

Divide-The-Truth Sunday School Preview Notes
Romans 8:28-39
Sunday School Lesson for November 27, 2005

Introduction: As we have stated numerous times, Romans chapter 8 is the pinnacle of Paul's work. If this is true, then the verses in today's study are very peak of that pinnacle. Because of the significance of this chapter, I would like to encourage you to memorize it. You may think Romans chapter 8 is impossible to memorize, but I have not found this to be the case. Many years ago a pastor of mine stated that he read John chapter 19 every day. Over the course of years it allowed him to have the passage memorized. So I did what my pastor did. I read it every day, and within eight months I had the entire chapter memorized. Let me encourage you to do the same with Romans chapter 8. Read it each day, and before long it will be a part of your memory, but it will also be a part of your walk with God.

28 Verse 28 is without a doubt the most glorious promise in all of Scripture. Few statements in the Bible are more familiar or offer more comfort than this verse. It is a verse that we remember when we are in distress. It is a verse that is often quoted when things in our lives are not going well. However, it is also one of the most misunderstood and misquoted verses in the Bible. Like all of Scripture, we must read this verse in its context. The context of this chapter revolves around the sovereign providence of God and the purpose of God in redeeming lost mankind.

What could be of greater assurance than to know that "all things work together for good." When Paul states "all things", he means all things. There are no qualifications or limits to "all things." The word "good" refers to things that are good and useful. Every situation, good or bad, every pain and hardship, every suffering and persecution is for our usefulness. In other words, God uses all kinds of things so that they may be good and useful in our lives. However, there are limits or boundaries to which this promise is available.

➤ What are the limits or boundaries?

First, it is "to them that love God." Obviously this refers to believers. Nothing more characterizes a true believer than his love for God. Redeemed people love God. The New Testament is very clear that those who belong to God love God (I Corinthians 2:9, 8:3). Obviously, we do not love Jesus Christ as we ought because we are still imperfect and we are still contaminated by sin. This is why Paul prays in Philippians that our love may abound still more and more in real knowledge (Philippians 1:9). Our love for Christ is genuine though not perfected.

"Them that love God" only occurs here in this epistle. As I have already stated, it refers to believers in general. However, only believers who are living in God's love can truly accept that all things work together for good. I make this statement because believers often question this statement of Paul when things in life are not going well. To question God's love, we must ultimately question our love. If we love God with the same sacrificial love Jesus had on the cross, then nothing can question His love for us.

Second, it is "to them who are called." The term "called" is a term that refers to believers. The term signifies the action of God. It is a call from God, not of man. We might understand that "to them that love God" is the human side of the equation, and "to them who are called" is the divine side of the equation.

Lastly we say that God has a purpose for us. Paul will go on in the next verses to discuss that purpose, but for now we simply need to understand that the purpose of God is for all of mankind to be saved. His purpose is to offer salvation to all. This provision is made possible because salvation has been offered to all through Jesus. Too many people, including believers, seem to have no purpose. First and foremost, our purpose is to come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Second, our purpose is to glorify His name by obedient service to him.

When Paul states that all things work together for good, he does not mean they occur by chance or fate but by divine control. Thus, we see that not only does the Holy Spirit help us, but the divine providence works in our favor also. There is nothing in life that is beyond the power of God or incapable of being used by Him to promote our good.

29-30 In verses 29-30 we see five verbs that describe our salvation from the divine side of the equation: foreknow, predestinate, called, justified, and glorified. If all we ever see is the human side of the equation, our response to God, we can be saved for sure, but we are robbed of the joy, peace, comfort, and assurance that comes through a deeper understanding of God's eternal plan our souls. That is Paul's whole point in this chapter.

All of the verbs in this text are connected with the phrase "he also", which is a conjunction that joins each of these verbs together so that they are incomplete without the others.

