

Pillars of a Precious Promise

I remember listening to an interview a few years ago with one of the astronauts who walked on the moon. He was asked "What did you think about as you stood on the moon and looked back at earth?" The astronaut replied, "I remembered how the spacecraft was built by the lowest bidder?" In other words he was glad he made it to the moon, but now would he make it back home.

Sadly, that's how some Christians feel. They think, "OK I'm saved today, I've come this far, but will I make it home?" Well, as Christians we can rejoice that the work of salvation did not go to the lowest bidder! Our salvation was accomplished through the love, grace, wisdom and power of our infinite and holy God working in His Son Jesus Christ.

Today we are going to focus on one of the most powerful and precious promises made in the Bible. It is the promise that in all of life God is at work for our ultimate good. And He will continue His work for our good until we receive our full salvation in Christ.

The promise is in Romans 8. And Romans 8 begins with the bold statement that there is now no condemnation from God to those who are in Christ. We then learn that the Spirit of God is within us giving us divine power, wisdom and life. Then we are told that we are children of God and heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ Jesus. But then suddenly the subject of suffering comes up.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time
are not worthy to be compared with the glory which
shall be revealed in us.

(Romans 8:18)

Now, why after telling us that the power of the holy Spirit is in us and that we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ does God bring up suffering? The answer is God is a realist. He doesn't want us to live in a fantasy world. He doesn't want us to think that being saved saves us from life's sometimes deep troubles. God knows life can be difficult and harsh. Yet He wants us to know that our final reward will far outweigh whatever troubles we face. Therefore we can go through life with Christ like character. And the Spirit of God will empower us in prayer and in patient endurance. Then in verse 28 we come to the first part of a great and precious promise.

And we know that all things work together for good to

those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.
(Romans 8:28)

A more accurate translation of this verse would be, "And we know that **in all things** God works for the good of those who love Him." You see it is not that *all things* work together for good in and of themselves. But in all things God works for those who love Him, for those who are called according to His purpose.

There is nothing here for the general optimist who says, "Oh don't worry, it will all work out." At best that is wishful thinking. And at the worst it is delusional. Evil things are what they are—evil. But the heart of this promise is that although bad situations are still bad, they have lost their power to ultimately defeat us and rob us of God's love and salvation. No matter how bitter or tough life may get, as believers in Christ we can discover the hand of God working for our good.

Have you ever seen a beautiful tapestry? When you look at the back of the art work there is just a tangle of threads. But when you look at the front you can see that the tangles of threads have produced a beautiful work of art. In the same way our lives are not the result of blind chance. There is a divine artist at work in our lives. God is ruling and overruling to bring the tapestry of our lives into conformity to His good will.

Now, this can seem scary, because we can't always see the hand of God at work in our lives: we cannot see the end from the beginning and so we worry. On the other hand there is still a part of us that wants to rebel. We are not too sure that we really want God to be the behind the scenes director of our lives. But, the alternate is exceedingly more frightful. This is because if God is not ultimately at work in our lives then Satan is. Paraphrasing 1 John 5:19 we read "We know that we are of God, but the rest of the world is caught in the powerful, seductive, destructive embrace of the wicked one."

So our lives are either being guided by the hand of God or we are being seduced and deceived by Satan. The promise here in Romans 8:28 is that God is at work in our lives for our ultimate good. This is why Proverbs 3:5, 6 tells us to,

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.

And now we come to the five pillars of God's grace that support the promise of God doing you good and bringing you to full glory.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

(Romans 8:29, 30)

These verses begin with the word "For" and this word gives us the reason why verse 28 is sure and certain. It stands on five strong pillars of grace which are: 1) God's foreknowledge of us, 2) His predestination of us, 3) His calling us, 4) His justifying us and 5) His glorifying us.

The first pillar is God's foreknowledge of you. Verse 29 says "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." There has been a debate over the centuries about what it means for God to have a foreknowledge of you. Some people believe that God in His foreknowledge specifically chooses you for salvation. I don't think this is accurate. I believe that God simply knows that you will believe.

