

**Romans Study**  
**Session 14 - Romans 8:28-39**

This week is the climax of all Paul's taught from chapter 1 up until this point in the letter. If you recall last week, we saw that there are three ministries of the Holy Spirit that He performs on our behalf. The first was mortification in that He makes us dead to sin. The second was attestation whereby He confirms or attests to the fact that we belong to God. The third ministry of the Holy Spirit is intercession so that the Spirit intercedes before God on our behalf. The Spirit works in this way to assure of us our justification but also He knows we will face hardship in this world in many ways yet in all of them, since we have been adopted into God's family and belong to Him, He will keep us safely in His hands until everything He wants to accomplish is accomplished and forever.

Now with the ministries of the Spirit explained, Paul brings this section of Romans to a close with a powerful and majestic argument for the eternal security and permanence of the life of the redeemed. God not only has the power to keep those who are His own but also has the abiding love which proves the eternal nature of our relationship with Him. This section of Scripture has three parts: 1) the assurance of God's presence in the present life, 2) the security we have based on the works of God in Christ, and 3) the security we have based on the love of God in Christ.

**[Romans 8:28]**

The word "causes" means to work together with or cooperate with. In this case it is God who is cooperating or working together with circumstances and experiences (all things).

Q: According to this verse, to what end are "all things" cooperating with God? (*for the good*)

Q: Who is the recipient of this good? (*those who are saved*)

Those who belong to God are those described in two ways at the end of this verse. They are those who love God and they are those who are called according to God's purpose.

Q: What is God's purpose for people? (*that they be saved and come to know Him - that's why we were created, for Him to enjoy us and us to enjoy Him forever*)

The word "called" means to call loudly but can also be translated "invited". God invites or calls out loudly to mankind to get saved and join Him in His good works which advance His will.

Q: Does this mean that only good things will happen to those who are saved? (*no - keep reading*)

Now that we have the elements of the verse in place, we can see the full meaning. The promise is that nothing will touch our lives that is not under the control and direction of our loving Heavenly Father. Our sovereign God uses everything that touches our lives for good. While we will not always understand these experiences and certainly not all of them will be

enjoyable, they are always used for good purposes. It is important to keep in mind that the good mentioned here is good from the perspective of God and His will.

This verse can be abused and misused by well-meaning believers. Someone may lose their job and someone seeking to offer hope and comfort quotes this verse saying that “God has something better in store for them.” While we would hope and pray that is the case, that isn’t the promise here. It’s not a promise of upward material benefits while in this world. The person who loses his job may never have a better job than the one he lost or may never work again. The key is to see that the “good” being promised may not be realized in this life. The good is the good of God’s will (as God’s will is the highest and best accomplishment of mankind) and that may lead to situations and experiences that are not pleasant or what we’d consider “good” in this life. However, believers can rest assured that no matter how this “good” plays out in the here and now, it will be fully visible and experienced in the life to come.

Take a couple of examples of this thought. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers at the age of 17. He spent the next 13 years in various Egyptian prisons and as a slave to various Egyptian leaders. He had been the favorite son of his father, who was a wealthy and respected man in his area. To be thrown into a pit and sold into slavery by his jealous brothers was a huge blow to him. Yet, at some point in this drama of Joseph, he came to see that God was at work in his life for something much bigger than himself. He had been sent to Egypt by God for the purpose of protecting and ensuring the lives of his family who God had promised would be the descendants of His eventual Messiah. At the climax of the incident, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and declared that even though they had meant the selling of him into slavery as evil, God had intended it for good - for the good of their entire family (and all mankind in time). So all the terrible things that happened to Joseph were used by God for good in the end.

