

Start your study here

Read Read, Record, Reflect, Respond

Prayerfully	Conscious dependence
Reflectively	Constantly
Extensively	Background issues Big Idea Basic structure and flow Broad strokes
Creatively	Imagination and View points
Intensively	Questions: Who, What, Where, When, Why, How. . .
	R epeated A like D ifferent A ccentuated R elated
Specifically	Purposefully—with the view of the author in mind
Effectively	By unit of thought— Think Context! Details, ask questions

Romans 8:26-30

- 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us
in our weakness.
For we do not know
what to pray for as we ought,
but the Spirit himself intercedes for us
with groanings too deep for words.
- 27 And he who searches hearts
knows what is the mind of the Spirit,
because the Spirit intercedes for the saints
according to the will of God.
- 28 And we know
that
for those who love God
all things work together for good,
for those who are called according to his purpose.
- 29 For those whom
he foreknew
he also predestined
to be conformed to the image of his Son,
in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
- 30 And those whom he predestined
he also called,
and those whom he called
he also justified,
and those whom he justified
he also glorified. (ESV)

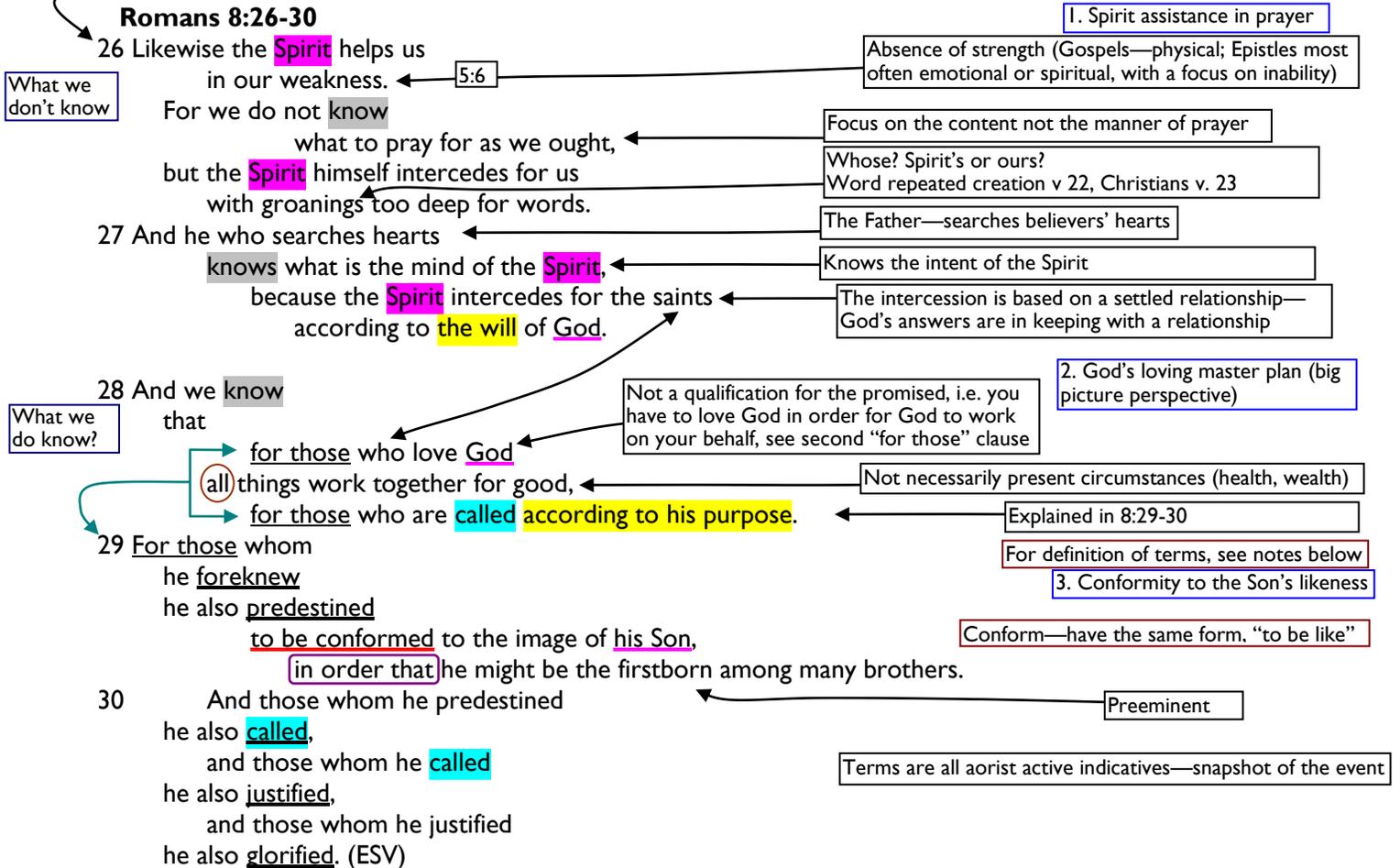
Review: Believers have a new relationship in the sphere of righteousness (6:1-14) as slaves of God rather than sin (6:14-23), and need to understand their total inability by their own will power to overcome sin's seductive pull (7:1-25). They must remember they have been adopted into God's family (8:12-17) and are provided the presence of the indwelling Spirit to empower the transformation process (8:1-11) which might (will) take place in the presence of suffering.

Observations: 1) identify the two sections 2) look for the primary point—how do you know it is the “the point” 3) notice parallels and flow

Key Question: What should we pray for? When do you not know what to pray for?
Is God reactive or proactive? How sovereign is God? What is God's greatest goal for us?
Do you live in the present, past or future? Why?

Context: Hope in the midst of suffering
Connection: Spirit assists/sustains our hope while we wait for our ultimate redemption

Romans 8:26-30



God has a purpose for everything that happens—and it is eventually for our good	8:28
8:18-25, 26-27; example 2 Corinthians 1:3-11	
God has a specific purpose for us—to conform us to the image of Christ	8:29
God has an ultimate purpose for us—to glorify us, to complete what He has begun	8:30

Working Idea (this is to help you see how the main idea was developed)

Two related thoughts explaining how we eagerly await our final salvation even in the midst of suffering:

- The Spirit intercedes for us
- God’s unbreakable promises

Main idea:

We are able to endure suffering as we longingly await the completion of our salvation through the assistance of the Spirit and the assurance of God’s purposeful activity on our behalf.

