



## **NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM GOD'S LOVE**

### **Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #46**

**Romans 8:29-39**

**David Sunday**

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Romans 8 is the most wonderful chapter in the Bible, I think. This will be our last sermon in this series in this chapter. If you're ever in a position to visit me when I'm sick, maybe even dying, and you're wondering what to say—give me Romans 8. If you ever get to visit me in prison—hopefully I'm there for good reasons like preaching the gospel—and you don't know what to say to me—read Romans 8.

On August 2, 2010, when I had about five minutes with Kate in the pre-op room before they put her under anesthesia to remove her right lung, I said two things. We read the Heidelberg Catechism questions 1 and 2: "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" knowing that I, every part of me, belong to my faithful God and Savior. And then we read Romans 8:28-39.

We can never get to the bottom of this passage. We'll never outlive its usefulness. There will never come a time when we will hear these wonderful words and not marvel at the assurance and security they bring to us. Let's start where we ended last week, in verse 28 where we learned that God has a purpose for those who love Him, and that this purpose has a definition.

Romans 8:28—God is working all things together for the good of those who love God—that's not a sentimental, feel-good, Hallmark card kind of saying that you give indiscriminately to someone who's going through a hard time. That is a word of great assurance given to believers and there's definition to it. We know what God's purpose is, and we know what He is working for in our lives—because that's given to us in verse 29. What is God's purpose? That He might conform us to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. That's the "good" toward which God is working all things together in our lives to make us like Jesus.

This week I read an article that was printed in The Washington Times in March about a man named Dan McConchie who works for Americans United for Life. Eight years ago he had a terrible motorcycle accident that left him a paraplegic, living in a wheelchair today. "What I learned," Dan said, "is that this life isn't for our comfort. Instead, the purpose of this life is that we become conformed to the image of Christ... My prayers are different today than they were eight years ago. Back then I looked at God like Santa Claus. I asked Him to send nice things my way. Now I have one prayer that I pray more than any other: 'Lord, may I be able to say at the end of today that I was faithful.'" He understands God's purpose for him, and God is working through paraplegia for Dan's good and for the fulfillment of that purpose.

Think of God's purpose for your life. What is it that you are most asking Him to do in you? Bring you comfort, or bring you conformity to Christ? Is that where your prayers are focusing? "Lord, let me be like Jesus."

You might be here today thinking, "That's not really my goal for my life. That's not really what is keeping me going day after day after day. I don't think much about becoming like Christ." If that is the truth for you, I would encourage you to be honest about that. Don't fake it. Don't say, "Well, I'm in church. I'm supposed to act as though Christlikeness is what I'm aiming for." No, be honest. Realize that this isn't what your goal is right now. Your goal is out of sync with God's goal expressed in verse 29.

But I would ask you to think about this: 50 years from now, 100 years from now, 1,000 years from now, is there anyone you would more want to be like than Jesus? Jesus alone has glory, honor and immortality. Jesus alone has resurrection life. Fifty years from now or 100 years from now, when I stand before God Who made me, I don't want to stand before God knowing that my whole life was lived out of sync with His purpose. I don't want to stand before God knowing that I was opposed to His Son or didn't value His Son enough to want to be like Him. When I stand before God, I want to be like Jesus in resurrection life. I want to experience glory and honor and immortality like Jesus has.

So if that's what we will most want 50 years from now, 100 years from now, shouldn't this be what we most desire today? That's what God is working for, and He's working through hardship, suffering and difficulty. We're groaning in this creation, but Paul has told us in verse 18 that all the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that's going to be revealed to us when we stand before Jesus.

This week, as we come to a close in this chapter, God wants us to be rock-solid sure that His purpose will be accomplished, that we will stand with Christ in glory, that we will see then that all we've suffered in this present age isn't worth comparing with that glory. So He gives us

five verbs in verses 29 and 30. Notice that God is the subject of each of these verbs. Each of these five actions of God describes what He has done for every single believer. These verbs are like unbreakable chain links of God's activity in our lives. This is the basis of our strong confidence that all things are working together for our good.

Here are the verbs: He foreknew us, He predestined us, He called us, He justified us and He glorified us. God's telling us these things in verses 29 and 30 because He wants us to be sure that we will stand with Christ in glory.

