

WHY THE CHRISTIAN MUST WIN

Romans 8:28-30

This wonderful book we call the Bible consists of 66 books, 1,189 chapters, 31,173 verses and 773,692 words. I am convinced that the greatest single promise in this whole book is Romans 8:28 because this great verse says that no Christian can lose for winning. The Christian must win - not because his circumstances may be so good but because of God's eternal purpose for His children.

Romans 8:28 says that God causes all things, with the emphasis perhaps on the bad things, to work together for good to them who love the Lord. But the question we raise today: WHY IS THIS TRUE? How can it be possible that God causes all things in human experience to work for our good? Some would think it is because we love God. No, the text does not say that. The text DOES say that if all things are working for your good that you must love God. The reason that all things must work together for good is because of God's eternal purpose. What was the eternal purpose of God? It was that every one of His children would conform to the image of His Son and be like Jesus. That is why God saved us. This is His eternal purpose for us. Everything that is happening to us is contributing to this great work that God intends in the heart of every believer; therefore, there is nothing without purpose in your life.

I hate to hear Christians say they are "lucky." That is the most unscriptural idea one could ever mention. No Christian is "lucky." Christians are blessed. There are no accidents in the lives of any of God's children. Everything, small and large, good and bad, has divine purpose, and God uses it to make us conform to the image of His Son.

Sometimes people have to suffer a great deal in order for God to accomplish His purpose. I have actually said, "Oh Lord, do not punish me too much. I do not like to suffer. Please do not judge me, do not humble me, let me humble myself." A man can humble himself. If he will not, God will humble him. I have even asked God to spare me from the

ravages of pain that some people have had to suffer. I do not know whether He will or not, but I know that whatever He does permit in my life is a part of His divine purpose and a part of those "all things" which are working to make me conform to the image of His Son. That is what the text says. You will notice that in the text, God is at work in three dimensions of time.

I. God has already worked in the dimension of the TIME PAST. Before time ever began God was at work for you and me as His children. Scripture teaches that. The Bible in many places speaks of things which God did before the foundation of the world. The eternal purpose of God for you and me was fixed before the foundation of the world. The Bible teaches that the Lamb of God was slain some 2,000 years ago. But in the mind and purpose of God, Jesus has always been slain. (Revelation 13:8). God knows no time.

Our text mentions two activities which happened in the eternity past before time began. In verse 29 Paul says, "For whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." Before time began and before you and I were ever born or born again, God foreknew and predestined a purpose for us in the world and in eternity to come. This text does not teach that a man does not have to accept Jesus Christ to be saved. The text does not teach that a man must not be born again to enter the Kingdom of God. The text does not teach that "what is to be will be whether it ever happens or not", as one Baptist body teaches. The text does not say that God has predestined some people to eternal life and others unto eternal damnation. Why do we bring this in here? Paul did not. The text simply states that God had an eternal purpose for those of His children who would accept the Son of God and that purpose would not fail but He would bring it to pass in time and in eternity to come.

There is no question that the Bible teaches the divine sovereignty of God on the one hand and the free will of man on the other. The Bible teaches election, it also teaches the choice of man. Theologians have tried to reconcile the sovereignty of God, the doctrine of election, with the doctrine of man's free will. Logically, these two concepts

can never be resolved. We are dealing with great mysteries of God when we deal with His sovereignty and the fact that He has made us free. Both are taught in Scripture. Our minds cannot grasp this, but our hearts must believe both of them: that God is sovereign over all things and that at the same time He has placed responsibility upon you and me as individuals.

On the side of divine sovereignty (or election), the Bible says that God foreknew and God predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son. We do not do ourselves any good by denying this part of the scripture. That does not make us intelligent at all. The Bible says it and it is true. God foreknew us and God predestinated^{ed} us. Every Baptist creed has election in the middle of it. We have not taught it much in Baptist churches, but it is in our creed. Every statement of faith that Baptists have believed historically has had an article on election and predestination. We are Calvinistic. We have not preached it as much as we should have. We need the strength of the sovereignty of God and the eternal purpose of God in our lives. We must have it in order to have steadfastness and purpose.

On the side of freedom I believe what the old preacher said about election: "God done voted for my salvation, the devil done voted for my damnation, I cast my vote with the Lord, we got in the majority and I was elected." That has been my experience. I know I have been elected because I voted with the Lord. I made the decision myself. But before I was ever born, God knew me and predestined that I would be conformed to the image of His Son and I am proud of it because that gives me strength. So we look at His work on the level of the eternity past.