Teaching idea:

This is one of the shorter passages we have looked at. That should give us the luxury of not only going deeper but more importantly, of processing this wonderful passage in a way that allows it to go deeper into us.

There are a number of potential approaches to this passage. One is completely theological—and you will see discussion of the theological issues in the notes. A second approach is completely practical—focusing on the benefits of God’s sovereignty. I believe both need to be considered. The theology in this passage, which has caused much division, was intended to encourage.

You will note many interactive questions throughout this lesson—these questions are intended to keep the focus practical.

Introduction



Is God reactive or proactive?
How sovereign is God?

What is God’s greatest goal for us?

Do you live in the present, past or future? Why?

What is freedom? What does it mean to be free—to have free will?
The power to live free for some means they become prisoners of their choices and lose freedom, or they become consumed by the consequences of their choices.

What should we pray for?
When do you not know what to pray for?



Review

In chapter 6, Paul taught us that believers are dead to the controlling authority (domination) of sin (6:1-14) and that we must be slaves to God (6:15-25). We have been transferred from the realm of sin to the realm of righteousness; we are not in a neutral state.

In chapter 7, Paul explained that neither the Law nor our will is capable of overcoming the allure of sin. Our struggle with present sin—even though we are dead to sin and dead to the Law (7:1-6), is heightened through the Law which arouses in us desires by making something forbidden. On our own we have a great struggle with sin and an inability to overcome sin (7:13-25). We are therefore incapable of either doing what we desire to do, or what we do not want to do.

Chapter 8 has 19 references to the Spirit—it is the Spirit that enables the believer to walk in a manner that pleases God.

We are children of God, with the presence of the indwelling Spirit to enable us to overcome sin—but the motivation is relationship, not rules. We have an intimate relationship with our adopted Father (Abba) which should motivate us to maintain that relationship even when suffering, in light of the wonders yet to come of our ultimate salvation and glorification.

Summary

Romans 8:12-25 emphasized the need for the Spirit to be the governing authority. In Romans 8:26-30 Paul provides hope for believers through the individual ministry of the Spirit and the sovereign plan of God.

Even when we do not know what to pray for (as we struggle) the Spirit intercedes for us. And in spite of the suffering we may experience, what God began in Christ and through the indwelling presence of the Spirit, will result in the believer’s glorification.

Overview / Preview

This section (Romans 8:26-30) is part of a large paragraph (8:18-30) which focuses on the hope of glory (8:18, 30), and which draws attention to our present longing (eagerly waiting 8:19, 23, 25) for the time when our status as children of God (15-17) is finalized—but now we must wait patiently. “In the same way” or “Likewise”—that is, just as we are waiting patiently because of the hope of glory—Paul now gives two more reasons why we should hope patiently and eagerly. We will spend more of our time on the last one.

Reasons why believers should endure the present suffering:

Because the future glory far exceeds the present suffering 8:18-25

Because of the present assistance of the Holy Spirit 8:26-27

Because God works all things according to His plan with the purpose of conforming us to the image of God 8:28-30

Catch Phrase / Key Phrase:

“according to His purpose”

“conformed to the image of His Son”

Outline

I. Doctrine: Justification—The Righteousness of God Revealed 1:18–11:36

God’s Gracious Provision of Righteousness is Acquired by Faith in Jesus Christ

A. The Need of It 1:18–3:20 *What a Mess!*

The Righteousness of God Revealed in Condemnation: The Universal Need of Righteousness
The Bad News: All condemned for sin—no exceptions

B. What It Is 3:21–5:21

What a God—The Way of Salvation

Justification: The imputation of righteousness to all who believe

C. How It Affects Me 6:1–8:39

Sanctification: The Impartation of Righteousness

The Purpose of Salvation: Conformity to Christ’s Image

	6:1 Principle	7:7 Practice	8:1 Power
Key Subject	Surrender	Self	Spirit

1. Believer and Sin 6:1-23
 - a. Believer’s Freedom from Sin’s Domination 6:1-14
 - b. Believer’s Enslavement to God’s Righteousness 6:15-23
2. Believer and the Law 7:1-25
 - a. Believer’s Freedom from the Law 7:1-6
 - b. The Law’s Relationship to Sin and Death 7:7-25
3. **Believer and the Holy Spirit 8:1-39**

The believer's relationship to the Holy Spirit gives assurance of victory in Christian life.¹
 To have victory over sin—you must live in the Spirit.

Or
 Believer's freedom in Christ 8:1-11
 Believer's responsibility in Christ 8:12-30

- a. Victory Today: Living by the Spirit 8:1-17
The Spirit's Enablement for Sanctification
 - (1) Believer's Freedom in Christ through the Spirit 8:1-11
 - (a) Life in the Spirit freed believers from condemnation 8:1-4
 - (b) Life in the Spirit contrasted to life in the flesh 8:5-11
 - (2) The Believer's New Relationship to God—living by the Spirit, putting to death the deeds of the flesh 8:12-17
- a. Hope Today: Truths that Sustain 8:18-30
The believer is to endure the present sufferings in light of the incomparable future glory in which he will partake.²
 - (1) The Believer's Present Suffering and Future Hope 8:18-25
 - *Endure because the future glory far exceeds the present suffering*
 - (a) Perspective on suffering 8:18-21
 - (b) Perspective on patience 8:22-25
 - (1) 8:26-30
 - (a) The Spirit praying for us 8:26-27
 - *Endure because of the present assistance of the Holy Spirit*
 - (b) God's eternal purpose in Christ: The transformation of the believer 8:29-30
 - *Endure because God works all things according to His plan with the purpose of conforming us to the image of God*

Exposition / Key Exegetical Issues to be aware of



What should we pray for?
 When do you not know what to pray for?



8:26-27 The Holy Spirit ministers to us in our suffering

The reason why the believer should endure the present suffering is because of the present assistance of the Holy Spirit.³

- 8:18-25 dealt with Suffering and Support
- 8:26-27 deals with Weakness and Help

The ministry of the Spirit to the believer also is related to his prayer life inasmuch as he needs to be guided in his prayer life, burdened by the love of God for others, and constrained to become involved in the prayer needs of those about him. According to Romans 8:26, the Spirit also intercedes for Christians "with groanings which cannot be uttered." Inasmuch as the Spirit is ministering to the believer as well as interceding for him, He can guide and direct the effective prayer exercise of a believer, presenting his petitions and worship to the Lord.