Another example, is that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a pastor and theologian in Germany during World War II. He was an outspoken critic of Hitler and the Nazis. For a time he fled to America and continued his work but realized that much of what he needed to do required him to return to Germany. Once back, it didn’t take long before he was arrested by the Nazis and he was executed. Yet, his ministry and his books, tempered by his experiences and reliance upon the Lord, have touched millions of people and his death has strengthened many other Christians who have faced similar fates. So, again, all the terrible things that happened to Dietrich were used by God for His good in the end. It’s great when that “good” is seen in the here and now and that’s how we always pray, but realize that this “good” mentioned here may not be realized as good until eternity when we view things from the Lord’s perspective.

Paul is going to shift again from the present life back to the future life in the next two verses describing the permanence of our assurance in Christ.

### **[Romans 8:29-30]**

There are many widely different ways in which these two verses are interpreted. Since this same conflict in interpretations is going to come up again in chapter 9, I’m going to rip the band-aid off now and we are going to separate the meat from the filler. One of these interpretations is called the Calvinist view and the other view is called the right and Biblical

view. (I'm not going to get into the others as this isn't the thrust of this section of Scripture.)

Here's how Calvinists view these two verses. According to them, these verses support their beliefs that becoming a Christian is ultimately rooted in God's free choice and those who God chooses become His people and will be saved during the final judgment. To make this view even slightly palatable, they have to define the word "foreknew" to mean "choose beforehand". Thus it is God who is the initiator of the entire process by which He brings people to Himself because He chose them long before the world was created. All people do is believe that they are already chosen by God and thus, they become justified. They argue that the string of verbs in these verses are an unbreakable chain dependent upon the one before. All whom God chooses and then justifies, He will eventually glorify.

The Calvinist (sometimes called Reformed) way to seeing these verses is tragic and nothing more than a house of cards. It misses the forest for all the trees. First, in getting to the right interpretation of these two verses, we need to know the definition of "foreknew". It simply means to "know beforehand". God knows everything beforehand. This is a basic element of God's nature being omniscient. That's why God could lead prophets to talk about future events with certainty and to be always correct. While God desires all people to come to know His salvation and He does draw people to Himself in the process of initiating a relationship with them (I Timothy 2:2-4 & John 6:44), He does not force or pre-ordain some to salvation and others to the eternal flames. Thus humans have the choice to respond positively or negatively to the call or invitation of God for their salvation. You'd think that this would be evident to anyone who had ever read John 3:16. The "whosoever will" of that verse puts the decision of salvation squarely upon the human being drawn to God. (All the clear, mountain-top verses of salvation in the New Testament support this view.)

Second, the Calvinist claims that the presence of the word "predestined" means the God did the choosing of who was saved and who stayed lost. Yet, if you look at the context of the word (and the context of every single time this word appears in the New Testament referring to believers (Romans 8:29,30 & Ephesians 1:5, 11)) you'll see that it is not describing being predestined to heaven or hell but rather to a believer being predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ - the Savior. This word "conformed" is not a casual or superficial conforming but rather this word is used to describe the way in which Christ is the very image of the Father (II Cor. 4:4). It is us being conformed together with Christ to be in the image of Him (the "sun" prefix is present so see last week's discussion of that for the definition of this word.) In other words, we will be conformed to the image of Christ once we accept the grace offered to us by God. Thus, when you define these two words correctly, you don't need to believe in a cosmic lottery conducted before the creation to figure out who gets saved. We see the clear truth presented throughout the New Testament that while God woos/draws people to Himself, it is the exercise of their free will in accepting the offer of God's grace that saves people. That is the crystal clear teaching of every clear passage on salvation in the New Testament.

