

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.

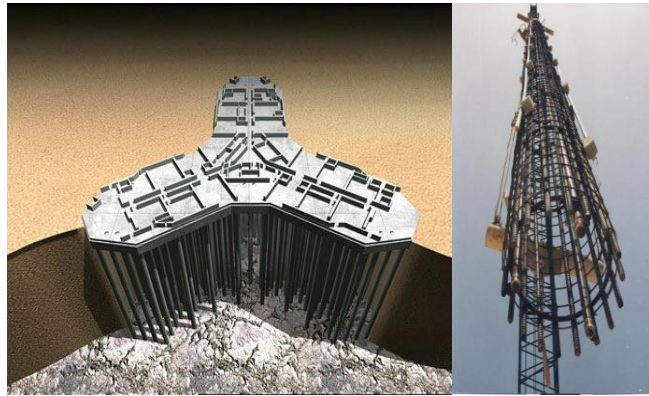
This morning we are picking up where we left off two weeks ago at Romans 8:28. I shared how not to use this wonderful passage and today we will see how we should be making use of it. First, I want you to see how verse 28 is related to verses 29-30. As is often said about understanding the Bible, context is king. I will do this by using an illustration of the world's tallest building.



At 2,717 feet tall, the Burj Khalifa is the current world record holder. It is so tall that if you took the Empire State Building and stacked a second one on top of it, the combined height would still fall short of the Burj Khalifa. It soars above the clouds and completely dwarfs any building near it. Can you imagine base jumping off of it [like these guys?](#)

How can anything so large as this possibly stand and not fall over. Every child knows what it is like to build a tower of ABC blocks. It is rather unstable. Even though you can snap them together, a tower of Lego bricks is not that much better. Obviously, there is a lot more engineering involved here than a mere stack of wooden blocks, but just how does it withstand 100 mph crosswinds threatening to topple the enormous structure?

The secret to such architectural wonders is in the foundation. The foundation is triangular in shape and has 192 pylons, each of which are five feet wide sunk 165 into bedrock. Without this engineering homework, the building would fair no better than a tower of Legos.



Here's the connection to Romans 8. As 192 pylons are to the Burj Khalifa, so are verses 29-30 to verse 28. If you want to understand verse 28 you first must understand verse 29-30. There are pylons in verse 28 driven deep into the foundation of verses 29-30. For example, verse 28 says that "all things work together for good." There is great power and tremendous comfort in that phrase, but we need to ask the simple question, "How?" How is it that "all things work together for good."? Are you content with that phrase alone and don't need to know why it is true? Is it enough for you to know that God said it, you believe it and that's good enough for you?

Do you know that even unbelievers think that this is true? I have heard something very similar from the mouths of people of all backgrounds and stripes. The basic way it is articulated is to say that "everything happens for a reason." I have heard this from people who call themselves a Christian, but probably are not. I have heard it from New Agers and everyone in between. I think the only person who would not say this would be an atheist. If they are consistent atheists, they don't believe that there is any purpose to life at all, let alone that *everything* happens for some larger purpose. I have never probed deeply with these folks but I am guessing they all share a belief in some kind of fate. Karma will get you there. Karma holds that bad things happen to bad people and good things happen to good people. When I think about it, Job's friends believed in a type of karma, didn't they?

