

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE

(LESSON THIRTY)

THE SECURITY OF THE CHRISTIAN

(PART THREE)

In our last two Lessons, we have been exploring the doctrine of the Christian's security in Christ. It is our conviction that the Holy Scriptures clearly indicate that the position of a person who has been saved by the grace of God is very secure. The security of the saved person is bound up with the sovereignty of God, the unchangeableness of His purpose, and the constancy of His good pleasure. It is not based on the person's merit or deserving but wholly and solely on the finished work of Calvary. It is the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ and not the faithfulness of the saved individual that guarantees this security.

In **Lesson 29**, we started to examine **Romans 8:28-39**. We noted that there is perhaps no other passage in the Holy Scriptures that so forcefully speaks to the Christian's security being bound up with God's sovereignty, the unchangeableness of His purposes and the constancy of His good pleasure. In that Lesson we considered verse **28** in some detail. Paul informs us in that verse that all things work together for good to those who are the called, or the elect of God. The reason why all things work together for the good of God's elect is simply because of the fact that God is absolutely sovereign and therefore no purpose of His can be thwarted.

The calling referred to by Paul in verse **28**, is the working of the everlasting purpose of God in the elect. By this purpose, God decreed before the foundations of the world were laid, that He would deliver those whom He chose in Christ, from curse and damnation and bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation.

We may be sure that all things work for our good, not only because we love the God who works all things, but more importantly, because the God who works all things loves us and chose us, and carries us through the successive steps of our spiritual life.

Paul says emphatically that “*all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*” Prosperity and adversity; joy and sorrow; success and failure; victory and defeat; fullness and lack; life and death; all are included in this statement! Yes, brothers and sisters, even the sins of others and our own sins also, are included in Paul’s sweeping statement.

Verse **28** is certainly one of the most remarkable in the entire Bible. Paul gives us an absolute guarantee that for those who love God because they have been called to fulfill his designed purpose, every detail of their lives is continually woven together to fit into God’s perfect plan of bringing good into their lives! This verse, all by itself, should be enough to convince us that our position in Christ is very secure!

But what is Paul’s amazing guarantee based upon? How in the world can he be so confident that “*all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose?*” In the next two verses, verses **29-30**, Paul explains to us the basis of his guarantee and the reason for his great assurance, by using five words: **foreknow**, **predestinate**, **called**, **justified** and **glorified**.

ROMANS 8:29-30

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also **called**: and whom he called, them he also **justified**: and whom he justified, them he also **glorified**.

In these two verses the Apostle Paul highlights the sequence known as “**the golden chain of salvation**,” the order in which Almighty God saves His people. This golden chain indicates very clearly that salvation is from start to finish a work of the Lord. Let us reread the passage.

*“For whom **he** did foreknow, **he** also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom **he** did predestinate, them **he** also called: and whom **he** called, them **he** also justified: and whom **he** justified, them **he** also glorified.”*

It is God Himself who does the foreknowing, the predestinating, the calling, the justifying and the glorifying! Paul makes no mention here of God depending on human beings to do their part. He does not say that if human beings do not cooperate with God the process will be aborted. Paul knows that God will bring to completion every project that He begins and that He is never dependent on human beings to finish what He initiates.

It is not that God initiates our salvation and leaves us to complete it by our good works. Our good works are important for they serve as evidences of the genuineness of our salvation, but they cannot earn salvation or maintain it. God and God alone is the One who saves. He starts the work and finishes it without any help from us.

According to **Hebrews 12:2** Jesus Christ is the “*author and finisher of our faith*” or “*the champion who initiates and perfects our faith,*” as the **New Living Translation** renders the clause.

The first step in the salvation of a person is God’s **foreknowledge** of him or her. The word “*foreknow*” is the translation of the Greek word **proginosko (prog-in-ocē’-ko)**, which means “to know before.” The word as it is used by Paul here means more than previous knowledge. It means “foreordination.” This is exactly how the translators of the **King James Version** of the Bible have rendered the same Greek word in **1 Peter 1:20**, where Peter speaks of Christ as the Lamb “*who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.*” The word “*foreknow*” here refers to the act of God, when as the result of the exercise of His deliberative judgment, He designated the believer to the position of a saved person before this universe was created.

Let us be very clear. When Paul uses the word “*foreknow*” in this verse, he does not mean for us to understand that God looked down “the corridors of time” and knew that there would be some who would make a decision to serve Him after hearing the gospel and, in light of this knowledge, He elected them. Rather, when Paul says God foreknew us, he is speaking of God’s knowledge of us as persons. He is speaking of His decision to enter into a relationship with us and to set His love upon us. It is because He chose to love us that we believe the gospel and are saved. Only those whom God chooses to love in this special way can be saved, and all those whom He has chosen to love in this way will be saved. Dr. R.C. Sproul in his book “**Romans,**” made the following comment: “We could reasonably translate this text [**Romans 8:29**], ‘Those whom he foreloved [those whom he knew in a personal, intimate, redemptive sense from all eternity] he predestined.’”

This is exactly what Paul informs us of in **Ephesians 1:3-4**. He writes, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”*

The words *“He hath chosen”* are the translation of a Greek word which means “to pick out or choose.” The words are in a construction in the Greek which indicates that the subject of the verb, God in this case, acts in His own interest. In other words, when God picked or choose out certain ones, He was acting in His own interest.

Paul advises us that we were chosen *“in Him,”* referring of course to Jesus Christ. God’s selection of certain out of mankind was “in Christ.” That is to say that those chosen out were chosen with the provision and limitation that this choice of them would be followed by the inclusion of the person thus chosen within the sphere of the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This fact would in turn result in their being positioned in Him as the Last Adam who would confer upon them His righteousness and life as the first Adam by his fall brought sin and death upon the entire human race.