The ministry of the Spirit to the believer in all of these things--teaching, guiding, assuring, inspiring worship, and guiding prayer--is vitally related to the spiritual life and holiness of the individual believer and affects the quality of his life as it reflects the holiness of God.⁴

¹ Dr. Harold W. Hoehner's outline (DTS, Spring 1991, Exegesis of Romans 206, unpublished class notes)

² Dr. Harold W. Hoehner's outline (DTS, Spring 1991, Exegesis of Romans 206, unpublished class notes)

³ Dr. Harold W. Hoehner's outline (DTS, Spring 1991, Exegesis of Romans 206, unpublished class notes)

8:26

When facing suffering or trials, we want to pray for deliverance—but is that what we should pray for?

Notice 8:28-29 clearly provides God’s purpose for us—is it health, happiness and prosperity?
Or is it much more significant?

God desires to conform us to His Son—to produce holiness more than happiness (more on this when we get to 8:29).

“weakness” –same word used in 5:6.

The explanation of our “weakness” could simply be related to our general inability or as the text seems to indicate—in the face of suffering, we don’t know what to pray. The text might be chiasmic.

- A The Spirit helps
- B in our weakness.
- B’ For we do not know what to pray for as we ought,
- A’ but the Spirit intercedes with unspeakable groanings.⁵

Christians are inadequate when it comes to knowing what to pray. However, they are assured that they never pray alone! The indwelling Spirit helps them in a positive way with their problem of prayer-ignorance, by praying along with them. By supplementing their pitiful prayers, He brings them into complete harmony with the will of God. This takes place every time a Christian prays, even if He is unaware of the Spirit's intercession.

However, much of what is commonly labeled prayer is not prayer at all. Simply getting out a prayer list and mechanically mouthing pious-sounding generalities absolutely devoid of earnestness or urgency is not prayer, according to the Bible. Simply reciting the Lord's Prayer in a church service without mental or emotional involvement comes closer to being labeled vain repetitions than true prayer. Such so-called prayer does not have the cooperative intercessory help of the Holy Spirit for the simple reason that it is not really Christian praying.⁶

“Groaning”

The Spirit intercedes for us, communicating our groanings to God. He conveys to God what we cannot put into words, and He also intercedes with requests which are consistent with the will of God. When we cannot speak, the Spirit speaks for us, to God. The Holy Spirit is the communicative link between our own heart and the heart of God. He ministers to us in our present weakness.⁷

Since this term has caused a debate within the Church and some have reinterpreted this passage through the eyes of 1 Corinthians 12-14, I’m included some material for clarification:

Despite the appeal of seeing a reference to glossolalia, there are decisive reasons for rejecting this interpretation.⁵ (1) The term ἀλάλητος could mean that which cannot be uttered in words, but it much more likely means “without speech,” the absence of any vocalization at all. This seems to be the most natural way of translating a word that negates a word for speech. (2) The word στεναγμός is not necessarily meant literally; that is, the groaning may not be audible. That groaning may be metaphorical is evident from the reference to the

⁴John F. Walvoord, *Contemporary Issues in Doctrine of the Holy Spirit-Part III: New Morality* Bib Sac-- Vol 130 #519 -- Jul 1973 -- 220-221.

⁵Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 442.

⁶Curtis C. Mitchell, *The Holy Spirit's Intercessory Ministry*, Bib Sac Vol 139 #555 -- Jul 1982 -- p. 239.

⁷Robert Deffinbaugh, ©1996 by Community Bible Chapel, 210 Abrams Road, Richardson, TX 75081, www.bible.org.
Lesson 22

⁵Most scholars still do not see a reference to tongues speaking. See especially Schlatter 1995: 191; Wedderburn 1975; Osten-Sacken 1975: 272–74; Wilckens 1980: 161–62; Obeng 1983–84: 362; O’Brien 1987: 70–71; Dunn 1988a: 477–78; Moo 1991: 561–62.

groaning of creation in verse 22. Indeed, the groaning in verse 26 must be metaphorical in some sense because the text says that it is the “Spirit” who groans. Nowhere else in the Bible does the Holy Spirit audibly groan, and thus a literal meaning here is not likely. One might reply that the Holy Spirit’s groaning is expressed through the groaning of believers (cf. Rom. 8:15–16; 1 Cor. 14:14–15). This is probably the case, but even in that case the groaning is not necessarily audible. The point could be that believers have longings that are so deep that they are inexpressible. (3) The most serious objection to a reference to tongues speaking is that Rom. 8:26–27 refers to all Christians, while tongues speaking is reserved to only a few.⁶ There is no evidence in verses 26–27 that any believers are excluded from the assistance of the Spirit described here. Indeed, it would destroy the entire argument of chapter 8 if any believers were outside the pale of what Paul says⁸

It seems more likely to me that the groanings are genuinely those of believers that originate from the Holy Spirit (so Schlatter 1995: 190–91; Murray 1959: 312; O’Brien 1987: 70–73; Stott 1994: 244–45). These groanings are not audible. They are the inexpressible longings that arise in every believer’s heart to do and know the will of God. That the groanings arise in the hearts of believers is suggested by verse 27, which says that “God searches the hearts.” This is most naturally understood to refer to the hearts of believers. God searches the hearts of believers and finds unutterable longings to conform their lives to the will of God. The Holy Spirit takes these groanings and presents them before God in an articulate form. Even though believers cannot specify their requests to God adequately since they do not know his will sufficiently, the Holy Spirit translates these groanings and conforms them to God’s will.⁹

Point: Our weakness, Paul says, is that we do not have an adequate grasp on the will of God. This is developed in 8:27.

8:27 The Spirit’s intercession on behalf of the believer in keeping with God’s will
“according to the will of God”

Aside: Will of God

Providential—things that God has determined He will do, not dependent on our prayer or desire but accomplished through people

Galatians 4:4; Revelation 20:11-15;

Moral—that which God has instructed all people to do and not to do

1 Thessalonians 4:3; 1 Peter 2:15

These are things that you don’t have to pray about—should I lie, should I pay my taxes? etc. The more we know and apply the moral will of God, the easier it is to discern the personal will of God.

