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## God's Will

May 5, 2019 - Romans 8:28-30 - Read Passage: [epmkg.com/romans8](http://epmkg.com/romans8)

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### About Austin's Study Notes

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## Notes

**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose** (verse 28). This verse is so rich in comfort and substantive in meaning that it is frequently memorized by itself. But if we take this particular verse out of the context in which it is written, we could distort the meaning. There are three elements that require specific attention.

The first element is the meaning of the phrase, 'in all things'. One natural conclusion from such a statement is that every single thing which happens to us, by us, with us or for us, in this world, is added together by the sovereign God and brought to a great and wonderful conclusion. Well, I am not denying that God does that. But in the context of this verse, the use of the phrase 'all things' does not refer to each and every thing that happens.

Rather Paul is using this phrase 'all things' in the same way he uses it throughout his writings, as a summary statement to capture the essence of what he has just said. So if we are going to understand what he is saying here, we have to apply the 'all things', not to a universal sense of all things, but to the 'all things' that he has just described.

Obviously what the apostle has in view is the infirmities and the sufferings of the people of God. These sufferings that we endure in this world are not worthy to be compared with the glory that God has laid up for us in the future. These present sufferings are the 'things' that Paul has in mind. They are actually in a sense blessings in disguise, because the sufferings in this world are used by God for our ultimate good and for our ultimate benefit.

This does not mean that everything which happens to us is good in and of itself. Suffering is a tragic, physical evil. I am not supposed to say to another believer who is suffering, 'Rejoice, this is a wonderful benefit that you are experiencing here, because it is working together for your good.' We are not to praise God for the presence of suffering,

particularly in the case of others, because that would lead us to the same smug attitude that is so destructively manifest in Job's friends. Rather if I see another suffering, I must do everything in my power to alleviate that suffering.

Now that would seem to be working against this wonderful benefit God has given him. But Paul is saying that God uses these things, triumphs over them, brings victory out of them and adds them together for our greater glory. In other words, God redeems the evil that befalls us.

So we should be comforted and consoled by the fact that our suffering is neither futile nor ultimately tragic. It may be very painful and difficult to endure for the moment. But God stands sovereign over our suffering.

The second thing we need to note is that there is a restriction here. God is not promising to bring goodness out of all suffering for everybody. Rather he says, **that in all things God works for the good of those who love him** (verse 28b). It is not in the final analysis a matter of mental assent but of affection for God. Obedience, discipleship and living the Christian life are a consequence of loving God. If you love me, Jesus said, keep my commandments (John 14:15). Our obedience is based upon a prior love. The love of God is the motivating force for living a Christian life. It is not the desire to merit one's own salvation, nor even an altruistic beneficent attitude towards our fellow men. The ultimate motivator for Christian service, Christian ministry and Christian obedience, is a personal affection for God.

The whole point of studying Scripture is that we might love God more. The better we know him, the easier it is for our hearts to be inflamed with affection for him. It is difficult, nay impossible, to love an unknown quantity. Love involves a personal relationship. Love is something that takes place between subjects, not objects, and is the personal quality on which Christianity is based. So those who love God have the promise that all of their suffering and all of their difficulties are being worked together for their good by the very God that they love. The bottom line of what we are trying to develop in our Christian growth is a deeper affection for God. That's what worship is all about.

The third aspect of this verse to be noted is a second distinction that makes it a passage of particular rather than universal application: **who have been called according to his purpose** (verse 28c). When the Bible speaks of God's call, it never means simply the external call whereby the invitation to fellowship with God is given. Those who are called by God experience, what we call in theology, effectual calling (see comments on 1:1).

The last clause does not refer to a different group from the clause preceding. All those whom God calls according to his purpose love him, and all those who love God have been called according to his purpose.

The foundation for the comfort and certainty of future joy is God's plan of redemption, which Paul summarises in verses 29 and 30: **For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.**

A woman once raised this question with me, Does the Bible teach the doctrine of predestination? My answer to her was not a simple, Yes, followed by a lengthy explanation; my answer was more emphatic: 'Of course the Bible teaches the doctrine of predestination. I say that as dogmatically as I possibly can because the assertion is indisputable. I don't know anyone who has ever read the Scriptures, or particularly the book of Romans, who has tried to argue that the Bible has no doctrine of predestination.' Now the reason why no-one does so is because such an argument would be futile. John Calvin, Martin Luther and Augustine didn't invent predestination, it is a biblical term.

So the answer to the question, Does the Bible teach predestination? is simple. But not everybody agrees about what kind of predestination is in view. Biblical scholars and Christian theologians throughout history have been sharply divided on this issue.