### **He Foreknew Us**

The first two verbs show us that God's purpose for us has its origin in eternity past. Verse 29, *"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."* Fore-knowledge and pre-destination.

Huckleberry Finn found himself in church one Sunday morning, and his assessment was, "It was pretty ornery preaching, and had such a powerful lot to say about faith and good works and free grace of preforeordination, I don't know what all, but it did seem to me to be one of the roughest Sundays I had run across yet."

I'm hoping this isn't going to be a rough Sunday for you. I know these things can be preached in an ornery sort of way, but I just want you to see the beauty of them.

God foreknew us. That doesn't mean that God looked down the corridor of time and knew who was going to be brilliant enough to choose Him, so because He knew that we were going to choose Him, He made a choice for us. Because if that's true, who's the driving force in all that? Doesn't that go against everything Paul is telling us about the gospel—that God saved us?

When it says He foreknew us it means that God knew us before we ever knew Him. He cared for us before we cared for Him. He loved us before we ever loved Him. And in love, He set His love upon us and chose us to be His people—not because of anything in us, but because of His pure grace and mercy.

This agrees with what we read about in the Old Testament where God says through Moses to His people:

*For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples.*

Deuteronomy 7:6-8

## He Predestined Us

Why did He do it? *“Because the Lord loves you.”* Why does He love you? Because He loves you. Why did He choose you? Because of His grace and mercy. *“Those whom He foreknew Him also”—*here’s the second verb—*“predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that [Jesus] might become the firstborn among many brothers.”* That word, predestination, is not meant to be an abstract philosophical concept that we argue about in an ornery sort of fashion. It’s meant to be a beautiful word that humbles us and gives us assurance in trials. It comforts us and leads us to praise God’s glorious grace. And it motivates us to share the gospel with others, because—notice verse 29—He didn’t predestinate you alone, but a great huge family of brothers and sisters along with you.

Oh, what a relief that my destiny, your destiny, has been decided by God. You don’t have to make all the perfect choices in life in order to end up where God wants you to be: like Christ, with Him in glory. That doesn’t rest ultimately on you doing the right things. No, as we often sing “In Christ Alone... Jesus commands my destiny.” God has set the final destination for His people. We will be like Christ. We will be with Him in glory. And He has determined that nothing is going to get in the way of that. He’s made provision for every possible obstacle.

So predestination is a great concept when you understand that it means all this. “I’m going to be like Jesus. I’m going to live with Him in glory.” Do you believe in predestination? Good! J.I. Packer says, “Everyone does. Every believer believes in predestination.” He’s in his 90s now, so he has a right to say things like that. He says:

We admit it in two ways. We admit when we say thank you to God for our great salvation, because we’re saying, “From You, through You and to You are all things. I didn’t do this; You did.” And we admit it whenever we pray that God would do whatever it takes in someone else’s heart to bring them to faith in Christ. We’re saying, “Salvation belongs to You, O God.” On our feet we may have arguments about it, but on our knees we are all agreed.

I say amen to that. That’s what God has done in the past: He foreknew us, and He predestinated us.

## He Called Us

Now let's move to the present. Two verbs show us how God's purpose is being carried out in our lives in the present. Verse 30, "*Those whom he predestined he also called.*" God called us. We sing about this:

When I ran my hell bound race  
Indifferent to the cost  
You looked upon my helpless state  
And led me to the cross

(All I Have Is Christ by Jordon Kauflin)

Or we sing:

I was blinded by my sin  
Had no ears to hear Your voice  
Did not know Your love within  
Had no taste for heaven's joys

Then Your Spirit gave me life  
Opened up Your Word to me  
Through the gospel of Your Son  
Gave me endless hope and peace

(Oh Great God by Bob Kauflin)

He called us. We heard God speaking to us through His Word, saying, "Come to Me and rest. Are you thirsty? Come to Me and drink. Are you lost? Come to Me and I will be your Shepherd." And we came. That was the call of God in our lives. Just like the first disciples who heard Jesus say, "Follow Me," they dropped their nets, left it all behind and followed Him, God's Word came to us with compelling power, and we found ourselves moved to move in His direction. An old poet put it like this:

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew  
He moved my soul to seek Him seeking Me  
It was not I that found, O Savior true  
No, I was found of Thee

(I Sought the Lord, Author Unknown)

## He Justified Us

"While I was seeking You, Lord, You were seeking me. While I was looking for you, it was only because You were finding me." So God called us, and then when we responded to the gospel, what did He do? Verse 30, "*Those whom he called he also justified.*" We heard the gospel with

faith. God forgave us, acquitted us, accepted us, declared us righteous in His sight—all because of what Jesus did on the cross, taking our sins upon His righteous soul and bearing our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might be clothed in His righteousness.

