

Sermons through

Romans

The Purpose of God

Part Three

Romans 8:28-30

A Sure Destination

With Study Questions

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6/1/2014*

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And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified (Romans 8:28-30).

Introduction

Jesus had a very inclusive and protective disposition when it came to children. He would often use children to provide a lesson. When the disciples would argue about **“who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven”** (imagine that argument while in the physical presence of Jesus), Jesus would put a child in the midst of them and tell them **“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:1-4)**. He would then explain that it was the one who humbles himself like a child who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

On another occasion we are told that the disciples rebuked people who were bringing children to Jesus. This was one of the few times we see Jesus **“indignant”**. **“Let the children come to me”** Jesus said **“for to such belongs the kingdom of God...whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it” (Mark 10:13-16)**. Then Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them. It was a challenging, yet moving event.

We also read of Jesus thanking His Father that He has hidden **“these things”** (referring to the source, aim and authority of His great works) from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children (*nepios*—lit. infants). And again Jesus taught **“out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes you have prepared praise” (Matthew 21:16)**.

In a certain sense or category, we are to grow up and give up our **“childish ways” (1 Corinthians 13:11)**. But there remains a childlike trust, a childlike humility that we are called to nurture when it

comes to our thoughts of God, heaven and His kingdom. That which is seems so natural for a child, especially a small child, becomes elusive as we grow.

Sometimes I'll watch children sitting in the back seat as their parent drives on the freeway. They might be playing a game or sleeping or arguing with their sibling. They never consider for a moment the speed at which they're throttling down the road. At least not until they get a little older and start working toward a driver's license. Then they have manifold concerns and suggestions.

But little ones are so secure in their parent's car. They have no concern about the future of their journey. They are not struggling with the doubt of not knowing if they'll make it to their desired destination. As far as their little hearts are concerned, what's supposed to happen will happen.

Not so with the adult. We struggle with not knowing. Whether it's the diagnosis of an illness, the future of a relationship or career, we want to know what's going to happen. We want to see some evidence of things moving in a specific direction. We want to feel secure, like the child that Jesus actually held.

The Eschaton in History

The Apostle Paul began this chapter with the blessed proclamation that there is **“no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1)**. Because of this great grace **“we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh”** but are rather called to **“put to death the deeds of the body” (Romans 8:12, 13)**. Christians are called to **“suffer with”** Christ **“that we may also be glorified together” (Romans 8:17)**.

Paul is quick to assure us **“that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”** (Romans 8:18). He goes on to teach how we groan in anticipation of **“the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23)** and how we currently called to patiently operate in the **“hope”** of that promise.

But it is not as if the plan of God is restricted to the final resurrection. The eschaton has invaded history. Our prayers are, in this life, presented by the Spirit to the Father **“according to the will of God” (Romans 8:27)** and are, therefore answered, in this life, according to God's own wisdom and power. And it is not just the prayers which function in this way. **“All things work together for**

good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

So every last single event in the course of human history has a glorious design to it—a design Paul here calls **“good”** for God’s children, children who God knew, loved and chose before the beginning of time to be His own. When a Christian is told they are loved **“with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3)**, those words are only truly meaningful if they come from the **“Everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6)**.

And the **“good”** which is the design of God’s loving foreknowledge and divine predestination is that His children would be **“conformed to the image”** of Christ. There is a transformation taking place (2 Corinthians 3:18). It is presented a couple of ways—we are **“conformed to the image”** of Christ and/or Christ is being **“formed in”** us (Galatians 4:19).

However one wants to put it, this transformation can be a highly uncomfortable enterprise, seeming **“painful rather than pleasant” (Hebrews 12:11)**. And whereas verse 29 appears, at some level, to be describing what God is doing in us, verse 30 dials in to what God has done for us.

In light of the **“sufferings of this present time”** the anticipatory **“groaning”** and the struggle of this **“transformation”** where God is utilizing all the events in human history for our **“good”** to form Christ in us, Paul would have us enjoy the security of the small child resting in the sure knowledge that we will reach the desired destination. This is the penultimate climax leading into a series of rhetorical questions with which he will complete the chapter—questions like **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”**

But right now Paul wants us to know who is driving the car and how we can know we are safely within it.

Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified (Romans 8:30).

Predestined

Since we spoke of this in detail last time, I will only briefly remind us that **“Predestined”** *proorisen* in the Greek, similar to English is comprised of a prefix *pro* meaning in front of or before and *horizo* meaning to mark out definitely or to determine; all this to say that our

destinies are determined by God **“according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11)**. God has a purpose for you and me. There is a place we are being brought—a destiny He has determined.

It should be a great source of security for the Christian to know that His inclusion in the plan of God is not an afterthought or generated from the mere wisdom or volition of man. From eternity past it was determined by God that we would, if you will, be sitting in His car going where He would have us go. But how do I know that includes me?

He Also Called

“These He also called.” We can know this includes us from the calling *ekalesen* of God. The word *called* is used in religious circles in a variety of ways, e.g. someone called to the ministry or Paul himself **“called to be an apostle” (Romans 1:1)**. We make distinctions between an *inward* call (where within our own hearts/thoughts we detect a desire to ministry) and an *outward* call (where a legitimate ecclesiastical methodology acknowledges giftedness in this area).

But it important for us to recognize that even though in the gospels the word **“call(ed)”** may involve some sort of outward invitation or acknowledgment (e.g. **“many are called but few are chosen”** [Matthew 20: 16]), the word “called...”

is never in the Epistles of the New Testament applied to those who have only the *outward invitation* of the Gospel... It always means “*internally, effectually, savingly called.*”¹

Effectual Calling

The calling of which Paul writes is *effectual calling*. It is the grace of God which most certainly and irresistibly delivers sinners not only from the devil and the world, but from our own rebellious hearts. We are incapable of coming to Christ without and we are incapable of remaining in rebellion when it is directed toward us. As Jesus taught:

¹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Ro 8:30). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:44).

We will often think of drawing as wooing or cajoling; as if God is seeking to gently coax or persuade us to make the right decision. That is not the meaning of “**draws**” *helkyse* in this verse. One translation renders “**haul**” John 21:6. It is also used to describe unsheathing a sword, as when Peter drew his sword to cut off Malchus’ ear (John 18:10). It is used to describe being dragged into court (James 2:6). One might think of drawing water from a well.

It is not merely telling the kids they should get in the car. It would more closely approximate putting the baby in the carseat and safely strapping him/her in their place.

Question 67 of the Larger Westminster Catechism asks and answers the question of effectual calling. Included in the answer:

- The acknowledgement that it is the work of God’s almighty power and grace (John 5:25, Eph. 1:18–20, 2 Tim. 1:8–9).
- That it extends from God’s free and special love and nothing in us that would move us in that direction (Tit. 3:4–5, Eph. 2:4–5, 7–9, Rom. 9:11).
- This calling happens at a certain time (determined by God) in our lives through the work of God’s word and His Spirit (2 Cor. 5:20, 2 Cor. 6:1–2, John 6:44, 2 Thess. 2:13–14).
- This effectual calling savingly enlightens our minds, renews and powerfully determines our wills (Acts 26:18, 1 Cor. 2:10, 12; Ezek. 11:19, Ezek. 36:26–27, John 6:45).
- That though we are dead in our sins we are made willing and able to freely answer the call and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein. (Eph. 2:5, Phil. 2:13, Deut. 30:6).

In many ways we might view effectual calling as highly unremarkable. We believe in Jesus as the Savior of our souls and the Master we seek to obey. Jesus, on the other hand, describes this as an astonishing blessing from heaven.

**He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”
¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed**

are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven (Matthew 16:15-17).

The person who is the recipient of effectual calling is the person who has not remained in willful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them in Christ. It is the person who has come to Christ. Is there a greater question to be asked (or to ask of oneself) than have you come to Christ?

