

## Working for the Good - Part 2

Scripture: Romans 8:28-30

### Introduction

Last week we examined this passage and saw that God works all things for the good of certain people. How do you know God works all things for the good? How do you know that this promise is for you? The passage says that this promise is for those who love God and who are called according to His purpose. If that is you, if you are one of those who love God and are called by Him according to His purpose, you know that God is working all things for the good. In fact, this passage gives us a glimpse at just how much God is working in the lives of His people. He is working in each of their lives to make sure good happens. The good is for each of them, who were once weak, distorted by sin and enemies of God, to become like God's only begotten Son, Jesus. God wants to make each of us into the image of His Son and He is working to make that happen.

This passage is meant to give great comfort to God's people. While that is so, it is also one of those passages in Scripture that raises many questions. Maybe you have read this passage, or others like it, and have wondered what certain things mean. What does it mean to be predestined or to be called? Those are good questions. My hope is to faithfully preach God's Word and not my opinions about it. That can be difficult, and it is certainly difficult with this passage. I will attempt to explain this text and to be fair to the hundreds of years of debate that is related to this passage. One thing I must admit is that I do not have this all figured out. I must concede that there is a lot I do not understand. Our God is bigger than any of us can comprehend and there is far more I do *not* understand than what I do understand. I assume the same is true for all of us.

### The Mystery of Our Faith

I recently seized upon a concept that has helped me to better understand the tension in Scripture regarding our faith. We see it mentioned in another of Paul's letters.

**1 Timothy 3:8–9** <sup>8</sup> *Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.* <sup>9</sup> *They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.*

The thing that has helped me is not the deacons (although they help), or being dignified (though that is good), or not being double-tongued (though that is desired), or not being greedy (which is also a good thing). The thing which has helped me sort through this issue is that our faith is a *mystery*. How our faith in Christ coincides with God's work in our lives is a mystery. God has revealed to us those things that He has chosen to reveal to us. It is not a complete knowledge. There are some things we believe to be true, but we do not fully understand them, such as the incarnation and the Trinity. When it comes to our salvation — how it works, what God does, what we do — I think it is helpful to realize that we do not know everything. We can trust that what God has revealed to us is true, that He is working for our good, and that He knows what He is doing.

There is a tension in Scripture between God's sovereignty and man's will to choose. The Church has debated this for over a thousand years. It has not been resolved yet. I promise we will not resolve it today. However, I agree with John McArthur who said, "I am quiet happy to concede that God can resolve things that I can't." God can work out things that you or I cannot. Since the Church has not come to a consensus about this and well-meaning, Christ-loving people are on opposite sides of the issue, a healthy approach would be to say, "I do not know." At the same time, we should be charitable with others who might hold different opinions or convictions about this issue, as well as others in Scripture. We will not always agree about certain things, but we should be able to disagree in love. Only Satan benefits when Christians break fellowship over an issue like this. There are some hills worth dying on. I don't think this is one of them.

### The Golden Chain of God's Work

Having said all that, what does this passage say about God's work? It basically reveals a "golden chain" that summarizes God's work in our lives. This passage explains to us why we can be assured that God is working all things for good. God has always been doing good for His people, starting before creation, continuing in their conversion and salvation, and then on to the day of Christ's return. Realizing the goal of God's work in our lives should help us better understand what God is doing here. According to this passage, the purpose of God's work in our lives is to make us into people we are not.

**Romans 8:29** <sup>29</sup> *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

God chose beforehand that His adopted children would become like His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. All mankind has been created into the image of God, but sin has distorted that image. The cross is the means by which we are *spiritually reborn* into His image. God's people have been *predestined* to share the likeness of His Son so that Jesus would be the older brother among a large family. Before you were even born, God was working in your life to bring about this good thing. He knew you and He knew you were going to need a Savior. Some understand God's knowledge as more than merely knowing about you but really *knowing you* before you were born. Whatever it means, God chose those He knew beforehand to be like His Son. That is the meaning of "predestined" here, that God decided beforehand that His people would be like His Son. The "golden chain" that summarizes God's work continues with the following:

**Romans 8:30** <sup>30</sup> *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

Those who are predestined by God are also called to faith through the Gospel. And all those who are called to faith through the Gospel are also justified (declared righteous in God's sight). This means that those God knew before hand were called to have faith in Jesus Christ that would result in them being declared righteous before God. The chain begins with God's perfect knowledge of His people and continues with them being declared righteous before Him. All those who are declared righteous (justified) will also

be resurrected on the last day (glorified). This chain is not broken. We are assured that God's work in us will be completed. No matter what suffering or trouble we face in this life, we can trust that God is working in us to bring about the completion of His work.