Back to vv. 29-30. When referring to Christ as the first born among many brothers, it is saying the Jesus is the eldest brother in the family of God. All who have been adopted into God's family share Jesus as their older brother and so that is a reason to rejoice and stand firm in the truth of our justification and eventual glorification. This list of verbs in v.30 is not some

unbreakable chain starting with one verb and leading the person (cooperating with God or not) to an end they had no decision or say in reaching. Instead, these verbs are verbs relating the same basic idea but giving a more full picture of the completeness of our security in Christ. While the word “also” is not this string, it could be to get the idea Paul is discussing across. Those who are predestined to be conformed to the image of God’s Son are also those who were called (accepted the invitation) and also those who were justified and also those who will be glorified. (The tense of the word “glorify” is such that it is similar to the prophetic past tense often used in the Old Testament. Glorify is in the aorist tense usually meaning that the event happened in the past but its force continues on into the present and future. In this case, the past (aorist) is used in way different from normal in that glorification has not happened yet for the believer (at least not fully - to the point of glorifying our bodies and souls). However, Paul is so sure that the event (glorification) will happen, it’s being spoken of in the past tense even though the event has yet to actually take place. The verb tense can only be used this way when describing God and His activities because they are certain. (II Timothy 1:12, Philippians 1:6, Philippians 3:21) It is important to see that God did not host a cosmic lottery before creation to determine who would be saved and who would remain lost and under God’s condemnation. (This is the problem with word study without context of the rest of the passage where the word is found and the more full teaching of the Scripture.) God calls everyone but not everyone responds to the call. When I was growing up, I played outside a lot. Many times my parents called me home for some reason or another and I didn’t always respond when they called. God has given us a will to accept or reject His grace. If we were forced to accept it despite our lives, we would never come to love God freely. Love can only be found through freedom of choice.

Q: Are there any questions about vv. 29-30?

The next section deals with our eternal security based upon the works of God for us in Christ. Paul is inviting those who read this section to celebrate the eternal commitment of God to His people.

### **[Romans 8:31-34]**

In typical Paul fashion he makes a grand statement of fact and then invites objections to be heard. These are typically objections he has heard from people in the past when discussing these topics. Here, he is telling anyone with an objection to these truths, “Who is on par with God?” *(As a side note here, no one or any other being is on par/on the same plane of existence as God. We often give Satan too much credit by thinking that he is the opposite of God. That is not the case. Michael the archangel is an example of an opposite for Satan as he is also an archangel - now the chief demon. God created those beings and exists independently from them. Satan has nowhere near the power of God and is not even worthy of being considered an opposite to Him.)*

Q: What was the first work of God mentioned that proves God worked on our behalf? (v.32 - *God sent Jesus to die for us*)

Q: What is the result of this work according to the rest of v.32? (*God will give us all things along*

*with Christ - things such as justification, sanctification, glorification, redemption, salvation, etc.)*

Listen to this quote from Chrysostom (the archbishop of Constantinople around 400 A.D. And remember while Christianity was the official religion of the Empire at this time, there were still pockets of lingering persecution and animosity against Christians as it had been the object of persecution just 100 years earlier.) *“Yet those that be against us, so far are they from thwarting us at all, that even without their will they become to us the causes of crowns, and the procurers of countless blessings, so that God’s wisdom turns their plots into our salvation and glory. See how really no one is against us!”* So even though there are people who hate Christians and Satan himself who works against us, none of their opposition ultimately matter. In fact, their hard work against us gives us, the justified, the opportunity to show the love of Christ and the wisdom of the Spirit in the world in a way that comfort would not afford. The world sees Christians as different from themselves when hardships confront Christians. Thus, we gain all sorts of blessings from these temporary oppositions and countless chances to witness for Christ are afforded to us through these times of so-called opposition. Yet, by faith, we see through them as nothing as they cannot ultimately stand against God.

Q: Why can no one bring charges against God’s people? *(v.33 - God is the one who justifies us)*

It is important to note here in practical terms of our lives, that just because no one can bring a rightful charge against us as God’s justified people, doesn’t mean they won’t try. The devil is the accuser of the brothers and he leads a host of demons and the lost in the world to daily level charges against Christ and those of us who follow Him. The good news is that they are all bogus charges for which we have already been declared, “Not Guilty!”. It is a foolhardy accuser who brings false charges against God’s people - people who God has already paid the price for their charges through His blood.