Personal—guidance based on His Providential and Moral will

Proverbs 3:3-7 (5-6)

God often uses wise counsel to help us know His will

The problem is not God’s direction or willingness to share His will, the problem is usually our willingness to do it—God reveals His will, not for consideration but for obedience—participation/ actions. And God usually waits until we are at the point that our answer to Him is “Yes” even before we know the “what.” “My answer is yes, not matter what you want.” God is more interested in us knowing Him, not what we do.

Summary

Believers should take tremendous encouragement that the will of God is being fulfilled in their lives despite their weakness and inability to know what to pray for. God’s will is not being frustrated because of the weakness of believers. It is being fulfilled because the Spirit is

⁶This is the objection of most commentators; see, e.g., Schniewind 1952: 82.

⁸Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 445.

⁹Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 446.

interceding for us and invariably receiving affirmative answers to his pleas. The deepest longings (groanings) of our heart are to accomplish the will of God. The Spirit, Paul teaches, is carrying out these desires via his intercessory ministry. We can see how nicely this fits with the next verses, where Paul teaches that all things work together for good and that God has designed all things so that we are conformed to the image of his Son. No wonder all things are working out for our good—the Spirit is effectively praying for us so that the will of God will be accomplished in our lives.¹⁰

Application:

- ❶ God can distinguish the intent and the actual specific request
- ❷ No prayer goes unanswered and the Spirit’s prayers are answered “yes”
- ❸ **Ephesians 3:20** Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, (ESV)

8:28-30 God’s eternal purpose in Christ: The transformation of the believer

Eternal Plan

The ministry of the Sovereign God

*The reason why the believer should endure the present sufferings is because God works all things so that the believer is being conformed to the image of Christ.*¹¹

Interactive questions

Is God reactive or proactive?

How sovereign is God?



Talk about it

What is God’s greatest goal for us?

Do you live in the present, past or future? Why?

What is freedom? What does it mean to be free—to have free will?

The power to live free for some means they become prisoners of their choices and lose freedom. OR they become consumed by the consequences of their choices.

Please note that this most encouraging and often misused verse (8:28) is in a larger context. The preceding context is one of anticipation of final salvation in the midst of trouble. So the context requires an eternal perspective. The following context paints a picture of God’s eternal plan—a plan we will see is not only purposeful but unbreakable. That is, there are aspects which God guarantees will happen. One key question we will need to ask is, “what is my role?”

8:28 Hope in Suffering: The Sovereign Involved God

God’s working for the Believer

God’s working out His Purpose

It is clear from the context (the suffering of the believer) that “the good” described in 8:28 is not necessarily what we desire, what seems good from our perspective but more likely, what is best in conforming us to the image of Christ—which is our ultimate good—resulting in our glorification.

In explaining the meaning of “good,” Moo states,

Many interpreters insist that it has a very specific meaning in the context: eschatological glory.

The “good,” these scholars argue, is “defined” in vv. 29-30 as consisting in our ultimate conformity—in heaven—to the image of Christ and the glory that will then be ours. While,

¹⁰Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 446.

The personality of the Holy Spirit is emphasized in this text. In both verses 26 and 27 he “intercedes” for the saints and this is possible only for a person. His personality is evident also in the word φρόνημα, for only a person possesses a mind. The text also indicates distinctions between the Father and the Spirit (cf. Niederwimmer 1964: 252, 265). The Spirit intercedes to the Father for the saints, and it is the Spirit’s mind that the Father discerns when he searches the hearts of believers.

¹¹ Dr. Harold W. Hoehner’s outline (DTS, Spring 1991, Exegesis of Romans 206, unpublished class notes)

however, Paul's focus in on this completion of our salvation, we should probably include in the word those "good" things in this life that contribute to that final salvation and sustain us on the path to that salvation. Certainly Paul does not mean that the evil experienced by believers in this life will always be reversed, turned into "good." For many things that we suffer will contribute to our "good" only by refining our faith and strengthening our hope. In any case, we must be careful to define "good" in God's terms, not ours. The idea that this verse promises the believer material wealth or physical well-being, for instance, betrays a typically Western perversion of "good" into an exclusively material interpretation. God may well use trials in these areas to produce what he considers a much higher "good": a stronger faith, a more certain hope (cf. 5:3-4). But the promise to use is that there is nothing in this world that is not intended by God to assist us on our earthly pilgrimage and to bring us safely and certainly to the glorious destination of that pilgrimage.¹²

Most probable is the view that God is the intended subject of the verb *συνεργεῖ* [*sunergei*]: "He works together with all things unto good." Clearly Paul's thought is not that "all things" as impersonal realities by themselves work together constructively; rather it is God's providential working in and through these various things that assures that all things work together for good. This is expressly asserted when ὁ θεός [*ho theos*] is placed into the text. "This certainty," Grundmann remarks, "which is proper to all Jewish piety and derives from its consciousness of God, acquires here its fulness from the action of God."²⁰ This reading of Romans 8:28 is strongly supported by Paul's assertion in Philippians 1:6.

The present tense verb *συνεργεῖ* [*sunergei*] declares God's continuing activity in working all things "unto good" in the lives of His people. "For good" (εἰς ἀγαθόν) [*eis agathon*] denotes the goal of the divine working, but the verb does not indicate when or how soon that goal is attained. The verb may mean that God "cooperates with" all these things to attain His goal for His own, but the expression εἰς ἀγαθόν suggests that in the providence of God all things "work together with or cooperate in" the achievement of the intended "good." Watson suggested a medical analogy: "Several poisonous ingredients put together, being tempered by the skill of the apothecary, make a sovereign medicine, and work together for the good of the patient. So all God's providences, being divinely tempered and sanctified, work together for the best to the saints."²¹

The "good" that God works to bring about in the lives of His people is not just a physical good, such as food, comfort, health, or pleasures of one kind or another experienced in this life. God works to fulfill His "purpose" for His own as outlined in verse 29. Thus Dunn remarks, "In the context here, where Paul has in view the eschatological climax which God has purposed for 'all things,' the ἀγαθόν will have an eschatological reference (cf. 14:16)."²²¹³

Applicational Caution

This verse is absolutely true, but we often use it in inappropriate ways. Some times when we see a difficult situation—the untimely death of an individual, the unexpected loss of a job, a health crisis, etc., we want to encourage people. But to simply quote the truth of Romans 8:28 may not be what a friend or family members needs. They may simply need compassion, understanding, love and silence.