Verse 29 has been a very important proof text for those who would deny the Reformation concept of predestination. Most people equate predestination with Calvinism, because Calvin is seen as the author and propounder of the doctrine of predestination. But there are different beliefs concerning predestination. For example, the view which is common to the Roman Catholic Church, to Methodists, Arminians and Lutherans is what is known as the *prescient view* of predestination. As the word implies, it is a doctrine of predestination based upon a concept of foreknowledge, and the classical proof-text for the prescient view of predestination, is verse 29.

The view goes something like this. From all eternity God has prior knowledge of the actions and responses of humans. This is part of God's omniscience, since he knows everything from an eternal perspective. Since God knows in advance with respect to time what we will do as human creatures, he knows in advance who will and who will not respond to the gospel. So the idea is this: God looks down the corridors of time from his vantage point in eternity and he sees the different responses people make to the gospel of Christ. On the basis of his prior knowledge of how we will respond freely to the invitation of the gospel, God then predestines those whom he knows will say yes to salvation. Predestination, according to this view, is not an actual foreordaining that people will believe, but only a foreordaining that those who believe will be saved. God does not work the faith into their hearts. That is something they do by their response, by their will, by their choice.

The Reformed community would answer by saying that foreknowledge, or prescience, is not an explanation of predestination, but is in fact a denial of predestination. The word

has been explained away because on this view the destiny of people is, in effect, determined by the choices that they make and not by any choice that God makes in advance.

But we are still left with the problem of how to answer the fact that the advocates of the Arminian view appeal to this text, where *foreknowledge* is at the beginning of what we would call the order of salvation: **For those God foreknew he also predestined ...**

First of all, Paul is saying here that each one of these categories is all-inclusive, that is, all those whom God foreknows, he predestinates, and all he predestinates, he calls, and all he calls, he justifies, and all he justifies, he glorifies. It is very important to understand that, in the structure of the language here, everyone in each category belongs totally to every other category. The prescient advocates say that God foreknows who will choose, and on the basis of who will choose, he predestinates.

Now the Scripture doesn't supply that information, it is supplied by the prescient advocate. He puts something in the text which is not there and I am saying that such an addition or qualification to the text is utterly gratuitous. All the apostle says is that everybody God foreknows in some sense, he predestines in some sense, and everyone that he predestines in some sense, he calls in some sense, and everyone that he calls in some sense, he justifies in some sense, and everyone he justifies he glorifies.

What can we learn from this? Let's work backwards. First of all, if a person is justified, can he lose his justification? This passage tells us very clearly that everyone whom God justifies, God will glorify, so that once a person is justified there is an absolute certainty of receiving the fullness of salvation.

Who are justified? All those who are called. When Paul refers to being called by God in this context, he is not referring to the outward call of the gospel which falls upon the ears of the believer and the unbeliever. He is speaking about that inner calling which results in regeneration.

Who are those who receive this inward work of the Spirit? What comes prior to this kind of calling? Predestination. Notice in the order of salvation, prescient advocates would say that all whom God has foreknown he has called. But they are thinking of the outward call, arguing that all who respond to it God predestines to be justified. In so arguing, they have reversed the order here so that it simply doesn't flow from the text. Paul says that everyone who is called is justified. Now he can't mean the external call because not everyone who hears the gospel is in fact justified. So he must be speaking of the internal call.

Who receives that inward calling? Everyone who is predestined to receive that inward calling. There is a clear link between predestination and calling, and between calling and

justification. So we can say that only the predestined are justified; only the predestined are glorified.

But why is foreknowledge stated first? To answer that, we have to ask the question, What does foreknowledge mean?

The verb *to know* has more than one meaning in Scripture. There is first of all the cognitive meaning of knowledge, simply to be aware of something, to have cognition. In the sense of 'being aware of', we would have to say that God is aware of all men's actions. God certainly knows in advance what everybody does. But 'foreknew' describes some, not all humans. It, therefore, cannot refer to pure cognition, it is more than that.

There is also the intimate sense of knowing, where the Bible says Adam knew his wife and she conceived. Some would interpret foreknowledge as saying that those whom God has loved in advance, he did predestinate to be called. (Some believe that God loves all men but it is clear from Paul's statement that not all are predestinated.)

