

“GOD’S WORK IN US.”

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November 3, 2024, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Romans 8:28-30

Introduction.

Do you remember that passage in Ecclesiastes 4 that is a favorite for weddings, a cord of three strands is not easily broken? In our text we are given a cord of five strands that is impossible to break. Remember these five words are called the Golden Chain of salvation.

I wasted a little time looking up the largest, strongest chains in the world. They are mostly anchor chains on aircraft carriers and cruise ships. Some of the individual links weigh 500 pounds each and lift 30 ton anchors.

This golden chain of salvation is stronger than anchor chains. These five links give our souls eternal security as the children of God, they anchor our souls to God. There is no weak link.

Those whom God foreknew He predestined.

Those whom God predestined He called.

Those whom God called He justified.

Those whom God justified He glorified.

There is enough doctrine and truth packed into these verses to be worthy of a lifetime of reflection. These are big theological words, but it is not Paul’s purpose to teach us cold theology. He is not making an appeal to our heads. Paul wrote these words to give us life-giving, life-sustaining comfort for our hearts and souls; to give us a personal assurance of our salvation.

Paul wrote vs. 29-30 as proof for vs. 28 how “we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” All things, as in everything, suffering, sickness, diseases, accidents, disasters, sins by us or sins against us. All things are working in the chain of our salvation, and are meant to conform us to the likeness of Christ, and be for our good and for our ultimate glory.

Two weeks ago we consider how God in eternity past foreknew those whom He would chose for salvation. The 'fore' in foreknowledge not only shows God's choice preceded the knowledge of it by us but also shows it was done before the world was created.

Those who are loved by God are eternally loved by God. There was never a time when those who are loved were not loved. Do you know how loved you are and for how long?

II Timothy 1:9 God saved us and called us to 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.

Did you have anything to do with your physical birth? Did you decide to be born, did you decide when and where and to whom to be born? Of course not, we didn't decide it or ask for it.

Yet many Christians think they are the cause of their spiritual birth, they thought about it and then decided it was a good option and went with it. No, God decided and God did it.

Let's consider the last three links in this great golden chain of salvation.

Called.

There are two ways the word call is used in the Bible, or two parts to this call.

The first is the external call of the Gospel, the hearing of the good news. This outward call is a general call of God. It can happen in a sermon, in a conversation, in a personal testimony, in reading a book.

Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Repent and believe for the salvation of your souls.

Go and preach and make disciples of all nations.

This is the general call made to all people everywhere.

But Jesus says many are called but few are chosen. You could say it another way, many are called who are not called. Many hear the general call, but not all have the second kind of call.

The second call is the internal call, the believing of the Gospel by faith which is a gift from God. It is the stirring and work of the Holy Spirit. The outward call is inwardly responded to through the enabling of the Spirit.

This call is an irresistible call, notice what it is linked with, predestined and justified. This is the hand of God reaching down. God's salvation comes from God.

1 Thessalonians 1:5, Paul declares his gospel came to the Thessalonians "not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."

Every sermon you hear is an invitation to believe. It is the Holy Spirit who makes it believable to us.

When Jesus called the dead Lazarus out of the tomb, how did Lazarus hear that call and respond to it? Dead men don't hear anything. The call of Jesus created the ability to hear and respond. We are dead men who can't hear the call until the Holy Spirit opens our deaf ears and blind eyes with the gift of faith.

This calling refers to the time when God goes public with what He foreknew and predestined in eternity past. Calling happens in us during our life on earth and it is known by us and others.

Make your calling sure.

That our calling be visible is why Peter says, "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling" (II Peter 1:10).

How can you make something that is certain, more certain, more sure? This is part of that both/and tension in Scripture.

Philippians 2:13-14 Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

God saves us from first to last through His sovereign grace alone, but one evidence that this sovereign grace is operative in our lives is that we persevere in faith, that we bear fruit and do good works.

Prove your profession, by knowing and loving the truth; by hating sin and darkness; by bending your will to God's will, by conforming to the likeness of Christ. Can I be honest, frank? Who really wants to do that? It's hard. Who doesn't rather want to be conformed to the world? That's a lot easier and more fun frankly? It doesn't create as much trouble for you with those around you. But does anyone think about the destination of those two paths? It's hard.

Conforming your behavior to be more Christ-like is a life-long battle with wrong actions.

Conforming your emotions to be more Christ-like is a life-long battle with wrong feelings.

Conforming your mind to be more Christ-like is a life-long battle with wrong thinking.

He calls us to obey Him and to bear fruit. You will know the tree by its fruit. Do you want to bear fruit for God? Do you pray for God to make you faithful and fruitful for His glory? By your fruit you will know you are called and filled by the Holy Spirit.