So now the God, the Judge, the Supreme Court of the universe says to believers in Jesus, “You are not guilty, but you are righteous in My sight.” That’s what it means. God justified us. We’ve experienced that through the gospel, through the Spirit, if we’ve trusted in Jesus. We’ve been called; we’ve been justified.

## **He Glorified Us**

Then there’s one more verb that takes us forward into the future. At the end of verse 30, “*Those whom he justified he also glorified.*” I pointed this out last week. It’s so good that it doesn’t say, “He also will glorify.” We know that our experience of glorification is still awaiting us in the future. We’ve fallen short of His glory through our sin. But one day we are going to stand in the presence of Christ in perfect bodies that are designed to live in a sinless world. We’re going to see Him face to face. We’re going to shine like the sun in the Kingdom of our Father. That still is in our future when we see Jesus, but Paul says in the mind of God it is so certain to take place, God speaks of it as if it’s already a done deal. He has glorified us.

What he is saying here is that God’s purpose for His children is not in jeopardy. There will be no dropouts. Everyone whom God has predestined to be like Christ will reach the final goal. No one’s going to get lost on the journey. Everyone God starts with, He ends with. God is so sure of this, it’s a done deal.

I love where Paul goes with this in verse 31: “*What then shall we say to these things?*” He has given us amazing doctrine in eight chapters in Romans. It’s time to stop analyzing and time to start applying. It’s time to stop just thinking about these things, and it’s time to start singing about these things. It’s time to stop just being in prose—we need some poetry. We need to rhapsodize over this.

## **He Applies This for Us**

So Paul pulls out all the stops and gives us application of this doctrine that should make us want to stand up and sing, “If God is for us...” as Paul says in 8:31.

Application number one: God is for me, therefore I will not fear.

Believe that God is for you. Everything he just said here in verses 28, 29 and 30 is driving to this conclusion: God is for you. He foreknew you. He predestined you. He called you. He justified you. He glorified you. He is for you. And if God is for you, who can be against you?

Mike Bulmore says, "We've got to put the gospel to work and make it like rebar." We often see bars of iron stacked on the back of trucks. They're not meant to stay on the back of those trucks. They're meant to be planted deep into concrete, laid down as reinforcement to form a bond with the concrete, to strengthen and hold the concrete in tension. That's what God is doing here in these verses now. He's planting the gospel deeply in us. He's anchoring it firmly in our hearts like rebar, so that it exerts its strong and gracious influence over every part of our lives. He wants to put this gospel to work and he's saying, "If you really believe it, it should free you from the fear of man. If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Everything God has said so far is meant to anchor this truth deeply into your heart. He wants you waking up in the morning and affirming this truth: God is for me. He wants you facing your fears with this truth: God is for me. He wants you fearless before your enemies with this truth: God is for me. He wants you patient in adversity because you are rejoicing in this truth: God is for me. He wants you fighting off unbelief and casting off your guilty fears, because you know: in Christ, God is for me.

If you're not trusting in Jesus, you're going to one day experience God against me. You don't want that. But in Christ, God is for you. God is not annoyed with you. God is not embarrassed by you. God is not full of disdain toward you. God is not discouraged by you. God is not looking down on you with disapproval. God is not fed up with you and getting tired of you. God is for you. He sets His love on you through Christ. He's predestined you to be made like Christ and to stand with Him in glory. He has called you to know Him, trust Him and live in a relationship with Him. He has justified you, and nothing in all creation will keep you from sharing in that glory.

God is for you—that's application number one. Believe that until it frees you from the fear of man and from the fear of the devil with all his evil forces. *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*

Let's keep putting this gospel doctrine to work in verse 32: *"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"* What's the greatest obstacle to your salvation? Do you think it's your sin? I heard John Piper say it's actually not your sin. The greatest obstacle is God's red-hot love for His Son. That's the greatest obstacle. There's no way anyone's getting saved if God's Son does not come down to earth and die on that cross. And God loves His Son. What does it say here? *"He...did not spare*

*his own Son but gave him up for us,”* to be mocked, lied about, spat on, beaten, scourged, to have thorns pressed into His skull and to be nailed onto a tree, publicly exposed. God Who loves His Son gave Him up for us all.

