Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Ultimate Security
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 80-90

I'm very thrilled about the opportunity that I have this morning to teach you the Word of God because the passage to which we look is a familiar one and yet not a familiarly understood one. It is another one of those great mountain peak passages in Paul's epistle to the Romans. I want you to open your Bible to Romans chapter 8 and I want you to consider with me verses 28, 29 and 30. Let me read this great text to you. Romans 8:28, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the firstborn among many brethren and whom He predestined these He also called and whom He called these He also justified and whom He justified these He also glorified."

In Jeremiah chapter 21 and verse 3 God said to His people, "I have loved you with an everlasting love...I have loved you with an everlasting love." And that is still how God loves His redeemed people. He loves us with an everlasting love.

That is precisely what the Apostle Paul is saying in these three great verses. He is saying that God has set in motion a purpose that will be fulfilled by our glorification. In other words, He has set upon us a love that is everlasting. We're going to see that unfold. But that should be at the very heart of our Christian faith and understanding. How sad, how tragic it is, however, that today there are many people who believe that God loves you with a temporary love. That He has set His love upon His church and it may last and on the other hand it may not last. It is possible, some would say, that you can step out of the love of God and lose the salvation He gave and the love He showed you in Christ.

That, however, is not what Paul is saying here...nor is it what God said through Jeremiah when He said, "I loved you with an everlasting love." One hymn writer had it absolutely correct when he wrote these words, "How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord is laid for your faith in His excellent Word. What more can He say than to you He hath said, you who unto Jesus for refuge had fled? Fear not, I am with you. O be not dismayed for I am thy God and will still give thee aid, I'll strengthen thee, help thee and cause thee to stand, upheld by My righteous omnipotent hand. When through the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of grief shall not be overflow. For I will be with thee, thy troubled ablest, and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress. When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply. The flames shall not hurt thee, I only design thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine. The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose, I will not, I cannot desert to its foes. That soul all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

Never...no never, what a promise. Certainly Paul had that in mind, that great truth when he said, "He that has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." God has entered into a permanent relationship with those upon whom He has set His saving love.

Now frankly we're not used to that because we live in a world where everybody breaks promises. People break promises every day, vows and covenants and commitments seem to mean very little. I think about how many couples walk an aisle and before God and a multitude of human witnesses swear to love each other until death parts them. Swear to be faithful and devoted and loyal and singleminded and to support each other and be true to each other in good times and bad times. And then they proceed to go out and have absolutely no qualms about violating all those promises. But God is not like we are. And we don't want to project our infidelities on to the character of God. God has set His love on us in an everlasting covenant, never, no never to be broken. That love is strong and that love is secure. After all, don't you understand that if God gave us His Son to save us, would He not do less to keep us? Having given us the most to redeem us when we were filthy vile sinners, would He not give us less to keep us now that we are His sanctified children?

Robert Haldain, that great commentator of another generation, wrote about this truth, "As the Father delivered Him up, the great end of His suffering was satisfaction of the justice of God and as He bore the whole curse of the broken law, His people are never on that account to bear any portion of vindictive wrath. He delivered Him up to sorrows unparalleled and even to death itself, to death not merely involving the dissolution of the soul and body but the weight of the sins of men and the wrath of God against that sin. God thus delivered up His Son that He might rescue us from that misery which He might have justly inflicted upon us and might take us who were children of wrath into His heavenly presence and there rejoice over us forever as the trophies of His redeeming love."

You must understand what he says. The reason God saved you was that He might make you a trophy of His redeeming love and His saving purpose would never be accomplished if He lost you before He got you to eternity. If you understand the atonement and if you understand the purpose for which God redeemed you, then you must believe in the security of a believer. If you understand the love that saved you when you were a wretched, God-hating, Christ-rejecting sinner, then you can understand the love that holds you and keeps you saved now that you're His beloved son or daughter.