When one answers 'yes' to this, Paul (by the Spirit of God) would have us know the history behind this decision (that God knew us, loved us and chose us in eternity past); the future benefits that belong to those who have trusted in Christ (the glory, which we will speak of shortly) and the present condition of those who have embraced Christ—one of justification.

Justified

“These He also justified.” We have the blessed assurance that God has called us; He has put us in this car, a car headed for glory. But we may wish to stop just for a minute and ask ourselves, “Just who are we with in this car?” Consider the experience of the Apostles who were in an excited fear while Jesus slept through the storm at sea. Jesus wakes up, calms the storm and then we read that they were (not just afraid) but **“filled with great fear and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him’ (Mark 4:41).**

Suppose God were to say “Come to me” and suppose we did have left within our sin natures enough of an inkling to come (please excuse the hypothetical heresy for a moment), what happens to those who enter into the presence of God while still in their sins? How do we know the car isn't headed for hell?

We can know this because God didn't merely call us, He **“justified”** *edikaiosen* us. What is justification and how is it ours? Again, if I can summarize questions 70 and 71 of the Larger Westminster Catechism, justification:

- Is an act of God's free grace unto sinners (Rom. 3:22, 24-25, Rom. 4:5).

- In this grace God pardons all our sins and accepts us and accounts us as righteous in His sight (2 Cor. 5:19,21, Rom. 3:22,24,25,27,28).
- Our justification has nothing to do with anything we have done or what God has done in us (Tit. 3:5,7, Eph. 1:7).
- It is the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed (credited) to us and received by faith alone (Rom. 5:17-19, Rom. 4:6-8; (Acts 10:43, Gal. 2:16, Phil. 3:9).
- All of this satisfaction was provided by a surety; a surety which God Himself provided in his own and only Son...imputing his righteousness to them (us) and requiring nothing of them (us) for their (our) justification by faith, which is also his gift (1 Tim. 2:5-6, Heb. 10:10, Matt. 20:28, Dan. 9:24,26, Isa. 53:4-6,10-12, Heb. 7:22, Rom. 8:32, 1 Pet. 1:18-19).
- Their (our) justification is to them (us) of free grace (Eph. 1:7).

All this to say that when God calls a guilty and polluted sinner—a sinner He is in the process of transforming—He sees in that sinner, simultaneously, both their sin and the righteousness in Christ. And Christ is our **“surety”** *engyos* (Hebrew 7:22) of this. *Surety* carries the idea of one taking responsibility for another. But the word goes deeper, it also expresses the quality or condition of being sure...a means of assurance or safety. It is like the small, perhaps very small, child in the car who does not question where they are going, the safety of the journey or the love of the one at the wheel. These things are all a given.

Glory

It is such a given that Paul completes the thought, the thought of a future glory *edoxasen* as if we have already arrived. Childlike faith would not give it a second thought. Someone else has said it well:

...and whom he justified, them he also glorified—brought to final glory (Ro 8:17, 18). Noble climax, and so rhythmically expressed! And all this is viewed as past; because, starting from the past decree of “predestination to be conformed to the image of God’s Son” of which the other steps are but the

successive unfoldings—all is beheld as one entire, eternally completed salvation.²

And it is with this in our heart, that the Apostle will begin to challenge anything, anyone or any thought that would seek to convince God's child that he is capable of be extracted from the car.

Questions for Study

1. Discuss the relationship Jesus had with children? What lessons did he use them to provide? How should we be like children? In what ways should we not be like children (pages 2, 3)?
2. How has the eschaton invaded history? What is God currently doing in the lives of His children (pages 3, 4)?
3. How is predestination a comforting doctrine (pages 4, 5)?
4. What are some different ways the word "call" or "called" is used in religious circles? What is effectual calling? What does it mean to be drawn to Christ (pages 5, 6)?
5. How do you know if you have been effectually called by God? Have you been called? What is the history behind this decision (pages 6, 7)?
6. What does it mean to be justified? Define and discuss surety (pages 7, 8)?

² Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Ro 8:30). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

7. Why does Paul present being glorified in the past tense (page 8)?