

Series: The Reign of Grace
Today's Message: All Things Work Together for the Good
Jeff Kennedy / November 20, 2022

Romans 8:28–30 “We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.”

Introduction: No one knows whether or not they will have another day, another hour, or another minute in this world. There are some things we must accept to be true based on a preponderance of evidence—meaning we hold these things to be true because in our repeated and uniform experience they generally are. We’ve never had a day that didn’t start with the rising and setting of the sun (or more correctly the earth rotating on its axis and changing its orientation to the Sun). We’ve never experienced a moment when the world ran out of oxygen. We plan our lives—our days, weeks, and years, based on the regularity and reliability of the world. Odds are that despite what happens to me personally, the world will spin on. There are things in life that we count on just being true—and so we say “we know” this or “we know” that.

There are lots of things we don’t know. We don’t know that the cowboys will win the super bowl this year (though some have high hopes that this is true—but hope that is seen is no hope at all). Likewise, we don’t know how things will end up between Ukraine and Russia. The best we can do is to make a really educated guess, based on probability assessments.

But Paul tells the Christian that there are certain things we do know. We know them as a matter of faith. But isn’t faith believing in something you can’t see? Yes, it is. We walk by faith and not by sight. Faith is the evidence of things “not seen.” But these truths are revealed by the Holy Spirit and these things become settled convictions in the Christian heart—a faith that transforms into knowledge, assurance, and comfort.

Paul has, 6 times in this book already, told us that there are certain things we just know.

- 1) **(Rom 2:2) We know that God’s judgments are just.** “Now **we know** that God’s judgment on those who do such things is based on the truth.” God is just—he shows no partiality. When the righteous are judged “forgiven” and the unrighteous judged “condemned” God is perfectly just in his judgments. And we trust his character.

2) **(3:19) We know that the law is for everyone.** “Now **we know** that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are subject to the law” Jews are subject to Moses’ Torah law, and Gentiles are subject to the moral law of God written on the heart. No one will be exempted on the day of judgment saying, “Well I didn’t know it was wrong to lust, and covet people’s stuff, and hate others, murder them, and steal their stuff.” *We know* that the law speaks to everyone subject to the law.

3) **(5:3) We know that affliction yields a harvest of strong Christians.** “Because **we know** that affliction produces endurance,”—our “light and momentary afflictions” are the means by which God accomplishes his purposes in our lives—producing an enduring faith, folded and hammered and burnished like steel.

4) **(6:6) We know that Christians can live victoriously over sin.**

“For **we know** that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin,” every believer has hope that they can live triumphantly over the impulses and whims of the flesh through the Spirit’s power.

5) **(6:9) We know that Christ’s resurrection is permanent.**

“**We know** that Christ, having been raised from the dead, will not die again.” And all who are in Christ have this same hope.

6) **(7:14) We know the inherent goodness of God’s law.**

“For **we know** that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold as a slave under sin.” The unbeliever with Moses’ or the Moral law is held captive to the law in their minds, and a slave to sin in the flesh.

7) **(8:22) We know that all creation is groaning/travailing,** waiting for the Sons of God to be revealed—meaning waiting for our resurrection in glory—then the whole world will be set free from its bondage to decay and corruption by the one who subjected it to that bondage.

“For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now.”

And now he tells us that as believers **we know that all things work together** (that is, God works all things together) for the ultimate good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

While all of us struggle with doubt sometimes because our fallen sinful nature is prone to wander and prone to doubt.

Paul is painting the picture here that the believer's *unseen hope* is a *settled conviction* that the God who saved us is plotting the course of the world and our lives working all things together for our ultimate good. And that promise in Paul's mind is more certain than the rising of tomorrow's sun. It's surer than the availability of oxygen to breathe and more infallible than the earth rotating on its axis.

How do we know this to be true?

Because the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the adopted children of God and if children, heirs with Christ (8:16–17), and if heirs of his glory we are co-participants in his suffering. Pastor Daniel reminded us last week that in this life the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses as we await our adoption, the redemption of our bodies (8:23–25).

1. What “things” does God work together for the believer’s good? He’s already identified one major theme/idea... Pastor Daniel touched on this last week... Now, v. 28 is about the *providence of God* supervising and overseeing the course of history and our history.

- Our suffering and our weaknesses (Romans 8:18, 26) “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us... In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses.” Our suffering is being worked out toward our ultimate good—producing in us a harvest of righteousness, perseverance, and hope for future resurrection glory.