First, we see God's foreknowledge: "for whom He did foreknow." The word "foreknow" is the Greek word "proginosko." It means to know someone beforehand. It does not speak of events...but people, "for whom" not "what." The word does not mean mere knowledge of people but rather to know them intimately.

Kenneth Wuest translates it "foreordination" and says, "it means more than a previous knowledge...it speaks of the sovereign act of God foreordaining certain individuals from among mankind to be saved."

The classic argument against this is that "foreknowledge" merely means that God looked down through time and saw who would believe and thus "chose" them on the basis of their belief. Those who hold to this view say that "foreknow" is the first verb in the list and that predestined, called, justified, and glorified are all due to the fact that God merely "knew" who would be saved.

This is simply not true! The first verb is not "foreknow" but rather "purpose." Our salvation is not due to the fact that God saw that we would choose Him, but rather our salvation has come because of His sovereign "purpose" as God for our lives!

This is the doctrine of divine initiation! It means that God is the initiator of salvation, and we are the responders. We are born "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph.2:1), and if God did not first "quicken" (Eph.2:1) through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, we would never choose Him!

It is God's eternal purpose to save us that brought about our conversion...not something He "foresaw" that we possessed.

The second verb is predestinate: "He also did predestinate" Keep in mind again that each of these verbs is connected by "he also." In other words, every person whom God foreknew...he did also "predestinate." The Greek word is "proorizo." It comes from the word horizo from which we get our word "horizon" and the word "pro" which means before. It literally means to mark out the boundaries beforehand! It means to predetermine or to appoint someone to salvation!

So before the world began, God marked out the boundaries. He set the "horizon" for all of His children who would believe in Him.

➤ And what is that boundary?

"To be conformed to the image of His Son." To be conformed to His image means to be fashioned and formed into the likeness of His Son Jesus. At conversion God begins the lifelong process of making us look like and act like His beloved Son.

Before the world began, God's purpose for your life was that you be just like Jesus! You were "foreordained" and "predestined" to take on the character and qualities of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Here's the point. Every single person whom God knew before the world began and every single person that God predestined for salvation will be conformed into the likeness of Jesus! If a person is not being conformed into the likeness of Jesus, he does not know Him! As we will discuss later, it is impossible to be justified without also being sanctified!

Point: There is no such thing as being saved without becoming like Jesus!

➤ Why did God "predestine" us?

“That He [Jesus] might be the firstborn among many brethren.” The word “firstborn” speaks of position...prominence...and preeminence! When all the sons of God are gathered to God, Jesus will outshine them all! He is the first, the highest, the best! None of the other sons would be sons were it not for the firstborn Son!

Jesus is the first of all the elect! He is the eldest Son! Our salvation makes His glory shine radiantly!

The third verb is called: “Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called.” Keep in mind again the use of the words “them he also.” These words connect our call to God’s predestined will, foreknowledge, and purpose! In other words, every person whom God had a purpose for...every person God knew intimately before the world began...every person whom God predestined to be conformed into the likeness of Jesus...every one of them He called. The word “called” means to bid one, “come unto me.” It means to call by name. It carries the idea of calling one out from the rest! This is where the sovereign eternal plan of God collides with the human response of man! Before the world began God had a purpose for our lives, He knew us, and He sovereignly chose us to be conformed into the likeness of Jesus, but in time, in human history, He called us by name to come and follow Jesus. This is the point at which we repented of our sin, placed our faith in Jesus’ death on the cross, and “decided to follow Jesus.”

This text teaches that every person that God had a purpose for, every person whom God knew before the world began, every person whom God predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus, will receive an effectual call to be saved. That is, a call that brings about salvation! This is a call that will accomplish the salvation plan of God!

Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them to me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.” (John 10:27-30)

We may be enjoying the “pleasures of sin”, minding our own business, doing our own thing, and then the “call” of the Master comes, “come unto me...deny yourself...follow me” (Luke 9:23). We find ourselves burdened over our sin, sorry for our transgressions, deeply desiring the forgiveness of God, and in repentance and faith we turn to Christ in childlike trust!