Then there is to be known as to be selected. This is a really simple explanation of predestination. God looks at the mass of fallen humanity and selects some to receive the grace of calling, justification and glorification. But before he can select anyone, God must have an idea in his mind of the identity of those whom he is choosing. God does not predestine unknown quantities; God predestines persons that are known to him. Therefore, it is a logical necessity that foreknowledge of the people comes before predestination. To add that it is a foreknowledge of what people were going to do before he predestines them, runs absolutely contrary to the rest of the list.

It is safe to say that the classical doctrine of predestination, in the Reformed sense, is not minimized or eliminated by the fact that the word 'foreknowledge' precedes the word 'predestination'. It would have to precede the word 'predestination', because God must know me before he can predestine me to anything.

For what are such predestinated? **to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers** (verse 29). This very important verse is often neglected, not only by Arminians, but by Calvinists as well. Here the goal of election is set forth, and we have a biblical answer to one of the greatest mysteries that puzzles us. If our salvation has nothing to do with our own merit, or our own foreseen good works, but is purely of grace, then why does God save me? What is his purpose, if it is not based on my work or my activity?

The only reason why God has saved me is for the sake of Jesus Christ. The ultimate reason for predestination is the honour and glory of Jesus. Jesus is the reason for the universe. The goal of creation is that Christ might have the pre-eminence.

God the Father gives his people as a love-gift to his Son. Jesus says, All that the Father gives to me, come to me (John 6:37). Christ was aware of the fact that certain people were given to him by the Father. And that's where our election is based, in the love of the Father for the Son.

Now that has glorious implications for us which should cause us not to despair but to rejoice, and Paul elaborates on those in the verses that follow.<sup>1</sup>

### *God Works for Our Good*

#### **ROMANS 8:28**

Romans 8:28 is surely one of the best-known texts in the Bible. Believers of every age and place have stayed their minds on it. It has been likened to a pillow on which to rest our weary heads.

The sentence begins with the assertion that “we know.” There are many things we do not know. In those areas in which God has not plainly revealed his mind, our correct attitude is one of Christian agnosticism. But here Paul lists five truths about God’s providence that “we know.”

First, we know that “God works,” or is at work, in our lives. The order of words permits the translation “we know that for those who love God he is working.” He is ceaselessly, energetically and purposefully active on our behalf.

Second, God is at work “for the good of” his people. Being himself wholly good, his works are all expressions of his goodness and are calculated to advance his people’s good. Moreover, the “good” that is the goal of all his providential dealings with us is our ultimate well-being, namely, our final salvation.

Third, God works for our good “in all things.” *All things* must include the sufferings of verse 17 and the groanings of verse 23. Nothing is beyond the overruling, overriding scope of God’s providence.

Fourth, God works in all things for the good of “those who love him.” This is a necessary limitation. Paul is not expressing a general, superficial optimism that everything tends to everybody’s good in the end. No, if the “good” that is God’s objective is our completed salvation, then its beneficiaries are his people who are described as those who love him. This is an unusual phrase for Paul, because his references in Romans to love are rather to

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<sup>1</sup> Sproul, R. C. (1994). [\*The Gospel of God: An Exposition of Romans\*](#) (pp. 146–152). Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications.

God's love for us. Nevertheless, elsewhere he does allude to our love for God, and this is a common biblical concept, since the first and great commandment is that we love God with all our being.

Fifth, those who love God are also described as those "who have been called according to his purpose." They love him because he first loved them, and his love finds expression in his eternal purpose and his historical call. So life is not the random mess it sometimes appears to be. God has a saving purpose and is working in accordance with it.

We do not always understand what God is doing, let alone welcome it. Nor are we told that he is at work for our comfort. But we know that in all things he is working toward our supreme good.

### *Conformed to Christ's Image*

#### **ROMANS 8:29-30**

Paul traces God's good and saving purpose through five stages: foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification and glorification.

First comes a reference to "those God foreknew." Since the common meaning of "to foreknow" is to know something beforehand, some conclude that God foresees who will believe, and that this foreknowledge is the basis of his predestination. But this cannot be right. God foreknows everybody and everything, whereas Paul is referring to a particular group. Also, if God predestines people because they are going to believe, then the ground of their salvation is in themselves and their merit, instead of in him and his mercy.

Second, those God foreknew "he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." Clearly a decision is involved in the process of becoming a Christian, but it is God's decision before it can be ours. This is not to deny that we decided for Christ, and freely, but to affirm that we did so only because he had first decided for us. Paul singles out two practical purposes of God's predestination. The first is that we should "be conformed to the image of his Son." God's eternal purpose for his people is that we should become like Jesus. The transformation process begins here and now, but it will be brought to completion only when Christ returns. The second purpose is that, as a result of our conformity to the image of Christ, "he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters," enjoying both the community of the family and the preeminence of the firstborn.