Application number two: God gave His greatest gift for me, therefore I will trust Him to give me everything else I need.

Let this gospel free you from worry, anxiety, fear of not having enough, fretting about your future. Trust that God gave you His very best when He gave you His Son. And if He did that, He's going to give you whatever else you need. It's the argument from the greater to the lesser.

Of course, we're tested here, aren't we? Do we really believe the greatest gift God could give us is Jesus? Often what we really want from God is a new job or a new marriage or a new car. And when God doesn't give us what we want, we pout and complain. What that reveals in our hearts is that we actually devalue Christ, because we're being told here that God gave us His best—the Son of His love. If you don't believe it, Ray Ortlund says the answer is to repent. If we want to feel loved by God, we must repent that we have disrelished God's greatest gift and plead with Him from the heart that we would esteem Christ above all else.

Application number three: God gave us the gospel, therefore we will put it to work.

Application number one: God is for me, therefore I will not fear. Application number two: God gave His greatest gift for me, therefore I will trust Him to give me everything else I need. Application number three—let's look at verses 33 and 34. Here God calls us to put the gospel to work when we're experiencing accusation and feeling condemned for our sins.

Verse 33, *“Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?”* I can think of lots of places where charges or accusations could be brought against me, and maybe a few against you too. But, look at what he says: *“It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”* The Supreme Court of the universe has already declared me guiltless. Why? On the basis of verse 34, Christ Jesus died. More than that, He was raised and is at the right hand of God praying for us. I don't need to fear any voice of accusation or condemnation if Jesus Who died for me is now interceding for me.

What though the vile accuser roar  
Of sins that I have done;  
I know them well, and thousands more;  
My God, He knoweth none

(His Be the Victor's Name by Samuel Gandy)

Because *“there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

This is the third way we put the gospel to work. It is the gospel that enables us to repent again and again with the confidence that God will receive us and not reject us. It is the gospel that gives us the courage to stare our sins right in the face, and the accuser who is roaring against us, and to say, “Be gone, unbelief, because my Savior died for me, rose for me, and is praying for me.”

Application number four: God gave us His love, therefore all will be well.

Verse 35: *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”* The question is not: “Will God or Christ ever stop loving us?” That question has been settled. The question is: “Is there anything that could ever come into our lives that could block the flow of His love for us? If the love of God in Christ is like a mighty river, is there anything that could dam up the river and stop it from flowing to us?”

Do you ever think, “What I’m going through right now is so painful, so unrelenting, so devastating, I’m afraid I’m going to lose contact with the love of God”? Paul says, “Let’s think of a few things that could possibly separate us from the love of Christ.” *“Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?”* Then he takes us to Psalm 44: *“As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’”*

Paul is not painting a rosy picture here about what the life of a believer is like in this world. He knows we are sometimes like sheep going to the slaughter. Our missionaries have seen that firsthand more than we have. For all of us, there are times in our lives when the distress, tribulation or pain is so great we fear, “Will I wake up in the morning and the river of God’s love won’t be running to me anymore? It won’t be able to get through my heartache and distress.”

Paul says, “Listen. I’ve surveyed all conceivable threats. I’ve looked in every possible direction. I’ve considered the threat from God Himself, and here’s what I’ve found: it’s been removed. God is for us. I’ve considered the threat that comes from within ourselves—our sin and shame—and I’ve found this: it’s been removed, because God does not condemn us. Jesus died, He rose and He’s at the right hand of the Father. I’ve considered the threat from every other alien force—from circumstances beyond our control, from suffering and slaughter—and I have reached this grand finale. I have reached this confident conclusion. There’s nothing more that can be said.”

*“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”* We will stand with Christ in glory.

*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

What more can we ask? If these things are so, what happy, joyful, confident, hope-filled people we should be in every tribulation.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!  
What more can He say than to you He hath said,  
You, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

(How Firm a Foundation by George Keith)

Let's rejoice together and help each other apply these truths.

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