Now this passage is one of the great peaks of majestic redemptive truth that jets above the rest in the book of Romans. Most often, however, verse 28 is relegated to a somewhat simplistic understanding. When something doesn't work out in life we say, "Well all things work together for good," in other words, some good in life is going to come out of this and we view it in a temporal way. That is not its intention. Paul has given us in these three verses one of the most profound and powerful truths regarding our salvation that exists in the mind of God and the revelation of Scripture. And you must

understand it. In fact, it is so grand and it is so glorious that it runs from verse 28 down through verse 39. In verses 39...31 to 39 you have the doxology of security. And in verses 28 to 30 you have the theology of security. And so before we come to the doxology, the song of praise about our security, we want to study the theology of our security, the truth itself. And for that we look at verses 28 through 30. All through Romans we're learning about salvation and here is the culminating glorious end of it all. And I want you to grasp it. Let's look at that marvelous and familiar phrase, "God causes all things to work together for good." God causes all things to work together for good.

Now would you notice that this is not true for everyone. This is only true for one category of people...those who love God...those who are called according to His purpose. Now from God's standpoint this is true of those He calls unto salvation. Every time you see the idea of a call in the epistles of the New Testament, it is the call to salvation. It is not just a general gospel call that might be given to many people, it is an efficacious call that results in redemption. It is God calling someone to Himself in salvation. From God's standpoint we're the called, from our standpoint we love God. So he is saying this is true of those who love God, who are the called according to His purpose. Those are the two sides of salvation. Christians are those whom God has called to Himself. As Jesus said, "No man comes unto Me except the Father draw him." So those of us who have come have been called by God but we in response love God because He first loved us. So you can identify a Christian from the divine side as the called or from our side as those who love God.

But it is only to us that this applies. And it is not speculation, verse 28, "And we know this to be true." It is an absolute fact that those who love God, and that, by the way, that's simply an identifying mark of a Christian. We could be called sons of God, children of God, saints, Christians, true worshipers, the true circumcision. We could be called those things the Bible calls us or we can be called "Those who love God." Non-Christians, according to 1 Corinthians 16:22, are those who do not love the Lord Jesus Christ and they're damned. First Corinthians 2:9 again said God's prepared wonderful things for those who love Him. Christians love God. It's amazing but some today are saying that Christians don't necessarily have to love God, that's not what Scripture says. We are the ones who love God because He first loved us and called us to Himself. Now for us this is true that He causes all things to work together for good. That is an incredible statement. And that, beloved, is the basic theological principle on which the doctrine of eternal security is built. No one can consider the issue of eternal security without understanding this verse is at the very heart of it. Some critics are going to come along in Paul's thoughts here and he's saying your salvation is forever, your salvation cannot pass away even if you have remaining sin in your flesh which you do, and even though you're going to fall to the flesh and there's a certain wretchedness in your Christian life because your redeemed and inner man is incarcerated in unredeemed humanness and you're losing the battle and you fall into sin, even so you will never lose your salvation...never. In Romans 8:1 he introduced it, "There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." You can't lose your salvation. And here he tells you why because no matter what happens God works it to good. It never ultimately ends in evil. That's his whole point. This is an incredible statement.

Would you please notice "all things." You might even want to circle that. "All things," not some things, not most things, not a few things, all things, all events, all issues, all experiences, everything in your life works together to produce good because God is making that happen. No limit. Whatever the nature of those events or things, whatever the extent, the number, the severity, the intensity, it doesn't matter what it is, good things, bad things, or indifferent things, all are working together for good because that's what God is doing with them.

Would you notice that verb "work together." God causes all things to work together is the verb in the Greek sunergeo, we get synergism from it which means to work things together. It's literally what it means. God weaves everything together to produce good, to produce ultimate good. We shouldn't be surprised by this. This is simply God in His providential power producing that which is under His control. He is the sovereign. He is the God who set the plan down. And He is the God who will bring the plan to pass.

But I want to add a footnote. It is not automatic. It isn't just that God the Father decreed it so it is. No, there's more to it. God is actively involved in making sure that everything works together for good. Let me show you one very important way He does it. Go back to verse 26. He says, "The Holy Spirit helps our weakness." How does He do that? Well we don't know how to pray as we should. We're ignorant, we don't know how to pray the way we ought to pray. We're fleshly and biased and self-centered and because our prayers are so inadequate and because they are, they might not get answered so the Holy Spirit Himself intercedes for us...with groanings too deep for words. This isn't talking about some human gibberish, this can't be uttered. Literally in the Greek it says groanings which can't be uttered. And this is communication between the Holy Spirit and the Father in a language that is not expressed by human voice...God the Holy Spirit interceding for us in deep communion with the Father. And, verse 27, "He who searches the hearts," that's God, "He knows the mind of the Spirit because God the Father knows God the Spirit's mind perfectly and because the Spirit is interceding for the saints according to God's will."