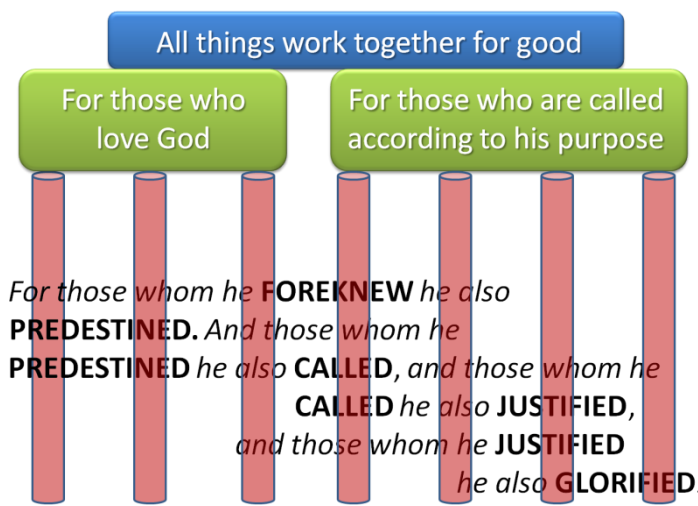
But karma and wishful thinking will only take you so far. We need to know *why* "all things work together for good." I believe this passage explains why and further, I believe that knowing why will help you have even more confidence in its truth.

One thing is clear. The phrase "all things work together for good" is the key phrase in verses 28-30. Not that the rest is unimportant, but from a theological and a practical stance, it is what we want to know, It is what we need to know. When we suffer or when we watch others suffer deeply, we need to know that there is some sort of purpose to the suffering. We need to know that someone is in control of such things. We don't want the glib, "Don't worry, everything will be OK" speech. But we do want to know that everything has a purpose and is working toward that one purpose.

Now while it may be true that all things work together for good, this is not true for every single person. There is only one category of person for whom all things work together for good. If you look that key phrase, it is situated between two other phrases: "for those who love God" and "for

those who are called according to his purpose." That is not two different people but rather two descriptions of the same kind of person. This is obviously the born again believer. For the unbeliever, all things do work out according to the will of God, but not all things work out for good. So, in building our foundation, "all things work together for good" is built upon these other two phrases. So we see the pylons being driven into the foundation. Now let me show you where the pylons go deeper still.

Verses 29-30 define God's purpose. "Those who have been called according to his purpose" What does that mean? I guess you could read the *Purpose Driven Life*, but that wouldn't give you the right answer. God's purpose is laid out in what is often called the golden chain of redemption. *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.*

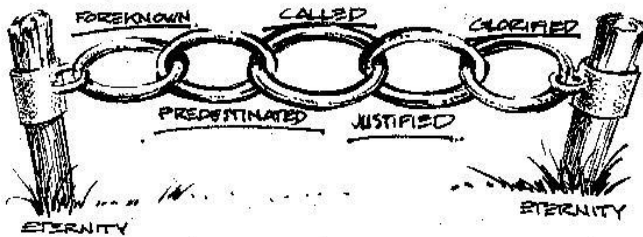


Just as the phrase "all things work together for good" is built upon "for those who love God" and "for those who are called according to his purpose", so all of verse 28 is built upon verses 29-30. I want us to picture countless pylons being driven down into the foundation of verses 29-30. Without the truth of these two verses, the promise in verse 28 could not stand.

Do you see why it is called a chain? Sometimes it is called a 'chain of grace.' There are five key words within four phrases and they are each inseparable from one another. The chain begins with

foreknowledge. And we will define each of these terms as we go. Watch how the chain develops.

CHAIN OF GRACE



"those whom he foreknew he also predestined"-so there is a category of people whom God foreknew. And all of these people who were foreknown by God, were also predestined by God. What is important to understand is that there are not two categories of people--those who God foreknew and those who were predestined. And the chain

continues in the same way.

And those whom he predestined he also called,
 and those whom he called he also justified,
 and those whom he justified he also glorified.

(circles) The same person has been foreknown by God, predestined by God, called by God, justified by God and glorified by God. The same person--or the same group of people--have had all five of these acts of God done for them. It is an unbreakable chain of grace and redemption. We need to be able to understand each of these words separately and then see how they work together in harmony.

Foreknowledge

This may be the most misunderstood Biblical term of the five. Many people simply assume that foreknowledge means to know information before it happens. While it can carry this meaning, in most of the NT occurrences it does just mean knowing information ahead of time but knowing people ahead of time.