And so if God knows you as one of His people, then he has determined that your ultimate end will be a glorious one! And everything that God foreknows and determines comes to pass. In Isaiah 46 we read,

Remember the former things of old,
For I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like Me,
¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things that are not yet done,
Saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
And I will do all My pleasure,'
(Isaiah 46:9, 10)

And earlier in Isaiah God said, "The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying, 'Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, And as I have purposed, so it shall stand.'"¹

Therefore, God's foreknowledge of you, as a believer guarantees your full salvation and that in all things He will work for your good. Why? Well, if God

¹ Isaiah 14:24

foreknew you, if He had foreknowledge of you as one of His own, how could that knowledge be wrong? God doesn't see you in His foreknowledge as a Christian and then wake up one morning surprised that you are a Buddhist!

No, in the beginning, before the foundation of the earth, God saw you as a believer in Christ. He knows the end from the beginning. And on that sure and certain pillar of God's foreknowledge we move on to the second pillar of grace.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.
(Romans 8:29)

The second pillar is that God who foreknew us also predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son. God has a purpose for our lives. God's goal is not just to forgive us of our sins and get us into His kingdom by the skin of our teeth. He desire for us to be fully like Christ.

So #1, God knows me as one of His own from beginning to end. And because I am His He purposes to make me fully like Christ as much as possible now and fully in the future. Now if it is still possible for me to fall away and to lose my salvation than what was the point of predestining me to be like Christ? There would be no point at all; it would be futile. But #1 God knows that I am His through Christ and #2, because of that knowledge He predestines the goal of my salvation, which is to be like Christ. Then the third pillar of grace that holds up the promise of Romans 8:28 is our calling.

Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called;
(Romans 8:30a)

Again, if God foreknew that you would be called and that you would believe and then not believe, why would He call you? It makes His purpose then chaotic and pointless. But God's calling is not pointless. Look at the following verses from 1 Corinthians.

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,⁵ that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,⁶ even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,⁷ so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,⁸ who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son,

Jesus Christ our Lord.
(1 Corinthians 1:4-9)

Isn't that wonderful? Isn't it comforting to know that the called will hear and believe and that God will "confirm" or strengthen us to the end and that God **is faithful** to those who He has called? God knows all those who are His. And He predestines them to glory. Then at the right time He calls us to salvation. And when we respond in faith to the call we are justified. This is the fourth pillar.

Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called;
whom He called, these He also justified;
(Romans 8:30b)

To be justified is to be cleansed of all our sins by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. You are saved and secure in your salvation because it is God who justified you when you believed.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us,
who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare His own
Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with
Him also freely give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring a
charge against God's elect? *It is God who justifies.*
(Romans 8:31, 33)

It is God who justifies you, because he has accepted Christ's sacrifice on your behalf! And there is not suggestion anywhere in the Bible that this justification is conditional. So if there is a possibility that a true believer may finally fall away and not be saved then God has made an error in declaring that person just and righteous.

I am not saying that there are not counterfeit Christians, there are. But God has not called these people, they are party crashers and their deeds will soon show them for who they are. And I am not saying that true believers cannot stumble and sin and fall, they can, we all do, I do, but we will always get back up. Proverbs 24:16 says "a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again."

Those whom God foreknew He predestined and called and justified. And those who are justified are all glorified. It is a done deal as far as God is concerned. Why? Jeremiah 32:40 states that God will never turn away from doing you good. And in Romans 8:28 we are told that in all things God will work for our good. We will be glorified. This is the fifth pillar that upholds Romans 8:28.

Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called;

whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.
(Romans 8:30)

In the Greek text this is written in the aorist tense. It is the past tense with ongoing results. If God has foreknown us as His people then He has already glorified us in His purposes.

Now glorification does not belong to this life, but to the life to come after Christ returns. So glorification cannot be a temporary condition. We will be glorified when we are fully conformed to the image of Christ. Here is what the apostle Paul wrote in Colossians.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.² Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.⁴ When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.
(Colossians 3:1-4)

So if glorification occurs when Christ returns, beyond this life, beyond the grave, beyond anything we can do in this world, then those whom God has called and justified and glorified can never be lost! Nowhere in Scripture does it say you can become unglorified. It is impossible for a true believer to fall away and slip out of God's loving embrace.

Five pillars of grace support our salvation in Christ and the promise that in all things God works for our ultimate good. God has given to us new life and a sure hope in Christ. To suggest that we can be lost is to say that God's work can be undone and that can never be. Praise God!