Now look at this. God has a will and God has a purpose. And that is that you be saved unto glory. And in order to make sure that will and purpose comes to pass, the Holy Spirit who knows us and lives within us continually in unutterable divine communication intercedes to God the Father on our behalf to bring about His perfect will.

Let me add another dimension. If we had time we could go into the book of Hebrews and there we would find that Christ is a faithful High Priest who ever lives to make intercession for us as well. And even though the accuser of the brethren may be in heaven night and day accusing us and we may be in sin and difficulty in life, the Son comes before the Father and continually intercedes on our behalf. So you have the Son in heaven interceding on our behalf to the Father. You have the Spirit in us interceding on our behalf to the Father. You have the Father desiring that His plan be fulfilled so the

Father works to fulfill His plan. The Son intercedes that the plan might be fulfilled and nobody will be lost. And the Spirit does the same from within us and the result is everything is synergizing to work together for good. And it's all being operated by the trinity. A tremendous truth.

And what it means, beloved, grasp it, is that if every single thing that comes into your life and my life ultimately produces good, then it means conversely that no matter what comes into my life it cannot ultimately end in my losing my salvation because that's not good. You understand that? How simple is that? How profound is that? This verse is not talking about the fact that the little things in your life usually work out okay. That might be true, that is not what this verse is talking about. What it's talking about is that the issues of life which might threaten your eternal salvation are overruled by God and they will ultimately produce your eternal good. That's what he's talking about.

Now let's just look at it a little closer because it's such a great truth. We would agree, wouldn't we, that when he says "all things," God causes all things to work together for good, we would agree that the all things could include good things, right? Nobody has a problem with that. I mean, we could talk about God's nature is a good thing and it works. His great power, His great resources, His great wisdom instructs and guides and overrules our ignorance. And His tremendous resource supplies all our needs and conquers all our enemies and His power can hold us through anything. And His goodness showers blessing upon blessing upon blessing. And His grace gives no regard for whether we deserve it. We could talk about God's promises when guilt comes into our life. God is merciful and gracious and keeps mercy for thousands. And when disobedience comes into our life He says I will heal their backslidings and who is a pardoning God like Thee. And when trouble comes He says I'll be with him in trouble, I'll be his strength in the time of trouble. And when deprivation comes he says, "My God shall supply all your needs." And the psalmist says, "I have never seen the Lord's people forsaken or the righteous begging bread." And so we look at all the good things in God's character and His nature. And they work together for our good...His promises and His person. And then His Word builds us up and enables us to take an inheritance. And His angels are sent as ministering spirits to minister on our behalf. And even His church, His redeemed people stimulate us to love and good works. Those are all good things. Prayer is a good thing and the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man produces much and righteousness is a good thing. And when we're filled with the fruits of righteousness, we are blessed, blessing upon blessing.

Now we all agree with that. There are good things that bring about our good. But the real issue here that's in the mind of Paul is bad things. Everybody knows good things produce good. But not everybody understands that even bad things produce good. That's what he's talking about. When he says God causes all things to work together for good, the surprise is all things. He could have said good things and everybody would have said..."Ho-hum." But he said all things. Now let's look at the bad things that work for our good.

You can take all the bad things in your life and put them in three categories...okay? This will help you so you know what categories you're complaining about. Okay? You can take all the bad things in life and you can stuff them into three groups. Group one is suffering, this is just plain ole being physical in a physical world, being fallen in a fallen world. You're going to have suffering. In this world you'll have it. It's just here, it just goes with the territory. But suffering God works together for good. It's amazing.