### **Our Response to God Work**

The issue of predestination raises a question about our response to God's saving work. What is our responsibility to it? What does God's sovereign choice mean about our ability to freely choose Christ? I think it goes without saying that most people live their lives in such a way that demonstrates their freedom to choose. Parents teach their children from early on to make the right choices. We encourage people to make good decisions and tell them that there are consequences for those decisions. We have an entire system of justice that rewards consequences for bad actions. Every time I preach is an appeal to people to respond to God's Word, to make some choice or take some action, to make some change in their lives. I would not preach that way if I did not think you could respond to it. So, how does this relate to God's work in our lives?

In short, there is both God's sovereign choice and will and man's choice and response to God's will. The crucifixion is a wonderful example of both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Look at Peter's first sermon recorded in the book of Acts.

**Acts 2:23** <sup>23</sup> *this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*

We see here that God had planned for Christ to be crucified and yet godless men chose to perform the evil deed. The crucifixion was both God's sovereign plan as well as man's free choice to kill his Savior. God had sovereignly planned the death and resurrection of Christ, but sinful man freely chose to kill Him. Now, look at how the people responded to Peter's message describing this.

**Acts 2:37–38** <sup>37</sup> *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"* <sup>38</sup> *And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

As a result of their sinfulness, the proper response to the Gospel was for these people to *repent* and *then believe* in the very one they had killed. They were to turn from their sin and turn to Christ. Did God just know about the crucifixion of His Son or did He plan it and orchestrate it? Did Jesus die at the hands of willful men or did He willingly give up His life? It seems the answer to these questions is *both*. God determined long ago that Jesus was going to be born, crucified and then resurrected for the sins of man. God determined long ago that sinful man was going to be the agents of this master plan of salvation. Man, on the other hand, determined to carry out this plan and they bore the consequence of doing so. This might seem like a contradiction but it is really a mystery. Likewise, God calls people to Himself and works through their lives to bring them to Him and people choose and are responsible for their choices. How this works is a mystery.

## A Glorious Guarantee

Now let's look at the end of the chain. Have you ever wanted a sure thing? When my wife and I visited Las Vegas we saw people who were looking for a win. They wanted a sure bet. The comforting thing about God's work in our lives is that there are no drop outs. When God works in you to save you by His grace, you are saved indeed and you will be glorified on the last day. It is the best guarantee available. That is why Paul could write about our future glory as if it had already taken place. (v. 30) Once you are called into Christ, you will remain in Christ. We saw this in the very first verse of chapter eight.

***Romans 8:1*** <sup>1</sup> *There is...no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

There is no condemnation for those who know Jesus Christ. We know this is true because God works through every step of the process. God predestines, calls, justifies, and yes, glorifies you. You can be assured of your destiny because God has planned it out and is working it out. We could not be more secure. Reflecting on this, our hearts should be calmed as we give glory to God for the complete stability of our deliverance. Once someone has received God's grace and through faith has trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, there is nothing or no one that can remove that person from God's grace. Once you are in Christ, forever in Christ will you remain. For if by grace we are saved, then surely, by grace we will remain saved. This is good news!

## Conclusion

In closing, we know that God is working to bring about the best in all things. God is involved in every step of the lives of His children for the purpose of making them like Jesus. We may not understand everything about how salvation works or how God's will and our will work together. We just believe that God is working for the good of His people. We should believe it is by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ that we are saved, but we are not required to agree with others how God works out our salvation. J. I. Packer once wrote that the message we are to take to the world is this, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for sins, and now offers you Himself as your Savior." That is the message we should communicate. Our job is to point people to the living Christ and summon them to trust in Him. How God works that out is His business.

There are going to be times in our lives where we do not have all the answers. We are going to be tempted to question God. Will you trust Him in those times? Cardinal Timothy Dolan with the Catholic Church once faced a crisis of faith in which he did not understand what God was doing. This was because his young niece was struggling with cancer. Cardinal Dolan then remembered Peter's confession to Christ after the Bread of Life discourse in which many of Jesus' disciples left Him. Jesus asked those who remained with Him if they wanted to leave also to which Peter confessed, "To whom shall we go. You have the words of life." God does not always explain what He is doing or explain things in a way we can understand. But, He is the Author of Life and to whom else shall we go? God is working for the good. Do you believe that? God is saying, "Come just as you are." Will you come?