Romans 8:28 promises that God is good and what comes our way will eventually work for good. But it does not eliminate or diminish pain. Suffering hurts.

Romans 8:28 gives prospective, but it is a long term perspective.

It might be good to these the promises of Romans 8:28 in the light of our own development from purposelessness and foolishness through faithfulness and perseverance leading to wisdom. This

¹² Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) pp. 529-530.

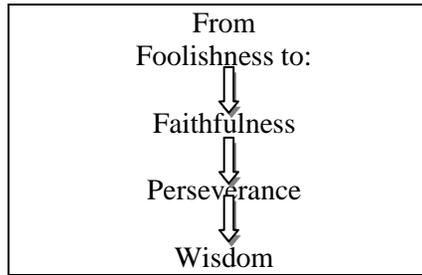
²⁰ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "ἀγαθός," by Walter Grundmann, 1:17.

²¹ Watson, *All Things for Good*, p. 11.

²² Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, p. 481.

¹³D. Edmond Hiebert, *Romans 8:28-29 and the Assurance of the Believer*, Bib Sac, Vol 148 #590 - Apr 1991, pp. 175-176.

perseverance and wisdom enabled by the Spirit assist us to look beyond our circumstance to God’s purpose.¹⁴



“who are called according to His **purpose**”

Purpose—κατὰ πρόθεσιν [*kata prothesin*] plan, purpose, resolve, will, “an act of setting forth.”

The noun πρόθεσιν (literally, “an act of setting forth”) here denotes God’s pretemporal purpose, which is now working in and through history and moving toward the accomplishment of His intended goal. God, not men, determines the nature and progressive development of that purpose. He has taken the initiative in the lives of these individuals, not only inviting them but also effectively calling them in accord with His purpose for them. As a result they now are the subjects of the outworking of His purpose, and as such are the “called” (κλητῶν). As Lenski notes, “The verbal is passive and involves God as the agent who called and the gospel as the divine means and the power by which he called.”¹⁵

Ephesians 1:11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, (ESV)

Ephesians 3:11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, (ESV)

2 Timothy 1:9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, (ESV)

John 13:7 Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” (ESV)

Romans 9:11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— (ESV)

Called κλητός [*klatos*] call, urgently invite, summon, invitation to the kingdom

God is the agent, we are passive

“who” –deals with the character of this distinctive group

For illustrations of hope in suffering see:

Job

Job 2:10; 42:1-6

Joseph

Genesis 39-40; 50:15-21

Paul

Colossians 1:14

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

1 Corinthians 15

2 Corinthians 11:16–12:10

8:29-30 Certainty of Glorification: The Eternal Plan of God

¹⁴ Concept adapted from Erwin Raphael McManus, *Uprising: A Revolution of the Soul*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003).

¹⁵D. Edmond Hiebert, *Romans 8:28-29 and the Assurance of the Believer*, *Bib Sac*, Vol 148 #590 - Apr 1991, pp. 178, quoting Lenski *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 553-54.

Paul expounds God’s plan in four parallel clauses, in which Paul repeats key verbs as a way of connecting them closely together. He thereby creates what has been called a “golden chain” and has furnished theologians throughout the history of the church with rich material for the construction of a doctrine of soteriology—particularly for its earliest (predestination) and latest (perseverance) stages. While such application is entirely justified, we must remember that (1) Paul does not intend to give a complete picture of his, still less of the NT, soteriology; and (2) these verses have a definite role to play in the argument of this chapter.¹⁶

The terms: foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified are all aorist active indicatives.

Observations¹⁷:

The aorist tense sees events as a snapshot, it sees an event or occurrence in summary fashion, as a whole

In the indicative the aorist tense usually indicates past action (but it is saying too much to claim that the aorist means “once-for-all”)

On rare occasions the aorist indicative is used to describe a future event as completed—as in 8:30 “glorified”

Proleptic (Futuristic) Aorist

A. Definition

The aorist *indicative* can be used to describe an event that is not yet past as though it were already completed. This usage is not at all common, though several exegetically significant texts involve possible proleptic aorists.

B. Clarification

An author sometimes uses the aorist for the future to stress the certainty of the event. It involves a “rhetorical transfer” of a future event as though it were past.^{29 18}

8:29 Immediate Purpose: The sanctification of the believer

Transition

“for” –ὅτι [*hoti*] reason, this begins the delineation of God’s comprehensive activities and ultimate purpose.¹⁹ Explains how 8:28 can be true.

“those”

Notice in verse 29-30 “those whom” (repetition)

God’s plan is related to individuals. It is the person, not the state or condition that Paul is referring to. Paul is seeking to encourage and provide individual Christians with assurance.

God’s Sovereignty: the right to rule because of Who He is

“The sovereignty of God thus expresses the very nature of God as all-powerful and omnipotent, able to accomplish his good pleasure, carry out his decreed will, and keep his promises.”²⁰

Definition of terms

Caution: We have to be careful not to superimpose an English definition onto a Greek word.

“foreknew”

προγνωσκω – to know beforehand, choose beforehand (in 8:29 aorist active indicative—something viewed as having been done)

¹⁶ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) pp. 531-532.

¹⁷ This is a very basic summary of the aorist primarily drawn from Dan Wallace.

²⁹ Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 269. See his discussion on 269–74.

¹⁸ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the Greek New Testament*, electronic ed. (Garland, TX: Galaxie Software, 1999, c1996).

¹⁹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Romans 8:28-29 and the Assurance of the Believer*, Bib Sac, Vol 148 #590 - Apr 1991, pp. 179.

²⁰ Walter A. Elwell, Ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984.