When we first hear that call, we don’t realize that God had that call planned before the world began. All we know is that we are a sinner, that Jesus is the Savior, and that He is calling us to Himself. But what a wonderful discovery it is to realize that this call is older than time!

It should also be stated that there is no salvation apart from our human response to God’s call! Everyone whom God calls must respond or there is no salvation! Spurgeon said, “A man is a fool to think that some decree in eternity past will affect his soul if he does not repent and believe the gospel.” When God calls, we have the human responsibility to move in repentance and faith, which themselves are gifts from God Rom.2:4, Eph.2:8-9.

The next verb is justified: “them also he justified.” Every person God has a purpose for, every person God foreknew, every person God predestined, and every person God called will “also be justified.” There is no break in the verbs! One leads to the other! The word “justified” means to be declared innocent and just on the basis of Christ’s work on the cross. It is to be legally acquitted of all the charges of sin (Rom.8:1). At conversion, God takes away the penalty and the guilt of our sin and bestows upon us the very righteousness of God!

Though God has a purpose for us from eternity past, and though He knows us intimately, and though he has predestined us to be conformed into the image of Christ, we are saved in time! We are saved when we repent of sin and surrender to Jesus as Lord! Justification does not take place in eternity past, but in the present. This is why Jesus said that a man must be “born again” (John 3:3,5,7) This is why the Bible says, “Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19) No man can claim to know the Lord without a born-again experience! Proof of that born-again experience will be the fruit of being conformed into the image of Jesus!

The last verb is glorified: "...and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Everyone whom God has a purpose for, everyone whom God foreknew, everyone whom God predestined to be conformed into the image of Jesus, and everyone whom He justified will be glorified! It is guaranteed!

"Glorified" means to be brought into the full splendor of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is our final and eternal state of perfection in heaven...in glory with the Lord. To be glorified is to be fully and finally conformed into the image of Christ with nothing lacking! We do not become "little Jesuses" or "gods" as cults teach, but we do become like the Lord.

"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." (1 John 3:2-3)

Notice that "glorified" is in the past tense just like "foreknew, predestinated, called, and justified." How can this be when our glorification has not happened yet? How can God speak of it as past tense!

Keep in mind this is "Salvation from God's perspective", and from God's perspective, which is not bound to time, we are completely saved. Even our glorification is a finished event! Just because we have not yet experienced it, it is nonetheless real and destined to come!

Our glorification is the next great event on God's predestined calendar of events! It is as much a part of His predetermined will for our lives as our justification! Nothing can stop our glorification! Being chosen by God for salvation makes us "...confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil.1:6)

31 Paul's question, "What shall we then say to these things?" is better understood as, "What is the practical value of salvation? He answers the question immediately. "If" is a statement that in no way implies a doubt. Paul is making clear that in regards to salvation and eternal security, no one can challenge God.

- How did God prove that He was for us?

32 God proved that He was for us in that, "He spared not His own son, but delivered Him up for us all." What greater proof of God's love could there be than the provision of His Son? God held nothing back to prove his love for us. Jesus' death on the cross is not only the foundation of our salvation, but it is the foundation of our security in God. Jesus' death is absolute proof that God is ready to "freely give us all things" needed for our salvation and security. If God gave us the greatest, His Son, can He not be trusted with the rest "all things"?

Point: The greatest piece of evidence that God is for us is Calvary!

- Turn to Psalm 118 and read.

33 Beginning here and continuing into the next two verses, Paul uses the image of a courtroom. His first question, "Who shall lay may thing to the charge of God's elect?" is better understood "Who can make an accusation against God's elect?" The world and our adversary the devil (Revelation 12:10) are continually bringing charges against us, but they amount to nothing because "it is God that justifieth."

- What is the most common thing that the world calls into question about our relationship with God?