Paul's third affirmation is that "those he predestined, he also called." God's call comes to people through the gospel. When the gospel is preached to them with power, and they respond to it with the obedience of faith, then we know God has chosen them. What Paul

means by God's call is not the general gospel invitation but the divine summons that raises the spiritually dead to life.

Fourth, "those he called, he also justified." God's effective call enables those who hear it to believe, and those who believe are justified by faith. Justification is more than forgiveness or acquittal or even acceptance; it is a declaration that we sinners are now righteous in God's sight because of his conferment on us of a righteous status, which is the righteousness of Christ himself.

Finally, "those he justified, he also glorified." Paul has already promised that if we share Christ's sufferings we will share his glory and that the creation itself will one day be brought into the freedom of the glory of God's children. Now he uses the verb *glorified*. Our destiny is to be given new bodies in a new world, both of which will be transfigured with the glory of God.

This is the third ground of encouragement for the support of the children of God in the sufferings they are called upon to endure in this life. It consists in the consolation and assurance to be derived from the fact that all things work together for their good.

**28** The version is probably correct in introducing these verses by the conjunction "and" rather than by "but". The thought is not apparently adversative but transitional. When the apostle says "we know", he is again intimating that the truth asserted is not one to be gainsaid. "To them that love God" is placed in the position of emphasis and characterizes those to whom the assurance belongs. They are described in terms of their subjective attitude. In such terms no criterion could be more discriminating, for love to God is both the most elementary and the highest mark of being in the favour of God. "All things" may not be restricted, though undoubtedly the things contemplated are particularly those that fall within the compass of believers' experience, especially suffering and adversity. Some of the ablest expositors maintain that "work together" does not mean that all things work in concert and cooperation with one another but that all things work in concert with the believer or with God. But it is unnecessary and perhaps arbitrary to depart from the more natural sense, namely, that in the benign and all-embracing plan of God the discrete elements all work together for good to them that love God. It is not to be supposed that they have any virtue or efficacy in themselves to work in concert for this end. Though not expressed, the ruling thought is that in the sovereign love and wisdom of God they are all made to converge upon and contribute to that goal. Many of the things comprised are evil in themselves and it is the marvel of God's wisdom and grace that they, when taken in

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<sup>2</sup> Stott, J., Larsen, D., & Larsen, S. (2016). [\*Reading Romans with John Stott: With Questions for Groups or Individuals\*](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 141–145). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press.

concert with the whole, are made to work for good. Not one detail works ultimately for evil to the people of God; in the end only good will be their lot. “To them that are called according to purpose” is a further definition of those to whom this assurance belongs. But the difference is significant. The former characterized them in terms of their subjective attitude, the latter in terms of God’s action exclusively. In the latter, therefore, there is an intimation of the reason why all things work for good—the action of God involved in their call is the guarantee that such will be the result. The call is the effectual call (*cf.* 1:7; vs. 30) which ushers into the fellowship of Christ (1 Cor. 1:9) and is indissolubly linked with predestination, on the one hand, and glorification, on the other. “According to purpose” refers without question to God’s determinate and eternal purpose (*cf.* 9:11; Eph. 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9). The last cited text is Paul’s own expansion of the thought summed up in the word “purpose”: “who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal”. Determinate efficacy characterizes the call because it is given in accordance with eternal purpose.

**29** This verse unfolds in greater detail the elements included in the “purpose” of verse 28, and verses 29, 30 are a “continued confirmation” of the truth that all things work for good to those who are the called of God. There is no question but the apostle here introduces us to the eternal counsel of God as it pertains to the people of God and delineates for us its various aspects.

“Whom he foreknew”—few questions have provoked more difference of interpretation than that concerned with the meaning of God’s foreknowledge as referred to here. It is, of course, true that the word is used in the sense of “to know beforehand” (*cf.* Acts 26:5; 2 Pet. 3:17). As applied to God it could, therefore, refer to his eternal prevision, his foresight of all that would come to pass. It has been maintained by many expositors that this sense will have to be adopted here. Since, however, those whom God is said to have foreknown are distinguished from others and identified with those whom God also predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, and since the expression “whom he foreknew” does not, on this view of its meaning, intimate any distinction by which the people of God could be differentiated, various ways of supplying this distinguishing element have been proposed. The most common is to suppose that what is in view is God’s foresight of faith. God foreknew who would believe; he foreknew them as his *by faith*. On this interpretation predestination is conceived of as conditioned upon this prevision of faith. Frequently, though not necessarily in all instances, this view of foreknowledge is considered to obviate the doctrine of unconditional election, and so dogmatic interest is often apparent in those who espouse it.