*Meaning*²¹

“His foreknowledge is of persons, not of their state or conduct; it is not what, but whom He foreknew.”³¹ The Greek verb “foreknew” (προέγνω) means “to know in advance, to foreknow.” The preposition προ does not change the meaning of the verb (γινώσκω); it only dates the knowledge. God’s knowledge of those He chose goes back to eternity past (1 Pet 1:2, 20). In His omniscience God knew, knows, and foreknew all men. But, unlike οἶδα, this verb does not imply mere intellectual apprehension; it also indicates an active and affectionate desire to bless. “That this character, in which they were foreknown to God, presupposes the subjection to faith (the ὑλακοῦ πίστεως, i.5), was self-evident to the Christian reader.”³² Paul’s focus in Romans 8:29 is on the terminus, not on the intermediate stages (cf. v. 30).²²

ginwvskw is equivalent to the Hebrew “to know,” to love, intimacy

The “purpose” of God is outlined in 8:29 – 30. God has instituted a series of actions that create, sustain, and bring his people to glory. The first action is the most controversial. The Greek verb “to foreknow” (*proginosko*) generally means to know something ahead of time. Some interpreters insist it must therefore mean that here as well. God “knew something” about us ahead of time, and on that basis, he “predestined” us. Usually what God is thought to have known is that a certain person will respond positively to the gospel and believe.

But the biblical use of “know” and “foreknow” creates a different picture. In Scripture God’s knowing often refers to his entering into relationship with someone. “You only have I known [NIV chosen] of all the families of the earth,” God claims ([Amos 3:2](#)). God knows everything *about* every family on earth, but Israel alone has he entered into relationship with. In four of its six New Testament occurrences, “foreknow” and its cognate noun, “foreknowledge,” has this sense ([Acts 2:23](#); [Rom. 11:2](#); [1 Peter 1:2](#); [3:17](#); cf. also [Acts 26:5](#); [2 Peter 3:17](#)). This is probably the meaning the verb has here. Adding to the probability of this interpretation is the fact that the verb has a personal object (“those”).

What Paul is saying, then, is that God’s plan for us began in a decision to enter into relationship with us. This led, in turn, to his decision to “predestine” us.²³

the Biblical meaning must be forethought, prearrangement, or predetermination. **Thus the Biblical meaning of foreknowledge is equivalent to foreordination, both describing the same act, one stressing the element of knowledge and the other that of will.** To say that God made a decision based on His prevision would mean that there was a time of indecision. This, of course, would be contrary to the nature of God and to the Biblical fact that the decree is eternal. Thus, God’s decree is from eternity past and the product of His knowledge and will.²⁴

Usage

Romans 11:2 God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? (ESV)

Acts 2:23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. (ESV)

1 Peter 1:2, 20 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you (ESV)

²¹For a more complete explanation see, Edgar C. James, *Is Foreknowledge Equivalent to Foreordination?* Bib Sac Vol 122 #487 -- Jul 1965 -- 215-219.

³¹William Kelly, *Notes on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (London: G. Morrish, 1873; reprint, n.d.), p. 153.

³²Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 335.

²²D. Edmond Hiebert, *Romans 8:28-29 and the Assurance of the Believer*, Bib Sac, Vol 148 #590 - Apr 1991, pp. 180.

²³Douglas J. Moo, NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: *Romans*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 2000.) 270.

²⁴Edgar C. James, *Is Foreknowledge Equivalent to Foreordination?* Bib Sac Vol 122 #487 -- Jul 1965 -- 219.

Notice that we are “called according to purpose, not according to foreknowledge, hence foreknowledge must be included in the electing purpose.”²⁵

So in the first verb Paul points to God’s initiative in the outworking of His plan or purpose.

“predestined”

προορίζω [*proorizo*]– decide upon beforehand, predestine, foreordain²⁶ (in 8:29 aorist active indicative—something that has been done)

In using this concept as the “second step” Paul is clearly making it the focus, for it is the one he explains—because it reveals God’s purpose.

Meaning

The simple verb ὀρίζω means “to mark out or determine the boundaries” (cf. the English “horizon”), hence “to determine or appoint.” Used of persons it means to set out or determine the goal or destiny of those foreknown; the preposition προ again marks this divine action as taking place in eternity past. The indicated action cannot be restricted to one point but covers all that is involved until the consummation of the goal. Again the indicated action relates to individual persons, not necessarily what happens to them. This predetermined goal cannot be separated from the fact of God’s self-motivated love for them.²⁷

Usage

1 Corinthians 2:7 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. (ESV)

Ephesians 1:5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (ESV)

Ephesians 1:11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, (ESV)

Goal of predestination

“to be (become) conformed to the image of His Son”

Dunn declares, “It is the sureness of the end as determined from the beginning which Paul wishes to emphasize.”²⁸

“conformed”— σύμμορφος (*summorphos*) pertaining to that which has a similar form or nature—of the same form

Philippians 3:21 who will transform our lowly body to be like [conformed] his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (ESV)

Romans 12:1-2 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed (συσχηματίζω *suzamatizo*) to this world, but be transformed (μεταμορφώω *metamorphoo*) by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (ESV)

2 Corinthians 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (ESV)

Titus 3:5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, (ESV)

“image”— the imprint on a coin

²⁵ *Expositors Bible Commentary*, Harrison, p. 98.

²⁶ Edgar C. James, *Is Foreknowledge Equivalent to Foreordination?* Bib Sac Vol 122 #487 -- Jul 1965 -- 215

“A related word is ὀρίζω [*horizo*] and means to “determine, appoint, fix, set.” It is used in Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; Acts 10:42; Acts 11:29; Acts 17:26, 31; Romans 1:4; and Hebrews 4:7.”

²⁷ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Romans 8:28-29 and the Assurance of the Believer*, Bib Sac, Vol 148 #590 - Apr 1991, pp. 180.

²⁸ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Romans 8:28-29 and the Assurance of the Believer*, Bib Sac, Vol 148 #590 - Apr 1991, pp. 180.

Thus the goal of God for His chosen sons is that they shall be conformed to and manifest something not merely like Christ but “what He is in Himself, both in His spiritual body and in His moral character.”²⁹

While some see this only as the ultimate transformation at the point of Christ’s return, the implication from the language and context seems to point to the progressive process.

Galatians 4:19 my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth **until Christ is formed in you!** (ESV)

Ephesians 4:13-15 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, **we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,** (ESV)

1 John 3:2-3 Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears **we shall be like him,** because we shall see him as he is. 3 **And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.** (ESV)

Remember the Context: Truths that sustain in present suffering

This blessed hope—that believers will be conformed to the image of His own Son—**explains God’s dealings with them as His chosen sons in this present age.** He is ever at work to reproduce the moral image of Christ in them. All that now comes into their lives He uses for their good to further that glorious goal. **His aim for them now is not to make them happy, materially prosperous, or famous, but to make them Christlike.** He now uses “all things,” the sad as well as the glad, the painful as well as the pleasant, the things that perplex and disappoint as well as the things they eagerly strive and pray for, to further His eternal purpose for them. **In His infinite wisdom He knows what is needed to bring about that transformation.** For some of His own He may need to use hotter fire and strike with harder blows than in His dealings with others to effect the formation of Christ’s image in them. This may be because some believers may be more resistant to His moulding activities or are more prone to insist on their own efforts.