Justified.

Justification is the heart of Romans.

In simplest terms justification is believers being made right with God by God. Those God calls He accepts and makes acceptable, by reconciling Himself by the blood of Jesus.

Justification is God's declaration that we sinners are now righteous in God's sight because He has given to us the righteousness of Christ.

Romans 3:23-24 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The difference between those two verses is staggering. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All have sinned and are justly deserving of the wrath of God and eternal hell. All have sinned and are without hope. All have sinned and are dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1, 5); futile in mind, darkened in understanding, alienated from the life of God, and hardened in heart (Ephesians 4:17–18), and by nature children of wrath.

Do you feel the weight of that massive, insurmountable obstacle between these two verses? How do you get over the mountain that stands between us and God? God flattens the mountain with His justification.

Romans 4:7 “Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin.”

Romans 4:5 To the one who ... believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness

Romans 5:1:18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

One act of righteousness leads to the justification of all who are called. In other words, God doesn't need our help. Give up thinking you have some small part in helping God out.

Romans 3:20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight,

When God calls a person, He declares him or her righteous on the basis of the death of Jesus on the cross.

Glorification.

History is not just one random event after another. There is a meaningful, purposeful end to everything. God has an agenda and He is sticking to it, and nothing can or will hinder it one bit. The future is all glory. Everything that happens to those who love God is connected to God's declared and stated purpose.

II Thessalonians 2:13-14 God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. 14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Like all the other links in this golden chain, this link is also the exclusive work of God. It is absolutely guaranteed that there awaits for every believer an "eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (II Corinthians 4:17). For this we have been saved.

Notice the verb tense of glorified. What is it? It is *past tense*. How is that since we are still polluted with sin? It is past tense to say even though the event is still in the future, it is as good as done and it cannot be undone because God says it will happen.

The French have a word for this, *fait accompli*, it has already been decided and cannot be changed. It is a done deal. One commentator called this the most daring anticipation of faith in the NT.

What good is a secure inheritance if there is a chance we will be shipwrecked here in the storms of life? What hope do we have of reaching our destination if we have to run a gauntlet of sin and temptation and great trials and Satan's powers on our own?

While God is actively preserving and protecting our inheritance up in heaven, He is just as actively keeping preserving and protecting us down here on earth.

There is danger, there are spiritual battles to be fought and won, there are sins to be overcome, there is great striving and praying. But we are never alone in this, God is with us and His power is for us.

Charles Spurgeon once used the illustration of a man on the deck of a ship who may be knocked down by waves crashing onto the deck, but he is never washed overboard.

We experience this is a small way on earth when we plan a big surprise party for someone. We plan this elaborate perfect party but we also plan to make sure the person arrives for their surprise party (illustration idea from Doriani, *I Peter*, p. 17).

That's what God is doing, planning the perfect party, and planning to make sure we are there for it.

Philippians 1:6 I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

An important part of this is understanding that our trials and troubles are part of God's purposeful design. Paul says, "we know" He will cause all this to work for our good and for our glory. We are reconciled to God and we will be glorified.

From this we can confidently draw this conclusion. All our present difficulties must work for our good and our glory. They are intended by God to lead us to the glory of the kingdom of heaven and the glory of the resurrection of Christ who is seated in the heavenlies at the right hand of the Father, and with whom we are also as good as seated (Ephesians 2:6-7).

The God who called you by his sovereign grace, will keep you by that same grace.

Sanctification.

Some ask where is sanctification in this golden chain? Sanctification is part of glorification. Sanctification is glory begun, and glory is sanctification complete.

It begins now as a process of becoming holy, and it ends at the resurrection when we receive our new and glorious bodies.

II Corinthians 3:18 We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, and are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

II Corinthians 4:16-17 We do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Implications and application.

If you come away from this text less sure of your salvation then you have not fully understood what Paul is saying.

The Bible teaches us about God's choosing us to comfort us. If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior from all you sin, if you have confessed with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believed in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then rest in your salvation and your coming glorification.

Do you know Jesus? Do you love Jesus with all your heart? Do you desire to be conformed to His image and likeness? Make sure of that, and then rest in that.

The Father planned our salvation an eternity ago. The Son purchased it two thousand years ago. The Holy Spirit is working it out today in our hearts.

It is He who is at work in us to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). And He who began in us this work will complete it at the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6). Those whom He called, those whom He justified He also glorified.

Let this be cause for you to worship Him, love Him, obey Him and enjoy Him now and forever.

Prayer: Thank you that you are a God who is faithful to all that you promise and that you are a God who follows through, what you begin you bring to completion. You are the potter and we are the clay. Thank you for seating us with Christ in the heavenly places and for securing our citizenship in heaven.