It needs to be emphasized that the rejection of this interpretation is not dictated by a predestinarian interest. Even if it were granted that “foreknew” means the foresight of faith, the biblical doctrine of sovereign election is not thereby eliminated or disproven. For

it is certainly true that God foresees faith; he foresees all that comes to pass. The question would then simply be: whence proceeds this faith which God foresees? And the only biblical answer is that the faith which God foresees is the faith he himself creates (*cf.* John 3:3–8; 6:44, 45, 65; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; 2 Pet. 1:2). Hence his eternal foresight of faith is preconditioned by his decree to generate this faith in those whom he foresees as believing, and we are thrown back upon the differentiation which proceeds from God's own eternal and sovereign election to faith and its consequents. The interest, therefore, is simply one of interpretation as it should be applied to this passage. On exegetical grounds we shall have to reject the view that "foreknew" refers to the foresight of faith.

It should be observed that the text says "*whom* he foreknew"; *whom* is the object of the verb and there is no qualifying addition. This, of itself, shows that, unless there is some other compelling reason, the expression "whom he foreknew" contains within itself the differentiation which is presupposed. If the apostle had in mind some "qualifying adjunct" it would have been simple to supply it. Since he adds none we are forced to inquire if the actual terms he uses can express the differentiation implied. The usage of Scripture provides an affirmative answer. Although the term "foreknow" is used seldom in the New Testament, it is altogether indefensible to ignore the meaning so frequently given to the word "know" in the usage of Scripture; "foreknow" merely adds the thought of "beforehand" to the word "know". Many times in Scripture "know" has a pregnant meaning which goes beyond that of mere cognition.<sup>55</sup> It is used in a sense practically synonymous with "love", to set regard upon, to know with peculiar interest, delight, affection, and action (*cf.* Gen. 18:19; Exod. 2:25; Psalm 1:6; 144:3; Jer. 1:5; Amos 3:2; Hosea 13:5; Matt. 7:23; 1 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:19; 1 John 3:1). There is no reason why this import of the word "know" should not be applied to "foreknow" in this passage, as also in 11:2 where it also occurs in the same kind of construction and where the thought of election is patently present (*cf.* 11:5, 6.) When this import is appreciated, then there is no reason for adding any qualifying notion and "whom he foreknew" is seen to contain within itself the differentiating element required. It means "whom he set regard upon" or "whom he knew from eternity with distinguishing affection and delight" and is virtually equivalent to "whom he foreloved". This interpretation, furthermore, is in agreement with the efficient and determining action which is so conspicuous in every other link of the chain—it is God who predestinates, it is God who calls, it is God who justifies, and it is he who glorifies. Foresight of faith would be out of accord with the determinative action which is predicated of God in these other instances and would constitute a weakening of the total emphasis at the point where we should least expect it. Foresight has too little of the active to do justice to the divine monergism upon which so much of the emphasis falls. It is not the foresight of difference but the foreknowledge that makes difference to exist, not a foresight that recognizes existence but the foreknowledge that determines existence. It is sovereign distinguishing love.

“He also foreordained.” One of the main objections urged against the foregoing view of “whom he foreknew” is that it would obliterate the distinction between foreknowledge and predestination. There is ostensible progression of thought expressed in “he also foreordained”. But there is no need to suppose that this progression is disturbed if “foreknew” is interpreted in the way propounded. “Foreknew” focuses attention upon the distinguishing love of God whereby the sons of God were elected. But it does not inform us of the destination to which those thus chosen are appointed. It is precisely that information that “he also foreordained” supplies, and it is by no means superfluous. When we consider the high destiny defined, “to be conformed to the image of his Son”, there is exhibited not only the dignity of this ordination but also the greatness of the love from which the appointment flows. God’s love is not passive emotion; it is active volition and it moves determinatively to nothing less than the highest goal conceivable for his adopted children, conformity to the image of the only-begotten Son. To allege that the pregnant force of “foreknew” does not leave room for the distinct enunciation of this high destiny is palpably without warrant or reason.<sup>58</sup>

“Conformed to the image of his Son” defines the destination to which the elect of God are appointed. The apostle has in view the conformity to Christ that will be realized when they will be glorified with Christ (vs. 17; cf. vss. 18, 19, 21, 23, 30), the final and complete conformity of resurrection glory (cf. 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2). It is noteworthy that this should be described as conformity to the image of the *Son*; it enhances the marvel of the destination. The title “Son” has reference to Christ as the only-begotten (cf. vss. 3, 32) and therefore the unique and eternal Sonship is contemplated. The conformity cannot, of course, have in view conformity to him in that relation or capacity; the conformity embraces the transformation of the body of our humiliation to the likeness of the body of Christ’s glory (Phil. 3:21) and must therefore be conceived of as conformity to the image of the incarnate Son as glorified by his exaltation. Nevertheless, the glorified Christ does not cease to be the eternal Son and it is the eternal Son who is the glorified incarnate Son. Conformity to his image as incarnate and glorified, therefore, is conformity to the image of him who is the eternal and only-begotten Son.