When believers understand and accept the Father’s loving purpose of developing Christlikeness in them as His beloved children, thus preparing them for that future day when the blessed Savior will come again to take them home, then they can rejoice and thank Him for all He is doing in them. Christians may not now understand how all that comes into their lives works together for their good. Yet they can trust God’s love and unreservedly entrust themselves to Him. As they increasingly experience the reality of this profound Christian assertion from the pen of Paul, they can gladly join in proclaiming its reality to others.³⁰

“that He might be the first-born among many brothers”

Though believers are heirs with Christ and they will be transformed into the image of Christ, Christ will forever hold His preeminent position. He will remain distinct and unique.

He is the “first fruits” of those who will be resurrected and glorified.

Believers can look forward to glorification because Christ already has been glorified.

1 Corinthians 15:20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (ESV)

1 Corinthians 15:49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (ESV)

*God’s foreknowledge seems to be directed toward those people whom He has chosen; His predestination is directed toward the plan or the program He has foreordained for His people.*³¹

²⁹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Romans 8:28-29 and the Assurance of the Believer*, Bib Sac, Vol 148 #590 - Apr 1991, pp. 181.

³⁰ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Romans 8:28-29 and the Assurance of the Believer*, Bib Sac, Vol 148 #590 - Apr 1991, pp. 182. (Bold added)

³¹ Robert Deffinbaugh, www.bible.org, Lesson 24

Foreknowledge—emphasizes knowledge → active loving knowledge
Predestination—emphasizes will → active purposeful will

Summary

Thus, one can properly start with the proposition that spiritual formation, rightly understood, is first of all, above all, and throughout, the life shaping (i.e., "forming") work of the divine Holy Spirit, carried out according to the will of God the Father, for the purpose of conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ his Son (cf. also, e.g., Romans 12:1-2 and 2 Corinthians 3:17-18). Spiritual formation consists of the Trinitarian work of God in transforming the lives of genuine believers in Christ through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. A spiritual formation **ministry** is one that is devoted to stimulating and participating in this work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians through the ways and means revealed in scripture.³²

Application

So that we don't get overly caught up in the "theological" aspects of this passage—though they are rich with meaning and wonderfully encouraging—we must remember what it is Paul is trying to accomplish with this passage.

He is seeking to help believers understand how to live out the freedom from sin that they have been granted through faith in Christ's cross-work.

That is,

having told them of the bondage to and guilt of sin that all humanity is confined in (1:18-3:20) and the glory of salvation by grace through faith (3:21-5:20) and having challenged them with their new relationship in the sphere of righteousness (6:1-14) as slaves of God rather than sin (6:14-23), who need to understand their total inability to overcome sins seductive pull by their own will power (7:1-25) but they must remember they have been adopted into God's family (8:12-17) and provided the presence of the indwelling Spirit to empower the transformation process (8:1-11) in the face of suffering, God has a plan for their transformation, and as we will see next for their ultimate glorification.

So What?

Celebrate what God will do and wants to do now.

8:30 Ultimate Purpose: The Glorification of the Believer
God's glory
God's eternal decree

These are the steps involved in the realization of the divine purpose.

"called"

καλέω [*kaleo*] to ask a person to accept offered hospitality—'to invite' (not the same word as in 8:28)

God's gracious direct appeal to our hearts to respond in faith to His free offer of pardon and new life in the gospel of Christ. . . . Calling is God's application in time of His election before time.³³

Without God's intervention, we could not respond to the gospel.

³² Richard E. Averbeck, © "The Human Spirit in Spiritual Formation" (Spiritual Formation Study Group, ETS Revised 3/29/05).

³³ Alan F. Johnson, *Romans: Volume 2 The Freedom Letter*, Everyman's Bible Commentary, Chicago: Moody Press, 1985, p.37.

2 Thessalonians 2:14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (ESV)

Ephesians 1:4-5 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (ESV)

John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. (ESV)

John 6:65 And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” (ESV)

“justified”—declaration of righteousness, beginning the relationship

“glorified” — δοξάζω [*doxazo*] praise, honor, magnify, clothe in splendor

Key Point: Paul speaks of glorification in the past tense (aorist) because from God’s perspective it is already accomplished. Because of His sovereignty, omnipotence and plan, what He decided will be completed. But from our perspective, it is still future so we set Him as our hope—but not a passive hope, for our concern should be with 8:29, being transformed.

Meaning (*What does it mean to be glorified?*)

- 1) To be glorified is to enter into the blessings of the full glory of God which we now experience in part.
- (2) To be glorified is to receive our adoption as sons and the redemption of our bodies.
- (3) To be glorified is to be free from the corruption of sin and death.
- (4) To be glorified is to experience the goal for which we were chosen, called and justified.
- 5) To be glorified is to obtain that “good” for which God has been causing all things to work together (Romans 8:28).
- (6) To be glorified is to have a share in the glory which belongs to Israel.

Paul’s teaching in Romans related to glorification³⁴

- (1) Glory and glorification must be understood in relationship to each other. Our glorification is to be understood in the light of Paul’s teaching about glory in Romans.
- (2) Our glorification, while spoken of in the past tense, is yet future.
- (3) Our glorification involves the redemption of our bodies and our adoption as sons (8:17-25; 9:4).
- (4) Our glorification is certain (5:2), yet unseen (8:24-25).
- (5) Our present suffering is preparatory and prerequisite to our future glorification (5:17).
- (6) Our future glorification is God’s promised reward for the righteous, the “glory” of which Paul writes in Romans 2:7 and 10.
- (7) Our future glorification is an extension or expression of God’s glory (5:2).
- (8) The glory is that which God promised Israel and which Paul still speaks of as belonging to Israel (Romans 9:4).