In fact, Ruth 1:21 says the Almighty has afflicted me. Amazing. In Exodus 4 God said, "Have I not made the blind and the lame and halt?" Job said, "The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Jeremiah 24:5, Jeremiah says, "Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive and of Judah whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good." Amazing.

The Babylonian captivity was for their good. The terrible holocaust in the life of Job God brought for his good. The affliction that came in the book of Ruth for his good. The good of God's special individuals that he was working on. First Peter 5 says, "After you have suffered a while the Lord will make you perfect." James 1 says, "When you fall into sufferings and difficulties, count it all joy, this has a good purpose." Suffering is the way you learn kindness. Suffering is the way you learn compassion. Suffering is the way you learn endurance and patience. Suffering is how you learn gentleness. Suffering is how you learn mercy, how you find the power of grace, learn to trust the Lord, believe in Him, cast your care on Him. God will take your suffering and produce good. Joseph, his brothers threw him into a pit, sold him as a slave. He was thrown into prison and it all worked together for his good and the good of his people. Manasseh was chained, it was for his good because he says when he was in infliction he besought the Lord, humbled himself greatly and the Lord responded to him.

Job lost absolutely everything he possessed, catastrophe upon catastrophe and through it all it was good because God blessed him with the knowledge of himself and rewarded him greatly. Paul was burdened with a terrible thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan and he saw yet in it that in his humiliation and difficulty and in his suffering he was being made powerful by the grace of God. And so he said I embrace my suffering, I welcome it. No, there's no question about it. Suffering can produce good. And life is going to have suffering. Sometimes we get it because of some sin in our lives, but sometimes it just comes with the territory. And God uses suffering to do a number of things that are good. One, to teach us to hate sin. You see, all suffering is related to sin. It wasn't here before the Fall and it won't be after the curse is removed. Suffering is a part of the sinful fallenness of the world. And you look at suffering and you hate sin.

Luther said that he never understood the Psalms until he suffered. David Watson said, "A sick bed will teach you more than a sermon will teach you. And one of the things that it will teach you is to hate sin and its effects." That's a good thing.

Suffering, secondly, will teach you to see the evil that is in you. You think you're doing fine then something goes wrong and you see the ugly flesh rise up, don't you? Your heart boils up with impatience, doubt, bitterness and it manifests itself when things aren't going well. You suffer a little bit and we find out what you're really like.

Another good thing...and that's good because you need to know that you're not as good as you thought you were for a few days when things were going fine. There's a little more sanctifying to be done with you.

And another thing that suffering does is it drives you to God. In prosperity the heart is easily divided. Suffering drives out the world. Let somebody get terminal cancer and go to the hospital and ask them how much they care about whether they redecorate the house. It just changes your whole perspective. It drives a soul to God.

Not only that, suffering conforms us to Christ because we're not going to be conformed to His image in glory unless we can be conformed to His image in suffering. Paul said I want to know the fellowship of His sufferings, I bear in my body the marks of Christ. I want to bear the reproach of Christ. I want to suffer with Him and reign with Him as well.

And then suffering drives out sin. It's the fire that burns the dross, like Job said, "When He tried me I'll come out like gold." Suffering confirms our sonship because every son that the Lord loves He chastens. And sometimes He brings suffering in our life to chasten us and we ought to be reminded that that's His love being shed on us even as it is when we discipline our children to make them more what we want them to be.

And then suffering has another good purpose, it brings joy because it corrects us and we're better for it. Happy is the man whom God corrects, Job 5:17 says.

Furthermore, suffering makes way for greater glory. The suffering in this world, Paul said, isn't even worthy to be compared to the glory that will be ours. We may suffer a little now, 2 Corinthians 4, but we have a far greater weight of glory in the future. You see, suffering God overrules for good. And there are many good purposes that come out of suffering.

Let's look at a second category, you can put some more of your trouble into this one, we'll call it struggling...struggling. What do I mean by that? Well, battling with temptation. Now we're getting away from just the general suffering that God brings or that physical life allows and there's a struggle in life as you battle temptation. Like Paul says, "O wretched man that I am," remember chapter 7, "I am weary of this, I am sick of this. I hate doing what I don't want to do and not doing what I want to do, I can't stand this battle." And yet out of it was coming good in his life as in all of our lives as

Christians.