“That he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” This specifies the final aim of the conformity just spoken of. We might well ask: What can be more final than the complete conformity of the sons of God to the image of Christ? It is this question that brings to the forefront the significance of this concluding clause. There is a final end that is more ultimate than the glorification of the people of God; it is that which is concerned with the preeminence of Christ. As Meyer correctly notes: “Paul contemplates *Christ* as the One, to whom the divine decree referred *as to its final aim*”. The term “firstborn” reflects on the *priority* and the *supremacy* of Christ (cf. Col. 1:15, 18; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:5). It is all the more striking that, when the unique and eternal Sonship is contemplated in the title “Son” and the priority and supremacy of Christ in the designation “firstborn”, the people of God should be classified with Christ as “brethren” (cf. Heb. 2:11, 12). His unique sonship and the

fact that he is the firstborn guard Christ's distinctiveness and preeminence, but it is among many brethren that his preeminence appears. This is another example of the intimacy of the relation existing between Christ and the people of God. The union means also community and this community is here expressed as that of "brethren". The fraternal relationship is subsumed under the ultimate end of the predestinating decree, and this means that the preeminence of Christ carries with it the eminence that belongs to the children of God. In other words, the unique dignity of the Son in his essential relation to the Father and in his messianic investiture enhances the marvel of the dignity bestowed upon the people of God. The Son is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb. 2:11).

**30** The two preceding verses deal with the eternal and pre-temporal counsel of God; the "purpose" of verse 28 is explicated in verse 29 in terms of foreknowledge and predestination, the latter defining the ultimate goal of the counsel of salvation. Verse 30 introduces us to the realm of the temporal and indicates the actions by which the eternal counsel is brought to actual fruition in the children of God. Three actions are mentioned, calling, justification, and glorification. There is an unbreakable bond between these three actions themselves, on the one hand, and the two elements of the eternal counsel, on the other. All five elements are co-extensive. The sustained use of "also" and the repetition of the terms "foreordained", "called", "justified" in the three relative clauses in verse 30 signalize the denotative equation. Thus it is made abundantly evident that there cannot be one element without the others and that the three elements which are temporal flow by way of consequence from the eternal counsel, particularly from predestination because it stands in the closest logical relation to calling as the first in the sequence of temporal events.

It is to be observed that calling, justification, and glorification are set forth as acts of God—"he called", "he justified", "he glorified". The same divine monergism appears as in "he foreknew" and "he foreordained". It is contrary to this emphasis to define any of these elements of the application of redemption in any other terms than those of *divine action*. It is true that all three affect us men, they draw our persons within their scope, and are of the deepest practical moment to us in the actual experience of salvation. But God alone is active in those events which are here mentioned and no activity on the part of men supplies any ingredient of their definition or contributes to their efficacy. For reasons which are rather obvious but which need not be developed we should infer that the sequence which the apostle follows represents the order in the application of redemption. The apostle enumerates only three elements. These, however, as the pivotal events in our actual salvation, serve the apostle's purpose in delineating the divine plan of salvation from its fount in the love of God to its consummation in the glorification of the sons of God. Glorification, unlike calling and justification, belongs to the future. It would not be feasible in this context (*cf.* 5:2; vss. 17, 18, 21, 24, 25, 29) to regard it as other than the completion

of the process of salvation and, though “glorified” is in the past tense, this is proleptic, intimating the certainty of its accomplishment.

In extending encouragement and support to the people of God in their sufferings and adversities, groanings and infirmities, the apostle has reached this triumphant conclusion. He has shown how the present pilgrimage of the people of God falls into its place in that determinate and undefeatable plan of God that is bounded by two foci, the sovereign love of God in his eternal counsel and glorification with Christ in the age to come. It is when they apprehend by faith this panorama that stretches from the love of God before times eternal to the grand finale of the redemptive process that the sufferings of this present time are viewed in their true perspective and are seen, *sub specie aeternitatis*, to be but the circumstances of pilgrimage to, and preconditions of, a glory<sup>3</sup> to be revealed so great in its weight that the tribulations are not worthy of comparison.

