is loving me.

3. It is important because it reveals God's power and wisdom in salvation.
  - a. The Gospel is the power of God and the wisdom of God.
4. It is important because it gives hope to even the worst of sinners.
  - a. God is not surprised by you.
5. It is important because it guarantees our future bliss.
  - a. Confidence in self is contrary to the Gospel.
  - b. Confidence in God is central to the Gospel.
  - c. Predestination enables you to place all your confidence in God.

Christian, you are still in process. You have not yet been made perfect. You are fighting battles against sin every day. Those battles matter. But your confidence is not in your own strength. Your confidence is in the Sovereign working of God to complete the work that he has begun. Your confidence is in God's ability to finish the plan in your life.

You look around you and you see the love of many growing cold. If you are honest, you feel the coldness of your own heart. You may wonder if you have what it takes to make it to the end. God does not want you to look inward for strength. He wants you to live by faith. He wants you to cling to Jesus.

Remember the end of Romans 7? Who will rescue me? What a wretched man I am? Jesus Christ will rescue me. God is working out his plan to take you to glory.