You say, "Well why? Why does a struggle with temptation yield good?" Well let me give you several reasons. First of all, it sends you to knees in prayer, right? Where does Paul go at the end of Romans 7? He cries out, "Who will deliver me from the body of this death, O God will you deliver me from this?" is what he's saying. Tempted to despair the believer is always driven to God.

Let me tell you something else the battle does, struggling with temptation. It devastates your spiritual pride...devastates your spiritual pride. You're rolling along thinking how spiritual you are, you're teaching the Word and you're discipling somebody and it's all going pretty good and you've been treating the people in your house very well, and all of a sudden you are hit with a temptation and you are devastated with that temptation. And you don't just ride across it, you are in a mortal battle to overcome that temptation and you wind up saying to yourself, "Man, that's a temptation I had before I was even a Christian. Why is that thing still so powerful?" And it just shoots down your spiritual pride in mid-flight, doesn't it? Sure it does. That's good because you don't want to think more highly of yourself then you ought to think or you will really be in trouble because the one who thinks he stands is on the edge of a fall.

Another thing that struggling with temptation does that's good, it teaches you to help others because they're going to be in the same struggle and like Peter was battling sin and Satan was trying to sift him and Jesus said to him, "Look, Peter, when you have been tested and the thing is over and the struggle has ended, you'll be able to strengthen the brethren because you'll have been there and you'll know how to help them in their struggle."

Furthermore, struggling with temptation causes you to lean on Christ. It causes you to seek His strength, to run to Him for the resource that you desperately need in the midst of the struggle because you can't find it within yourself to do that. And so even as the writer of Hebrews says, "When you are tempted, you're not tempted in any way unlike the way He was tempted, and if you run to Him you'll find Him able to help in your time of need."

And then one other thought, one good thing about struggling over temptation is it increases your desire for heaven. Doesn't it? Don't you get to the point where you just say, "Lord, get me out of here...just get me out, I have had it with this battle, I don't want it anymore...take me to glory," and you like Paul will say, "Far better to depart and be with Christ." So, even temptation works for your good...the struggle sends you to your knees in prayer, breaks your spiritual pride, teaches you so you can help others, causes you to lean on Christ, makes you desire heaven. All that is good. And God is producing all that good out of it.

Now that leaves us with only a third category and this one might blow your fuses but it's true. The third category, suffering, struggling, sin...your trouble goes into one of those three categories. And

the third...you say, "You don't mean to tell me, you don't mean to tell me that my sin God is causing to work together for good?" Yes I mean to tell you that because that's exactly what it says, that's the whole point here, that's the whole argument. Because, you see, the critic is going to come to Paul and say, "You're saying this salvation is forever, you're saying there's no condemnation, you're saying that once a person is saved that it's permanent and it can never be altered, well what if sin gets in the way and what about he has repeated sin or a continual pattern of falling to similar sin? You mean to tell me that can't do it?" And Paul's answer says no, it can't do it because God is causing even your sin to work together in some way to produce your ultimate and eternal good. Even my sin? That's right.

Not by the character of sin, not by the nature of sin, but by the power of God to bring light out of darkness and sweetness out of what is bitter and to bring the living out of what is dead. God can overpower it all and does. This in no way lessens the vile, the filthy, the wicked sense of sin that we need to have, but it shows that sin never ultimately triumphs in a believer's life because God always overrules it and keeps him on the path of believing and keeps him on the path toward glory. This is absolutely thrilling.

We could say, "Well, maybe my suffering won't take away my salvation and maybe my struggle in itself won't take away my salvation, but surely my sin will." And God says, "That's the point, even that can't do it." Sin deserves eternal hell, sin deserves punishment. Well God gave that punishment to Christ...let Christ bear the fury of His wrath...and now it takes even your sins as one who loves God and is called by Him to eternal glory and He overrules them for good. That's incredible.

