

Salvation's Golden Chain

Romans 8:29 - 30

²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

In today's Bible lesson, Paul addressed the issue of election. The theology of election can be thorny at best. For generations, Christians have argued about election, predestination, salvation, the sovereignty of God and human free choice. Through the years, two primary camps or approaches have emerged relative to salvation.

One camp, represented by the Calvinists, tended to emphasize the sovereignty of God in salvation whereby God elected some to be saved. The Calvinists embraced a theology of unconditional election whereby God elects individuals to salvation based entirely on His will alone. The Calvinists believed in "limited atonement." Limited atonement is the belief that Jesus only died for the elect or predestined ones.

The other camp, represented by the Arminians, tended to emphasize human choice and human free will. The Arminians held to a belief in conditional election that argued that God has foreknowledge of who will believe in Christ and receive salvation but does not directly choose or predetermine certain persons for salvation. Arminians held to a belief in universal atonement. Jesus died for all and His saving death is applied to anyone who chooses to believe in Him.

Both camps however dismissed human merit or efforts and exalted the role of God. Paul helps us to draw some reasonable, biblical conclusions about election. Note at the beginning of verse 29 the name God. God is always at the beginning of any discussion about salvation because God is the author of salvation. We bring no merits. He brings all the grace.

God plainly possesses the attribute of foreknowledge. But the full depth of power of that foreknowledge is beyond any human comprehension. God does indeed foresee the faith of every person who is saved or elected. That much the Bible clearly confirms. Saving originates with and is empowered by God alone.

For some predestination implies that God has willfully, purposefully and intentionally determined in advance who would be part of His great act of

salvation and who would not. But a richer understanding of that word leads us to recognize that predestination is not so much a matter of God arbitrarily choosing for or against someone as much as it is God deciding for mankind in the first place. God has chosen or predestined a pathway for salvation and for mankind to come to Him. It is not God's will that any should perish, but rather that all should come to the way He has opened through Christ (see 2 Peter 3:9). John MacArthur gives us a helpful way to understand predestination. *"God has predestined every believer to salvation through the means of Christ's atoning sacrifice. The Lord has predetermined the destiny of every person who will believe in Him."* We can choose God only because He has first chosen a way for us.

God next works to conform His elect into the likeness of Christ. God works to transform our lives into Christ-looking lives. We are the tapestry upon which the Holy Spirit works to produce change and transformation within us. We are conformed and called into the likeness of Christ through the Spirit's intervening work.

In verse 30, Paul summarized the work of salvation from God's perspective - predestined, called, justified and glorified. And God is the catalyst or driving force behind each stage. God has established a way. God has issued a call to repent and believe. God declares the humble, who turn to Him, to be justified and not guilty. And finally God ends with the glorification of the believer. It might be fair to summarize the theology of these verses in this way. God has foreknowledge of those who will come to Him through the way He has predetermined before the foundations of the world were laid. Those who respond are called, conformed, justified and eventually glorified. At each stage and through-out all of time, God is in charge and sovereign. Salvation is issued and accepted on His terms. We choose Him only because He first chose us.