Paul tells us that God’s choice was made *“before the foundation of the world.”* Paul wants us to understand that our election is not a historical selection, but an eternal choice, a determination of the Divine Mind before all time. The idea of the Divine election is a note of grace, expressing the fact that salvation is originally and wholly of God. In Pauline teaching, the subjects of this Divine election are not an entity called “the Church” as such, but individual men and women, designated as “us.” He says, *“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.”*

What we have here is an eternal determination of the Divine Will, having its basis, not in anything foreseen in those chosen but only in the freedom of God. That is what Paul explains in **Ephesians 1:11**: *“In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him **who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.**”*

The **New Living Translation** renders that verse as follows: *“Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, **and he makes everything work out according to his plan.**”*

God’s choice of His elect has its foundation in eternity, and is neither an incidental thing nor an afterthought of God.

Paul says that we were chosen in eternity before the universe was created. And yet, there is a sense in which this choice was never made. God cannot be said, in the final analysis, to decide upon any course of action. Any choice that God makes is as eternal as God is. The name of every Christian is as eternal as God is, for God has had that individual in His heart for salvation as long as He has been in existence. What a wonderful salvation is ours! It is a salvation based upon an eternal choice made before time began. It is a choice which extends through time, into, and throughout the eternity after time ceases. And yet, in spite of this knowledge, some dear children of God are afraid that after God has saved them, they will be lost.

Brothers and sisters, God’s foreknowledge is an advanced determination by God to carry through a plan which He has eternally purposed in the counsels of His own will, and which is to be carried through without fail because the Lord brings to pass all that He has determined and decreed.

God's foreknowledge is not previous knowledge of something which I will one day choose to do. God's foreknowledge is God bringing to pass in me something which He has already planned for me.

When the radical corruption of human beings is understood and appreciated, it will readily be acknowledged that there was no good in human beings that could satisfy God, and therefore, the motivation for salvation had to begin with Him. This is the important point, and if it is admitted, then all the rest is admitted. Salvation begins with God. He must initiate the process of salvation by quickening those who are dead in sin. No man would have been saved without this quickening work of God. And God does not perform this quickening work in all men. In **John 5:21** we read, "*For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.*" The Son does not quicken every human being. He quickens "*whom he will.*" To realize this truth is to be continually amazed by the wonder of that grace which included you and I when we did not deserve to be included, and that when we were dead, made us alive.

The first link in the golden chain of salvation is God's foreknowledge of the believer. Our position is secure because God foreknew us.

Because of God's foreknowledge of His elect, "*all things work together for good to them.*"

The second step in the salvation of a person is God's **predestinating** them to be conformed to the image of His Son. The word "*predestinate*" is the translation of the Greek word **proorizo (pro-or-id'-zo)**, which means "to put limits or boundaries upon beforehand, to predetermine."

Those who were foreordained to be saved had special limitations put upon them provided within the scope of the salvation which they are to receive, namely, to be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to be placed as adult sons. Thus, predestination is the effective carrying out of God's will in the case of those who are foreordained to salvation. After God foreknew the elect, He put a label upon them which read, "to be conformed to the image of my Son." The elect were to be kept for just that purpose and no other. This conformation to the image of the Lord Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit in the process which is called sanctification, a process which begins the moment the sinner is saved, and which continues throughout eternity.

The word "*conformed*" is the translation of a Greek word which means "to bring to the same form with." It refers to the outward expression of an inward essence or nature. Thus, in the process of sanctification, the saint is transformed in his or her inner heart life to resemble the Lord Jesus. This inner change results in a change of outward expression that reflects the beauty of the Lord Jesus.

The image of the Lord Jesus in the saint is not an accidental image but a derived image, as the likeness of a child is derived from its parents. Through the new birth we become children of Jesus Christ and thus we inherit His image. This image, unclear and not well defined in the new convert, becomes progressively clearer and defined as he or she matures in the Christian life. This is what Paul tells us in **2 Corinthians 3:18**: "*But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*"

Brothers and sisters, when God, in eternity before the foundation of the world, decided that He was going to introduce the plan of salvation, He determined that all things would centre in the glory of Jesus Christ.

The depth of the love of God for Jesus Christ and for those whom He chose before the foundation of the world cannot be measured.

There was a great difference, however between Jesus Christ and those whom God chose in Him. Jesus Christ was altogether lovely and we are altogether filthy. It is a most astonishing idea, and yet it is the very heart of the plan of God. Looking over humanity, the Lord God determined that He was going to take some members of the human race and join them to Christ. The plan involved a transformation that was to make them as lovely as Christ is. This is how God is going to receive the greatest glory. He is going to receive the greatest glory possible on the day when the filthiest become the loveliest; when the vilest sinners become the Bride of Christ; when those who were most unlike Christ become like Christ. God predestinated all of those whom He foreknew to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Jesus Christ is so wonderful that God determined that He was going to populate the earth with a vast number of images of His Son, and we sinners are the raw material of that plan. The blueprint has already been drawn and the plans and specifications have been written out. God is at work on the images, and, even though the practical distance between us and Christ is vast, the spiritual distance has been bridged, and the plan, already completed in the mind of God, is coming to pass day by day as God brings His predestination to effectual calling, to justification and on the road to glorification. Thus in **1John 3:1-2** we read, *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”*

The second link in the golden chain of salvation is God's predestinating the believer to be conformed to the image of His Son. Our position is secure because God has predestinated us to conform to the image of Jesus Christ.

Because of God's predestinating His elect to be conformed to the image of His Son, *"all things work together for good to them."*

In our next Lesson, we will examine the three remaining links in the golden chain of salvation.