28. *And we know, &c.* He now draws this conclusion from what had been said, that so far are the troubles of this life from hindering our salvation, that, on the contrary, they are helps to it. It is no objection that he sets down an illative particle, for it is no new thing with him to make somewhat an indiscriminate use of adverbs, and yet this conclusion includes what anticipates an objection. For the judgment of the flesh in this case exclaims, that it by no means appears that God hears our prayers, since our afflictions continue the same. Hence the Apostle anticipates this and says, that though God does not immediately succour his people, he yet does not forsake them, for by a wonderful contrivance he turns those things which seem to be evils in such a way as to promote their salvation. If any one prefers to read this verse by itself, as though Paul proceeded to a new argument in order to show that adversities which assist our salvation, ought not to be borne as hard and grievous things, I do not object. At the same time, the design of Paul is not doubtful: “Though the elect and the reprobate are indiscriminately exposed to similar evils, there is yet a great difference; for God trains up the faithful by afflictions, and thereby promotes their salvation.”

But we must remember that Paul speaks here only of adversities, as though he had said, “All things which happen to the saints are so overruled by God, that what the world regards as evil, the issue shows to be good.” For though what *Augustine* says is true, that even the sins of the saints are, through the guiding providence of God, so far from doing harm to them, that, on the contrary, they serve to advance their salvation; yet this belongs not to this passage, the subject of which is the cross.

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<sup>3</sup> Murray, J. (1968). *The Epistle to the Romans* (Vol. 1, pp. 313–321). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

It must also be observed, that he includes the whole of true religion in the love of God, as on it depends the whole practice of righteousness.

*Even to them who according to his purpose, &c.* This clause seems to have been added as a modification, lest any one should think that the faithful, because they love God, obtain by their own merit the advantage of deriving such fruit from their adversities. We indeed know that when salvation is the subject, men are disposed to begin with themselves, and to imagine certain preparations by which they would anticipate the favour of God. Hence Paul teaches us, that those whom he had spoken of as loving God, had been previously chosen by him. For it is certain that the order is thus pointed out, that we may know that it proceeds from the gratuitous adoption of God, as from the first cause, that all things happen to the saints for their salvation. Nay, Paul shows that the faithful do not love God before they are called by him, as in another place he reminds us that the Galatians were known of God before they knew him. (Gal. 4:9.) It is indeed true what Paul intimates, that afflictions avail not to advance the salvation of any but of those who love God; but that saying of John is equally true, that then only he is begun to be loved by us, when he anticipates us by his gratuitous love.

But the calling of which Paul speaks here, has a wide meaning, for it is not to be confined to the manifestation of election, of which mention is presently made, but is to be set simply in opposition to the course pursued by men; as though Paul had said,—“The faithful attain not religion by their own efforts, but are, on the contrary, led by the hand of God, inasmuch as he has chosen them to be a peculiar people to himself.” The word *purpose* distinctly excludes whatever is imagined to be adduced mutually by men; as though Paul had denied, that the causes of our election are to be sought anywhere else, except in the secret good pleasure of God; which subject is more fully handled in the first chapter to the Ephesians, and in the first of the Second Epistle to Timothy; where also the contrast between this purpose and human righteousness is more distinctly set forth. Paul, however, no doubt made here this express declaration,—that our salvation is based on the election of God, in order that he might make a transition to that which he immediately subjoined, namely, that by the same celestial decree, the afflictions, which conform us to Christ, have been appointed; and he did this for the purpose of connecting, as by a kind of necessary chain, our salvation with the bearing of the cross.

29. *For whom he has foreknown, &c.* He then shows, by the very order of election, that the afflictions of the faithful are nothing else than the manner by which they are conformed to the image of Christ; and that this was necessary, he had before declared. There is therefore no reason for us to be grieved, or to think it hard and grievous, that we are afflicted, unless we disapprove of the Lord's election, by which we have been foreordained to life, and unless we are unwilling to bear the image of the Son of God, by which we are to be prepared for celestial glory.