It is not the way we live, or should I say not live our lives for the Lord? Since God it the one who declares us "not guilty" (justifieth), no one can overturn the verdict or reopen the case against us. If the one before whom we are guilty has pronounced us not guilty, what is there to fear from any accusation?

34 The second question, “Who is he that condemneth?” is answered by “It is Christ...” Only Jesus can condemn us. However, if Jesus did condemn His children that would renounce the efficacy of His own work on the cross on our behalf. For Jesus to take away our salvation would be to undo Calvary! Jesus tells us, “I have come that they might have life more abundantly.” He also told us, “I am the way, the truth, and the life...” When Jesus offers us life, it is not a temporary work. It is a completed eternal work. He could not offer and promise eternal life and then take it away, for that would demonstrate His life was not everlasting!

Paul moves on in the verse to further proof that our salvation is eternally secure.

First, “It is Christ that died.” Our condemnation because of sin became Jesus’ condemnation on the cross.

Second, Jesus is “risen again.” The resurrection is positive proof that Jesus was who He said He was, the Son of God, and positive proof that He did what he said He could do, die on our behalf thus paying our sin debt. Without the resurrection, we are men most miserable (I Corinthians 15:12-19).

Third, Jesus “is even at the right hand of God.” Philippians 2:8-9 tells us of Jesus humbling Himself by becoming human in the flesh and accepting the death of a criminal. However, it also tells us that God highly exalted Him. Jesus’ position is at the right hand of God. This is the divinely rightful place for Him. It speaks of power.

Fourth, Jesus “also maketh intercession for us.” Positionally Jesus is at the right hand of God. He is practically there to make intercession for us. The word “intercession” means confer with or entreat.

➤ Turn to I John 2:1.

Here Jesus is called an “Advocate.” It is the same word used by Jesus in John 14 to describe the Holy Spirit. It refers to an intercessor or counselor.

➤ Who is Jesus conferring with about us?

God the Father! You might say that Jesus has God the Father’s ear.

Go back and read Romans 8:26-27. What does the Holy Spirit do for us?

He “makes intercession” for us.

In our judicial system, we often refer to our attorney as our counselor. He is the one who stands on our behalf and defends us against charges brought our way.

Point: Jesus is our counselor in heaven, and the Holy Spirit is our counselor on earth.

35 Paul has made it clear that no person can take away our salvation. Now with his third question, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”, he makes it clear that no circumstance is able to rob us of our eternal salvation. The word “separate” means to create a space. He then lists seven enemies that have been the common foes of all believers of all times:

“tribulation” – means strong pressure

“distress” – means compression and speaks of the inner constriction felt by those who come under extreme tribulation

“persecution” – refers to afflictions suffered for the cause of Christ. It would have been something foreign to believers in Rome.

“famine” – often the results of persecution

“nakedness” – may or may not refer to actual physical nakedness but most certainly refers to destitution

“peril” – the exposure to danger

“sword” – signifies death at the hands of another instead of natural causes

36 Paul then quotes from the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) Psalm 44:22 to reveal that the sufferings of saints are not a new thing.

- Turn to II Timothy 3:12 and discuss.
- Turn to Matthew 10:37-39 and discuss.

The cost of following Christ has always been very high. Jesus warned us about the high costs, and history has proven His words to be true. However, our sufferings and persecution of this world take on new meaning when we remember we are persecuted continually (“all the day long”) for a divine purpose (“for thy sake.”)

Paul did not write these words from a vacuum. No, they were words understood by the believers in Rome and personally by Paul. In fact, every one of the circumstances listed in v.35 Paul experienced by the time of his writing this epistle (II Corinthians 11:23-27) with the exception on the “sword.” That persecution would be reserved for his death at the hand of Nero.

Point: Nothing can come between and make space (“separate”) between us and God!