Did you understand the point? You can't do anything even in sin to negate your salvation because God takes your sin and causes it to produce good. What hope...what hope. And I'm not just talking about here and now, I'm not just talking about the fact that here and now your sin drives you to God and your sin humbles you and your sin causes you to be thankful for forgiveness and all of that here and now. That's not what Paul is saying. What Paul is saying is that God is causing all things to work together for good because He has an eternal purpose...and then he describes the purpose. The purpose is that He would foreknow and predestined and call and justify and glorify. The purpose then is to call out a people and bring them to glory. And in order to get you saved and all the way to glory, God has to overrule your sin, right? He had to forgive it at the moment of salvation and He somehow has to turn it to good in the process of your living to get you to glory. That is an unbelievably helpful encouraging truth. Nothing that happens in your life, doesn't matter what it is, is going to mitigate against God accomplishing that purpose.

Now that takes us to a very, very important note here. And I want you to look with me at the end of verse 28, a little phrase, "According to His purpose." The purpose of God always stands. You understand that? That God always accomplishes His purpose. He is sovereign, He is God, He will do His will. And God has a plan and a purpose. And He will bring it to pass.

What is that purpose? Watch this, verse 29 and 30, "For whom He foreknew," that means to preordain, that means to forelove, to foreordain, "Whom He foreknew He also predestined." Your destiny was predetermined by God who knew you and set His love upon you before you were ever born...or before anyone was ever born. God had a plan back in eternity. And the plan was this, now listen to this, He didn't predestine you, are you ready for this?, to stay out of hell. It doesn't say that, does it? He didn't predestine you to become a Christian. He didn't predestine you to be saved. He predestined you to become conformed to the image of His Son. This is incredible.

Now let me ask you a question. Have you already become conformed to the image of His Son? Now if you think you have, those of us around you will help you with that. We know you. You haven't. You have not become conformed to the image of His Son. You are nice, you are not like Christ. But that was God's purpose. Now you need to ask the question...has God already finished His purpose with you? No. God then in eternity past by His foreordaining, predestined you and me and all who were written in the Lamb's Book of Life from before the foundation of the world to some day become conformed to the image of His Son. That hasn't happened yet.

God didn't just predestine us to get saved and hope we stayed saved. God didn't just predestine us to become Christians and hope we can hang on and be Christians. God said, "My plan is very simple, I have a group of people and I'm going to bring them into perfect conformity to Jesus Christ." Remember 1 John 3? Some day we'll see Him, we'll be like Him. That's the whole plan, that's the whole purpose. And God's purpose will not be fulfilled until those whom He predestined are conformed to the image of His Son. And in John 6 Jesus says, "All the Father gives Me shall come to Me and I have lost none of them, but will raise him up at the last day." In John 10 He says, "And there in My Father's hand being in Me and no man is able to pluck them out of My hand." Why? Because the purpose says predestination to glorification...verse 30, "Whom He predestined He called, whom He called He justified, whom He justified He glorified," and that's a past tense as if it's already happened it's so secure. God says the plan was to bring you to glory and the plan isn't complete until you're there.

God didn't predestine you to be a Christian and hoped you'd hang on. He predestined you to be like Christ and He'll bring that to pass. What an immense reality that is. But that's the plan. Now you see the point? In order for God to get from predestination to glorification and have you pass through this fallen corrupt filthy vile sinful world, He has got to overpower the effect of your sin. You see that? So whatever happens in your life He weaves together in the omnipotence synergism to ultimately end up in your good which is eternal conformity to the image of Christ. Now that's what guarantees your security. What guarantees your security is that God has a plan and from eternity past you are in it. It's according to His purpose.

You go back to Deuteronomy 7 and somebody back there must have been scratching their head and saying, "Why did God pick Israel?" And He answers by saying, "I picked them because I decided to love them." And you sort of step back and say, "Well that doesn't clear up much. Why did You do that? Because they were more than any other people?" No, He says, "You weren't more in number than any other people." Why? Because they were better than other people? No, just read the rest of the story. Obviously that isn't true. Well why did He do that? Because He's God and He doesn't need a why ever, but He did. And so we were born again, not of the will of man or of the will of the flesh but of God. As the psalmist said, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory for Thy mercy." It's You, You started this plan.