Q: Why are believers not under the sentence of condemnation any longer? *(v. 34 - Jesus died for us and then rose from the dead and now is at the right hand of the Father making intercession for us. This is why we now no longer face condemnation from God and if He doesn’t condemn us, we certainly should not accept it from anyone else - including ourselves.)*

No one can be against us and no one can successfully bring charges against us because of the work of God in Christ - that is the death of Jesus on the cross for us. The cross is not only the gateway to salvation but it is also the gateway to the full Christian life in the Spirit. There are some experiences that are so stark and raw that people never get over them - whether they end well or not. Our Heavenly Father is this way concerning the death of His precious only Son, Jesus Christ. He mentions it often in His Word as the defining truth and moment for mankind’s only hope of salvation. Though He brings it up for our benefit and as the only way for man to be justified, it’s evident through the passages where the cross is mentioned, it’s an event that it is close to the Father’s heart and always will be. In the same manner, to reflect the Father’s heart, the death Jesus died on the cross will be close to our hearts as well.

Q: What works of a believer can undo the right standing brought about by the work of God in Christ on our behalf? *(none of them)*

Paul then asks another question to end this section. Just as the works of God in Christ on our behalf prove our eternal security so does the love of God shown in Christ do the same. Just as Jesus' work on the cross is to be celebrated for its eternal impact and security it gives us, so too the great love of God is directed to give us the same security, despite the circumstances of life.

### **[Romans 8:35-39]**

The word "separate" means to "place room in between" or "part". Paul points out some things which are commonly believed or felt to cause a separation between Christ and the believer but in reality these things do not part us from Him even in the slightest.

The word "sword" usually is a metaphor for war or judicial punishment. Back in those days, Christians could face judicial punishment for being a Christian. Nothing the law could do or the horrors of war can separate the believer from the love of God in Christ.

Q: How did God prove His love for us? (*Romans 5:8 - Jesus died for us.*)

Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 in v.36. He brings up the idea of continuous martyrdom. **[I Corinthians 15:31]**

Q: What does Paul mean in I Corinthians that "he dies daily"? (*We continuously put to death our wills and surrender our agendas and attitudes to be filled and led by the Holy Spirit. We accept the circumstances of the Lord as an act of His loving sovereignty that bring about His will. Other answers possible*)

Then in v.37 Paul turns things around. The word "but" starts off the sentence signifying that things are now different. He began on a low note but now is going to show how circumstances are not the final definition of who we are and that our actions in those circumstances are not the final verdict on how God loves us. The word "overwhelmingly conquer" means to gain a surpassing or decisive victory through the One who loved us. Again, God's love was already shown to us through Jesus' death on the cross. Since nothing or no one else is on par with God, no one else can love us like God does and no other love can bind us together like God's love binds us to Him permanently.

Then Paul attempts to list the things which might be, in the minds of the world, those things which might be able to separate a Christian from the love of God. They come in the form of couplets - at least at first.

- 1) death nor life
- 2) angels nor principalities (demons)
- 3) things present nor things to come - nothing in the future will show up that can separate us either. So we don't need to sweat and be anxious over our current problems or run mental scenarios about future problems that haven't even happened yet. Even if the worst comes true - these issues won't be able to separate us from the love of God.
- 4) powers - stands alone - this can mean both governmental, worldly powers as well as

angelic and demonic powers. It's a very general term.

5) height nor depth - nothing above us or below us

6) no other created thing

Q: How secure is the believer in the love of God in Christ? *(many answers but completely firm)*

Q: So what can a believer do to separate himself from the love of God? *(nothing - it is impossible for a believer to be separated from the love of God in Christ. Not even sin can separate us from the love of God as we now live under the new covenant of grace - not the law. Sin formerly separated us from God and His love but now it merely separates us from God's best and highest will but never from His love for us.)*

Chapter 8 began with the proclamation of "no condemnation" for those of us in Christ Jesus and ends with the proclamation of "no separation" for those of us in Christ Jesus.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?