1) **We suffer loss.** Losing loved ones, employment, family members. Over the course of our lives, we will lose more and more. We suffer mentally and physically. **The new “longevity science”** is trying to unwind the curse in Genesis 3. There are scientists today who are trying to cure us from death—treat death as a disease. In their attempts to improve health span and life span, they’ve made a remarkable discovery—people still die. No matter how good your diet was, or how much you exercised—you could exercise like an Olympic athlete, and someday ***something is going to get you. You say, “But pastor, look—I was able to become a centenarian (living to 100).”*** Good for you. And then what? You died.

Believers in Jesus still get arthritis and diabetes and cancer and heart disease. Our bodies waste away, and that's tough; it's hard.

- 2) **We suffer the weakness of the flesh.** Remember, Jesus said, “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” While we are no longer sold into slavery under sin, no longer captive to the law in our minds—set free from enslavement to the law and sin, we are susceptible to temptation because our bodies as yet are unredeemed.
- 3) **We suffer unrighteousness.** The unrighteousness in our society is a burden that God's holy saints have to contend with. When I look at the insanity of our culture and the evil that has overtaken it, as a Christian I am burdened. ***And it would be easy for us as God's saints, washed clean and made holy in the righteous blood of Christ***—it would be too easy for us to give into a seething anger at a wayward culture.

Jesus, however, rebuked the disciples for wanting to call down fire on sinners—Jesus said “you know not what spirit you're of.” We don't further damn the culture and curse the darkness—we proclaim the gospel to all men so that all might be saved from the wrath being revealed and the coming wrath. But in the meantime, it's painful to see our country die to choose hell, to wage war on the unborn and innocent, to choose injustice and hatred, and to continue the war on men and biblical masculinity. And we are to be a light in the darkness and show people the love of God on the cross.

- 4) **We suffer persecution.** The very world whose thinking has become futile and delivered over to a depraved mind—they mistreat and malign people of faith. Jesus said, “If they hated me then they're going to hate you. The servant is not greater than the master.” If a person wants nothing to do with Jesus (the Jesus of this book, not the Jesus of their imagination) then they'll want nothing to do with you. If they persecute Jesus and nail him to the cross to shut him up, get him out of the picture, to stop the noise of his voice confronting our sins, calling us to repentance—then they'll do the same to you. We can follow Jesus or follow the culture; those are our two choices.

We learned from Pastor Daniel last week that this just is the Christian life. It's suffering and weakness onto glory.

This week we discover that God is working everything out to the good of those believers who suffer for him.

What else does God “work together” for our ultimate good?

- Everything else (Romans 8:34–39) “Who can separate us from the love of Christ?” Not affliction, or distress, or persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, the sword of execution, not death, not life, nor angels, rulers, things present, things to come, powers, heights, depths, or any other created thing—nothing can defeat us. He says in Rom 8:37 “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

What things does God work out for the ultimate good of the Christian? Everything in the spectrum of creation, and in our human experience that threatens to defeat our faith. You name it. God is working it together for the good.

2. For whom is this promise valid—to whom does it apply?

Romans 8:28 “We know that all things work together for the **good** (persevering the believer through suffering onto glory) of those who love God, who **are called** according to his purpose.”

Who are those who love God?

Galatians 4:9 “But now, since you know God, or rather have become known by God.” The people that know God are the people that God first knew.

1 Cor 8:3 “But if anyone loves God he is known by God.” The people God first knew are those who love God.

1 John 4:10 “Love consists in this, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice.”

Romans 5:6, 8 “For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly...⁸ But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

What do we learn here? Because God knows us he makes it possible for us to know him; because God first loved us he makes it possible for us to love him; because Christ died for the ungodly he makes it possible for sinners to be made alive, to become the righteousness of God in Christ.

God takes the initiative to know us, love us, to call us according to his purpose. And God promises to bring those who love him, those who believe on his name inevitably to heavenly glory.

Who are the people who are called of God?

“Those” are “the ones.” How do we know it’s not just the group? Because this construction uses the substantival adjective—that is—the words “good” and “called” are adjectives being used as nouns.

For example, Jesus' prayer in Matthew 6:13 "deliver us from the evil one" is a substantival adjective. "Deliver us from the evil" doesn't just refer to some abstract evil—but the evil one. The devil.

The "called" is the group comprising those ones who are called to the group.

3. Who are the “called” and what is their destiny? The next two verses were not penned to start a theological debate on the nature of God’s foreknowledge, predestination, calling, etc. Paul included them to give us further encouragement in the midst of suffering and the various challenges to our faith.