II. The second dimension of His work is on the level of TIME PRESENT. "...moreover, whom He did predestinate He also called." This is the effectual call of the Holy Spirit to the heart of the sinner who calls him to Christ and to repentance. I have had people to tell me that they thought they were the elect and they thought

they would get into heaven but they had no experience with Christ. They knew nothing about a new birth and they knew nothing about the call of the Holy Spirit. That is unscriptural. The call is the effectual call of God to the heart - the call to repentance and to faith in Jesus Christ.

But not only does He call. Those He calls, He justifies - justifies from all things. From sin - yes! This He does in time. That which He purposed in eternity before time was, He accomplishes in time in the hearts of His people. This is what we preach and this is what the great Calvinists have preached. Some people say, "How in the world can you believe in predestination and be evangelistic?" The truly evangelistic people are the true predestinarians.

Johnathan Edwards, perhaps the greatest exponent of Calvin, ^{is} inaugurated the Great Awakening with his great sermon in North Hampton, Massachusetts: "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." He did not even give an invitation. The Holy Spirit fell upon North Hampton, and then the revival began and spread down the seacoast and saved this country. This is an unwritten chapter in American History. It was the Great Awakening of 1740 that bound this country together in heart and soul, that prepared ^{the colonists} us to fight the American Revolution. The Great Awakening was preached down by men who believed in the predestined purpose of God from eternal ages.

George Whitfield was a Calvinist. Spurgeon was a Calvinist who believed in the predestined purpose of God before the world began, but also believed in the responsibility of man. He preached repentance and faith to 5,000 people in the morning and 5,000 at night at the Baptist Tabernacle in London. There is not a voice in the world today that will compare with Charles H. Spurgeon, the great Calvinistic preacher.

As a very young preacher I used to read his sermons. When I came to his teaching on predestination, I just pushed his books aside. I thought Spurgeon was foolish. But then

I began to read the New Testament and I saw how uninformed I had been on the Word of God. God works in time the purpose which He had from eternal ages. "Whom He predestined He called and whom He called He also justified from all things."

III. But there is a third observation in our text; The work of God in the dimension of the eternity to come. God takes us through five golden links of the believer's life. Notice He begins in the eternity past. God set His love upon His people before time was and that purpose which He had cannot be defeated. That is what Paul is saying. "Whom He foreknew He predestined, those He predestined He called, those He called, He justified." The climax of the whole story is going to be in eternity to come. How glorious the consummation of God's purpose will be.

If you will notice carefully verse 30 you will see that all those verbs are in the past tense: foreknew, predestined, called, justified. How about glorified? It is in the past tense also. Someone who does not believe in the Bible would say, "This is a mistake. Paul was saying they WILL be glorified." But no, he did not. While it is future, it is present with Paul. Paul was so sure that the eternal purpose of God would be fulfilled in His people until he stated it as something that had already come to pass. That is the way God looks at you and me. He does not look at us as fainting and failing and about to quit if we have really started with Jesus Christ. He looks at us as if we are already in heaven - already glorified.

So you see, what Paul is saying in this text is "From the eternal election in the eternity which is past through the stages of the effectual call of the Holy Spirit and the justification by faith in the present, unto the eternal glory, God is in charge and not man." There is no circumstance that can defeat this purpose of God.

In an age when theology has reduced God to nothing, when He has been humanized,

it is quite understandable that what I am saying is not popular. Man wants to devise and work his own plan. But man cannot work it out! All in the world he can do is to respond in love to the purpose which God had before the world began.

The point I want you to get is this: God is the subject. God causes all things in your life to work together for your good. What is your good? That you might be made like Jesus. This was and is God's eternal purpose. As far as He is concerned, it is already accomplished and it cannot be defeated. The "all things" of our experience are fitting into this perfect, wonderful plan of our Lord. It does not mean we will not have to suffer. It does not mean we will not be persecuted. It does not mean that we will not get discouraged and despair. It does not mean we may not die for Christ, but it DOES mean that in all things God is at work and has His hands upon us and shall use everything to bring us to this final estate which was His eternal purpose that we ^{be} made like Jesus. That is His purpose.

In this world God calls upon us to follow Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit's indwelling He calls upon us to be transformed into His image and into His likeness. This process is going on right now. The person who is the greatest Christian is the person who has probably suffered the most. God leads us along but He is making us like His Son. We have to look at life in this light every day - remembering that everything has a purpose, everything is being used of God. One day His purpose will be completed. Oh glorious day!

The emphasis in scripture is not on the place called heaven. Heaven is not so much WHERE we will be but WHAT we will be. God is working out in time what we shall be but He was also working it out in eternity before time. He shall complete it in the eternity to come. His plan shall not be frustrated.

You may not be too well. You may have a lot of debts. You may have lost your loved one. You may be worried about a lot of things. But that does not matter. God foreknew

us in eternity. God predestined us. God has called. God has justified and God is going to glorify. He cannot be defeated. You cannot lose for winning if you belong to Jesus. Do you?