I think about that. God put my name in the Lamb's Book of Life before the world began and what He wrote in is "John MacArthur will eternally be conformed to the image of My Son." I'm in the process. And there was a part of that process in the planning stage and then there came from the planning stage in eternity past foreknowledge and predestination, a part of the plan called calling when God pulled me up, as it were, out of the pit of sin and converted me and now I am justified and the next phase is to be glorified but I'm in the plan. And in order to get me through that whole process, He has to take the sin of my life and overpower it and weave it together to produce my ultimate glory. And He does it...He does it. One writer said, "Why was I made to hear His voice and enter while there's room when thousands make a wretched choice and rather starve than come? It was the same love that spread the feast that sweetly forced me in, else I had still refused to taste and perished in my sin." God chose me sovereignly, God saved me sovereignly, God keeps me sovereignly and God will glorify me sovereignly. He's just pushing me through the plan. And I love God, it says here I love Him, this plan is for those that love Him but I have to confess what John said is true, I love Him because He...what?...first loved me and called me. And I'm headed to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Salvation...to be salvation, listen to this, salvation to be salvation cannot stop short of the fulfillment of divine purpose. It can't. Christ's likeness. That's why Paul says we are saved in hope.

Now it doesn't end there. It doesn't really end there. There's another greater purpose even than our glorification. Verse 29, "He predestined us to become conformed to the image of His Son...listen to this...in order that He might...that is His Son Christ...be the firstborn among many brethren."

This truth is...this is beyond us, folks. We are really just kind of spectators on this one. Do you know what the Father wanted to do? And I don't know why, but I know this the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father...you buy that? John 17, there's a love going between the Father and the Son that is...we get a little tiny glimpse of it in the best of love that we share and enjoy with Christ. But there's a love that is at a level that is incomprehensible to us and it's got the height and depth and width, you know, all that that Paul talks about in Ephesians 3 and to know the surpassing incredible love that exists within the trinity. Well on the basis of this love within the trinity, the Father was

compelled to do something for the Son. The first member of the trinity wanted to express profound love to the second member of the trinity. So do you know what He did? He determined that He would give the second member of the trinity a gift and the gift He would give the second member of the trinity would be a redeemed humanity...a redeemed humanity. And so God set in motion a plan whereby He would stoop down and redeem wicked sinners, such an incredible thing that even angels are hanging over the battlements of heaven trying to figure it out because they've never seen in their environment among angels a redemptive plan. Fallen angels fell and are damned forever, there's no redemption. And so the angels search into this thing and they're in awe of the manifold grace of God and this incredible plan by which God is pulling together a redeemed humanity to give to the Son.

Jesus put it this way, "All the Father gives to Me will come to Me." The Father was doing this for the Son. There is such immeasurable love in the trinity that the Father is giving a gift to the Son and that gift to the Son is a redeemed humanity over which...please notice verse 29...Jesus Christ is the firstborn, the prototokos, what does that mean? It doesn't mean the first in chronology or the first in time, it means of all who have ever been born, He is the preeminent one. He is the chief. Jesus Christ, of course, God the second person becoming man is the God/Man. He by His death and resurrection redeemed a group of people, a redeemed humanity. Of all who have ever been born He's the chief and He then leads this redeemed humanity. And the purpose of God could be simply understood this way, God ordained that Christ would come and die for sins and God would then redeem people from all tongues and tribes and peoples and nations and all the histories of the world on both sides of the cross and He would gather that redeemed humanity and He would give that redeemed humanity to Jesus Christ, make Christ the head of that whole redeemed humanity. And that redeemed humanity would spend forever and ever and ever and ever exalting Jesus Christ and the Father couldn't think of a greater gift to give than that. And He gave it to Him out of His love.

Folks, I want to tell you, there are elements of this salvation in which we participate that are way beyond us and that have to do with God the Father explicitly being involved in demonstrating divine love to God the Son. Now I don't want to unscramble all of that trinitarian interaction, but I just want to tell you that's what it means when it says, "In order that." In other words, this is the purpose...He predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son for the very purpose that He wanted the Son to be the chief over a whole redeemed humanity who would forever and ever and ever praise and glorify His name. This has to do with transcendent reality. And so, in order to make that happen, verse 30 says He predestined us and then He called us in time to Himself in salvation and then He declared us righteous and He will glorify us.