Rom 8:29–30 “For those he **foreknew** he also **predestined** to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also **called**; and those he called, he also **justified**; and those he justified, he also **glorified**.” Now, he does introduce some theological terminology here that we need to make part of our vocabulary as Christians. We just need to know what these terms mean and how they bring encouragement to the believer whose present reality is characterized by suffering.

He gives us five terms and they appear in logical progression...

- “foreknown” (Gk. *proginosko*) “to know something beforehand, or in advance.” Now some people want to collapse predestination into foreknowledge. 1 Peter 1:2 he greets “God’s elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.” Here we see that same logical order—God foreknows that which he forechooses. Understand, knowing something in advance isn’t to cause it. Prior knowledge of an event doesn’t cause that event because knowledge is not a causal property. If you knew the world trade center would be attacked in exactly the fashion that they were attacked two hours prior, you would not have *caused* the attack. You just knew about it. This word does just mean to know any propositional fact beforehand.
- “predestined” (Gk. *prooridzo*) “to decide on beforehand, preordain.” While some have attempted to collapse predestination into foreknowledge, others have tried to redefine predestination to essentially mean “foreknowledge.”

Acts 4:27–28 “Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, **assembled together** against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, ²⁸ **to do whatever** your hand and your **will** had **predestined** to take place.” Two things: (1) **They did it**. God didn’t do it. They did. (2) **They did it according to the will of God**. Look at what God wills for believers. Eph 1:5, 11 “He **predestined** us to be **adopted as sons** through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will... In him we have also **received an inheritance**, because we were **predestined** according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will.”

- “called” (Gk. *kletos; kaleo; eklektos; ekklesia*) “to call by name, to be issued an invitation or a summons.” Now, this is the verbal form of the term *eklektos* which is where we get the term “elect.” Paul tells the Romans that God works everything

together for the good of those who love him, or rather, have first been loved by him, and who are *called* as God's elect according to his particular plan and purpose. This word is actually in the NT word for "Church" which is *ekklesia*—the *ekklesia* being a compound term of "ek/ex" from which we get the word "exit" and *kaleo* meaning "to call." The church consists of those who have been called out of the world and into a holy assembly/community.

- "justified" (Gk. *dikaioō*) "to render a favorable verdict; to release an accused party from legal liability to judgment." We have mentioned this word often in this book at least up to chapter 6. But let's note here the sequence—God foreknows us in eternity past, and he then predestines us to be conformed to the image of his Son in salvation and sanctification. And then he calls us out of the world to gather in a sacred assembly/church and justifies us before the bar of justice by grace through faith. It is on the basis of this calling and justification that no one including Satan, can bring an accusation against the elect of God (Rom 8:33).
- "glorified" (Gk. *doxadzo*) means "clothe in splendor." So then where is all this leading? It is leading on to glory. The believer receiving their adoption—the redemption of the body in resurrection glory.

That is who the "called ones" are; that is their destiny.

Addressing Issues and Objections

First, (for those who loathe this subject) this passage was intended for our encouragement—to give us the assurance that God finishes what he starts. If God began a good work in us he will be faithful to bring it on to completion until Jesus returns or we go home with Jesus. We are encouraged to know that our God is competent in his knowledge and choices.

Second, (for those of you who love studying predestination) if you love this doctrine more than you love people who are lost then you have missed the point of this text and the point of this book; frankly, your priorities are out of whack. When was the last time you actually shared the love and grace of Jesus with another human being?

Thirdly, (for those who genuinely want to understand this passage)—realize that there are truths revealed in the text that we *can learn and know*, and there are *limits to our knowledge on this subject*. “Simple foreknowledge,” “infralapsarian-supralapsarian” or Molinism, etc. I empathize with you; I feel your pain. But it’s the *Gospel* that is the power for salvation...

Now, in the next three chapters, Paul is going to unpack just about everything he knows on this subject. Some of it may surprise or even shock us—Paul isn’t frustrated or exasperated by it; he ends the discussion in worship and praise to God...

Rom 11:33–36 Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! ***How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways!***

³⁴ For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? ³⁵ And who has ever given to God, that he should be repaid? ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

Paul says, “There’s a constraint on our exploration of this beyond what God has revealed in his Word.” Because God’s wisdom and his judgments on this matter are unsearchable. His knowledge is untraceable.

I want to encourage you, don’t turn off your mind as we unpack these things in the coming weeks. And don’t hold on to your theories so tight-fisted that your mind remains closed to what the text teaches us. And be careful not to become so enamored with theories about all this that you lose sight of the Gospel itself.