But the foreknowledge of God, which Paul mentions, is not a bare prescience, as some unwise persons absurdly imagine, but the adoption by which he had always distinguished his children from the reprobate. In the same sense Peter says, that the faithful had been elected to the sanctification of the Spirit according to the foreknowledge of God. Hence those, to whom I have alluded, foolishly draw this inference,—That God has elected none but those whom he foresaw would be worthy of his grace. Peter does not indeed flatter the faithful, as though every one had been elected on account of his merit; but by reminding them of the eternal counsel of God, he wholly deprives them of all worthiness. So Paul does in this passage, who repeats by another word what he had said before of God's purpose. It hence follows, that this knowledge is connected with God's good pleasure; for he foreknew nothing out of himself, in adopting those whom he was pleased to adopt; but only marked out those whom he had purposed to elect.

The verb  $\pi\rho\rho\rho\rho\iota\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu$ , which some translate, to *predestinate*, is to be understood according to what this passage requires; for Paul only meant, that God had so determined that all whom he has adopted should bear the image of Christ; nor has he simply said, that they were to be conformed to Christ, but to *the image of Christ*, that he might teach us that there is in Christ a living and conspicuous exemplar, which is exhibited to God's children for imitation. The meaning then is, that gratuitous adoption, in which our salvation consists, is inseparable from the other decree, which determines that we are to bear the cross; for no one can be an heir of heaven without being conformed to the image of the only-begotten Son of God.

*That he may be, or, that he might be, the first-born, &c.*; for the Greek infinitive,  $\epsilon\tilde{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota$ , may be rendered in these two ways; but I prefer the first rendering. But in mentioning Christ's primogeniture, Paul meant only to express this,—that since Christ possesses a pre-eminence among the children of God, he is rightly given to us as a pattern, so that we ought to refuse nothing which he has been pleased to undergo. Hence, that the celestial Father may in every way bear testimony to the authority and honour which he has conferred on his own Son, he will have all those whom he adopts to be the heirs of his kingdom, to be conformed to his example. Though indeed the condition of the godly is apparently various, as there is a difference between the members of the same body, there is yet a connection between every one and his own head. As then the first-born sustains the name of the family, so Christ is placed in a state of preeminence, not only that he might excel in honour among the faithful, but also that he might include all under himself under the common name of brotherhood.

30. *And whom he has foredetermined, (præfinivit,) them has he also called, &c.* That he might now by a clearer proof show how true it is that a conformity with the humiliating state of Christ is for our good, he adopts a graduating process, by which he teaches us, that a participation of the cross is so connected with our vocation, justification, and, in short, with our future glory, that they can by no means be separated.

But that readers may better understand the Apostle's meaning, it may be well to repeat what I have already said,—that the word *foredetermine* does not refer to election, but to that purpose or decree of God by which he has ordained that the cross is to be borne by his people; and by declaring that they are now called, he intimates, that God had not kept concealed what he had determined respecting them, but had made it known, that they might resignedly and humbly submit to the condition allotted to them; for calling here is to be distinguished from secret election, as being posterior to it. That none then may make this objection—that it appears to no one what lot God has appointed for him, the Apostle says, that God by his calling bears an evident testimony respecting his hidden purpose. But this testimony is not only found in the outward preaching of the gospel, but it has also the power of the Spirit connected with it; for the elect are there spoken of, whom God not only addresses by the outward word, but whom he also inwardly draws.

*Justification* may fitly be extended to the unremitted continuance of God's favour, from the time of our calling to the hour of death; but as Paul uses this word throughout the Epistle, for gratuitous imputation of righteousness, there is no necessity for us to deviate from this meaning. What Paul indeed had in view was to show that a more precious compensation is offered to us, than what ought to allow us to shun afflictions; for what is more desirable than to be reconciled to God, so that our miseries may no longer be tokens of a curse, nor lead us to ruin?

He then immediately adds, that those who are now pressed down by the cross shall be *glorified*; so that their sorrows and reproaches shall bring them no loss. Though glorification is not yet exhibited except in our Head, yet as we in a manner behold in him our inheritance of eternal life, his glory brings to us such assurance respecting our own glory, that our hope may be justly compared to a present possession.

We may add, that Paul, imitating the style of the Hebrew language, adopts in these verbs the past instead of the present tense. A continued act is no doubt what is meant, according to this import, "Those whom God now, consistently with his purpose, exercises under the cross, are called and justified, that they may have a hope of salvation, so that nothing of their glory decays during their humiliation; for though their present miseries deform it before the world, yet before God and angels it always shines forth as perfect." What Paul then means by this gradation is, That the afflictions of the faithful, by which they are now humbled, are intended for this end—that the faithful, having obtained the glory of the celestial kingdom, may reach the glory of Christ's resurrection, with whom they are now crucified.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Calvin, J., & Owen, J. (2010). [\*Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans\*](#) (pp. 314–320). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.