You see, the security of the believer is just completely wrapped up in this immense reality, this overwhelming concept. Does it make you feel a little small? Like you're really not the center of the universe? And that God isn't up in heaven saying, "Oh, I hope he gets saved because I really like him?" This is...this is a plan that is way beyond us. So you will have throughout all of eternity holy angels singing, "Holy, holy, holy, glory to God in the highest," you'll have angelic praise, angelic

worship ringing through the eons of eternity. And then added to that will be this redeemed humanity from all human history brought there and the leader of which is the Lord Jesus Christ and that redeemed humanity will be praising and glorifying the Lamb and crying, "Worthy, worthy, worthy," forever and ever and ever. And we're just this little part of God's purpose in time to bring about an eternally redeemed humanity for the purpose of glory to His preeminent Son and that's why we're secure because the plan God started, believe me, God will finish and we're in it...we're in it.

Now when you talk about Romans 8:28, please would you get beyond the concept that God kind of takes the little things of life and has a way of working them out? It's way beyond that...way beyond that.

How do we respond to this? Somebody says, "Well, you know, boy, I hate to preach that kind of stuff with an unbeliever present because they're going to think they can't get saved." No, you just preach the truth. We believe in predestination by God's preordained plan to set His love on people. He chose whom He chose and whom He wanted to chose. That's His plan.

You say, "Well how does an unbeliever respond to that?" Very simple, there are three things that an unbeliever needs to identify in his heart to know whether he's elect...three things to know whether God's chosen him as a part of the plan. One, a desire to leave sin...a desire to leave sin. Two, faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ as sufficient to deliver him from sin. Three, a longing to know and serve God. And so I say to someone who is not a Christian, that's...that's the best thing I can say to you. If in your heart you have a desire to leave sin and if you understand and believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again for your sins and offers you forgiveness and salvation, and if you long to know and serve the living God, then those are all the impulses being generated by the Holy Spirit who is calling you to justification and set you on a course to glorification.

How does a Christian respond? I'm sort of speechless. How do I respond? I say, "Look, I didn't deserve to get saved in the first place and I don't deserve to be kept but I'm happy about it. I didn't earn my way in and I can't earn my way out. I didn't earn my way in with good stuff, I can't earn my way out with bad stuff. I'm a part of this massive plan by which God is redeeming a humanity that forever and ever and ever in glory will praise Him and the Son." And all I can say is I respond with gratitude, I'm overwhelmed. I'm speechless. And I'm right where Paul was when he got to verse 30, even though he was writing this, he must have been literally about to blow the roof off wherever he was because in verse 31 he launches into the doxology. He goes with the theology for three verses and then it's ten verses into the doxology and he's just literally lifted up as he contemplates the immense reality and as he glories in comprehending it.

To an unbeliever I say if the Spirit of God is giving you that longing to leave your sin and has confirmed in your mind that Jesus died as the penalty for your sin and offers you forgiveness and salvation, and if you long to know and serve the living and true God, then the Spirit of God is pulling

you and calling you to justification. And all you need do is cry out to God and ask Him to redeem you to save you and you're on the .

For the believer, we must say, "God, thank You, thank You, thank You that no matter what it is that comes into my life, be it suffering or struggling or sin itself, you take it all and you weave it together for my ultimate good, not in time but in eternity, that I might be able to glorify the preeminent Christ forever and ever and ever." Indeed a mountain peak and next Sunday we're going to go with Paul into the doxology.

Father, thank You this morning that You have met us and You have confronted us with comforting, thrilling, exhilarating truth and we have no fear that those who hear will say, "Oh my, now we can sin with freedom," because You'll overrule it, but rather we say, "O God, such grace, such mercy, such kindness, such love." We are compelled by the longings of our inner man to love You and serve You and to run from the sin which You even work together for our good. Father, thank You for all that You are doing, thank You that our salvation this morning is nearer than when we believed, we're closer to being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ for that we long, to that prize we run. That is our high calling, to be made like Christ. Thank You for assuring us that once the work begins You will perform it until the day of Christ when we see Him and are made like Him. In His great and holy name we pray. Amen.

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