Application:

- ❶ So what are you thankful for? What do you want to be (and anticipate being)?
- ❷ *The glory of God is the standard for our every thought and deed.*
I Corinthians 10:31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (ESV)
- ❸ *The glory of God is the perspective from which life should be viewed and lived out.*
- ❹ Begin with the End in Mind

Implications/Application

In Adam our world got messed up (all our world, mankind and all creation)
In Christ our future is glorious



³⁴Robert Deffinbaugh, www.bible.org, Lesson 25

Key Point

God's purpose for our lives is transformation into the image of His Son



What do we learn
About God?

Sovereign
Purposeful



Act on it

This passage clearly teaches that God is on our side. He desires to care for us, even when we suffer. He provides the Spirit to assist us in seeking Him and provides assurance that He is able to accomplish His plan in us.

Appendix: Foreknowledge

The five terms in Rom. 8:29–30—foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified—form a chain “connecting God’s gracious purpose in the eternity past with its consummation in the eternity to come.”⁴ Verse 28 moves from the problems of this life to God’s counsels and work in eternity past and future—from foreknowing to glorifying. In the midst is the wonderful v. 29, which has been for so many an encouragement to confident trust. But the reason for the promises of vv. 28 and 31–39 is God’s sovereign purpose in election. God’s providence depends on His elective work, that is, His choosing. When we have problems with election, we should keep in mind that this passage teaches that our blessings depend on it!

What does the term *foreknowledge* mean? This is an important question, because it is the most misunderstood of the five words and the key to the rest, since it starts the sequence. Whatever benefits there are in the following verses depend on it. The crucial question is, did God simply see ahead of time that some would believe and call them the “elect,” or did He plan for their faith, too?

Several other biblical passages aid our understanding at this point. In Jer. 1:5 the same concepts of “knowing” is present (see also Gen. 18:19). It cannot simply mean “to know about,” but must describe a personal relationship. Certainly God “knew about” Israel before her founding (in Gen. 12); there must be more than that. In Amos 3:2 the Hebrew word behind the “known” of the AV is appropriately rendered “chosen” by the NIV. In Rom. 11:2 the same base word as Amos 3:2 and Rom. 8:29 is used (the prefix differs). Once again the concept is the same, and we could legitimately translate the word as “plan for.” The idea of simply knowing about the people of Israel ahead of time does not make sense here (i.e. knowing about them or knowing they would do something). Besides, the crucial question in Rom. 11:1ff is, if God planned for them, why aren’t they blessed now? This is like the idea expressed in Amos 3:2: God “planned for” a people to have a special relationship with Him. In 1 Pet. 1:19–20 there is, first of all, a term found in the AV—foreordination—that does not correspond to the Greek word *proginoskō*, usually translated elsewhere “foreknow.” What, however, is the meaning of the foreknowing here? It would not make sense to say here that God knew about Christ ahead of time. That goes without saying. The translators of the NIV have rendered this as “chosen.” This indicates more clearly that before the creation of the world God planned for Christ to have the role of the sacrificial lamb. A final passage is Acts 2:23, where God’s foreknowledge is the instrument, along with His counsel (they are grammatically parallel in the verse), of handing Christ over to the cross. Foreknowledge could only be instrumental if it involved planning.

We must always be careful not to read meanings of words in various contexts into occurrences elsewhere. However, there is enough evidence concerning the word foreknowledge to warrant our taking it in Rom. 8:29 as equivalent to choosing. Especially conclusive is Paul’s own use in Rom. 11:2, within the same epistle. Thus, in Rom. 8:29 the word does not indicate the God simply saw ahead of time that some would exercise faith. It is actually the initial, determining, selecting step in God’s arranging for some to be His own. It leads to blessing for the elect, essentially because it does not leave their relationship to God to chance.

What are the results of God’s planning foreknowledge? Four benefits come to us in the chain begun by choosing. First, it brings our greatest good. The promise of v. 28 is linked to vv. 29–30 with the word *for*, which gives the reason for God’s working in such a way that good results from all the events in a life given over to God. Apparent evils or problems work for good because of His initial foreknowledge that chooses us to be objects of His love.

Second, God’s planning foreknowledge is related to Christlikeness. Verse 29 literally says we will be inwardly and outwardly just like Him. This is really the greatest thing God could do for us. Predestination is what plans this out. The Greek word translated “predestine,” when found without the prefix equivalent to *pre*, can mean “to mark a boundary around something.” So we are kept and guarded for God’s purpose. Today and tomorrow are part of His plan to bring the believer to the place of being like Christ. This obviously establishes foreknowledge and predestination as eminently practical doctrines.

Third, foreknowledge makes it possible for us to believe. The word *called* in v. 30 does not simply mean “invite.” There is a general call to elect and nonelect alike, as seen in Mt. 22:14. Here, though, this is the call to the elect, those foreknown, i.e., *chosen*. (cf. 1 Cor. 1:24.) The same people are involved with all five acts of God. Calling is the work of the Holy Spirit that moves a person to believe in Christ as Savior. Paul tells us in Phil. 1:29 where our faith actually comes from: it is God’s gift to us.

Fourth, foreknowledge guarantees our security (vv. 31–34). We will discuss the security of the believer further below. But the issue is this: Is it possible for some who have genuinely believed in Christ as Savior to lose their salvation through their own sin or the act of someone else (Satan, for example)? If God just saw ahead of time who would believe, then there would be no guarantee of the constancy of a person’s faith—it would be essentially his own doing. But because foreknowledge (equivalent to planning for) starts the chain of vv. 29–30, then the blessings of vv. 31–39 are certain. In other words, our view of eternal security depends on our view of election. We should also notice the four questions in vv. 31–35. The answers result from the links in the chain, going back to foreknowledge. Furthermore, the words of Christ that guarantee our security are ours because of planning foreknowledge.³⁵

⁴ James M. Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Chicago: Moody, 1960), 149.

³⁵ Paul S. Karleen, *The Handbook to Bible Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Romans 8:26-30

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us
in our weakness.

For we do not know
what to pray for as we ought,
but the Spirit himself intercedes for us
with groanings too deep for words.

27 And he who searches hearts
knows what is the mind of the Spirit,
because the Spirit intercedes for the saints
according to the will of God.

28 And we know
that
for those who love God
all things work together for good,
for those who are called according to his purpose.

29 For those whom
he foreknew
he also predestined
to be conformed to the image of his Son,
in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

30 And those whom he predestined
he also called,
and those whom he called
he also justified,
and those whom he justified
he also glorified. (ESV)