37 Paul tells us that we are “more than conquerors through him that loved us.” It is our natural instinct to avoid if not run from oppression and persecution. No one likes to face things that are emotionally, physically, or spiritually distasteful. It is our knee jerk reaction to avoid things we do not like. But Paul does not talk about God abiding with those who wish to escape at all cost; rather, he is concerned with those who triumph. Rather than being defeated or at the very least discouraged “all these things” work to our advantage and there is complete victory “through Him that loved us.” The term “more than conquerors” is found only here in the NT. There really is not an English equivalent. We might understand it that we are supremely victorious in overcoming all obstacles in our way. We are triumphant in victory.

No matter what comes our way, there is no possible defeat, but that is only “through Him that loved us.” That’s the secret of success. We are not more than conquerors through our own strength or abilities. Notice that Paul wrote “through Him that loved us” not “through Him that loves us.” He wrote in the past tense when referring to our absolute security in Christ.

- What was he referring to?

There is no doubt that he is referring to the cross. The cross of Calvary not only provides victory for the sinner over sin, but it also provides victory for the saint no matter what he or she may be exposed to.

Point: The cross of Jesus is our historical assurance of security.

38 These words were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God but they were well practiced in the life of Paul. Apart from Jesus, there was no person who ever lived in a better position to speak these words. Paul was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and dragged outside the city for dead. Therefore he said, “I am completely convinced...”

Beginning here and continuing to v.39 Paul lists ten things that he was convinced could not separate us from the love of God. They are listed in four pairs and two singles, and they are listed in contrast to one another. Paul’s first supposed threat is “death nor life.” – Death is the supreme enemy that all of us will one day face. However, for the born again believer, it has completely been defeated. It cannot separate us from God. In

fact, the release of life on earth ushers us into the presence of God Almighty (Psalm 116:15). Also see II Corinthians 5:8 and Philippians 1:21.

“nor life” – It seems strange that Paul would list life. We think of life as positive but the reality is life creates more hindrances in our relationship with God than death. Living our lives is oftentimes like walking in a minefield. We know the dangers are there but cannot see them until it is too late. The temptations and trials we all face are a formidable foe. They often cause us to give up. Life is tough. Living for Jesus is tougher. However, if death has no power, then life has no power either!

Point: Nothing endured in life or death can separate born again believers from God.

Paul’s next supposed threat is “angels nor principalities.” There is no doubt that Paul is referring to powers above and powers below. The word “principalities” is used in Ephesians 6:12 to refer to powers of darkness. The question is what Paul was referring to when he wrote “angels.” Since we are dealing with contrasts, it seems that Paul is referring to “good angels” because “principalities” most certainly refers to fallen angels (demonic forces.)

Paul’s next supposed threat is “powers.” This may refer to demonic powers like “principalities” or it may refer to a person in power and authority. Either way, the “powers” are powerless to separate us from God.

Next on Paul’s list are “things present, nor things to come.” Neither the present with all its trials and temptations nor the future, which is completely unknown, has power over us. Time is equally powerless to separate us from God.

39 Next Paul tells us that space cannot separate us from God when he writes “nor height, nor depth.” The Greek word for “height” refers to the highest point possible, and the word “depth” refers to the lowest point possible. Both words together describe an unlimited amount of space or vastness of the universe. Paul’s point is that there is nothing as high as the heaven or as low as the depths of the earth that can come between us and God.

And just to make sure that someone would say, “What about...” Paul adds, “Nor any other created creature.” Since God created everything, that covers everything.

You name it! You suggest it! You conjure it up in your mind! You conceive it in your heart! There is nothing! Absolutely nothing can come between God and His children! Nothing!!! But only if he is your “Lord.” It is the reigning and ruling lordship of Jesus Christ that is fundamental to our salvation, but it is the personal aspect of His Lordship, making Him “our” Lord, that brings salvation from theological discussion to the practical transforming possibility in our lives.

Is Jesus your Lord?

To God be the Glory!

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