Romans 11:1-2- I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

The Jews were foreknown by God which is nearly identical to their being chosen by God. God did not merely know information about the Jews, he knew them personally. This is similar to Jeremiah's call where God declared, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (Jeremiah 1:5) Was God saying that he knew Jeremiah would be born before it happened? Obviously God knew this much but the meaning of know is to know Jeremiah personally. And do you see how this knoweldge would have been foreknowledge? *Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.*

In the Old Testament, the word know is most often used in an intimate, personal sense. We see this clearly in the KJV. "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain" (Genesis 4:4). Obviously, Adam, in knowing Eve, did not just have a discussion with her to gain information. It was very personal.

Now King David was old and advanced in years. And although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm. 2 Therefore his servants said to him, "Let a young woman be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait on the king and be in his service. Let her lie in your arms, that my lord the king may be warm." 3 So they sought for a beautiful young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. 4 The young woman was very beautiful, and she was of service to the king and attended to him, but the king knew her not. 1 Kings 1:1-4

1 Peter 1:18-20 is another helpful example. *knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you.*

This is key because Peter has linked foreknowledge with Jesus. Jesus "was foreknown before the foundation of the world." You can't possibly say that the Father merely knew information about the Son. In this case, foreknowledge means that the Father knew the Son personally and intimately. The single greatest personal relationships are among the Trinity--the Father, the Son

and the Spirit. In eternity, our relationship with the Lord will come close to this level of intimacy, but the three members of the Godhead have been in perfect relationship for all eternity. Except for when the Father turned away from the Son when he carried our sins on the cross, there never has been a moment when they were not in perfect relationship. So clearly, foreknowledge means knowing a person, not knowing events or information.

Finally, Acts 2:22-23 weighs in. *“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*

Look at the link between "definite plan" and foreknowledge. Once again, foreknowledge cannot mean simply knowing information ahead of time. God did not just know that Jesus would be arrested and crucified. It was God's definite plan. Foreknowledge is very close in meaning to the next word in Paul's chain of grace--predestination.

Predestined

Here is a good definition of predestination. "The omniscient God has determined everything in advance, both persons and things in salvation history, with Jesus Christ as the goal."¹

Predestination and fate tend to go together. As humans, we hate the idea of a lack of freedom, of the restraining of our complete free will and self determination. But if God predestines our salvation, where does that leave us? What remains of our free will if God has determined that something will happen? Another difficult question is this: if God predestines everything that happens, if he possesses that much sovereign power over everything and everyone, what about evil acts? Can God predestine something that appears to be evil and sinful? If you are going to have any meaning to the topic of suffering and the sovereignty of God, you have to deal with this question. Acts chapter four is one of the best answers to this question.

Peter and John has just been arrested by the Jews and released. They went straight back to their friends and prayed the powerful, hope-filled prayer, which contained these words.

27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Here is what we know from this passage and other truths.

- Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Sanhedrin, the Roman soldiers and the roaring crowds who clamored for his crucifixion all share blame for Jesus' death. Each of them is equally guilty.
- The Father predestined the extreme suffering and death of the Son (Isa. 53:10-father's will/Father "pleased", Acts 4:28).
- All sin is utterly grievous and completely against the revealed will of God. God hates all sin (Psalm 5:4) and it is impossible for God to sin (James 1:13).
- Killing Jesus was the most grievous sin ever committed (John 19:11).

What we have to do is to hold all of these truths together in tension. God predestined that evil things would happen, including the greatest evil in human history. Sloppy thinking could cause you to then blame God for killing Jesus. It was God's plan that Jesus was to die. It was the Father's wrath was poured out on the Son, since he carried our sins. But the Father did not kill Jesus. Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Sanhedrin, the Jewish crowds and the Roman soldiers killed Jesus.

Predestination is exactly what it sounds like: Pre-Destiny. God has determined our destiny beforehand, just like our definition states. . "The omniscient God has determined everything in advance, both persons and things in salvation history, with Jesus Christ as the goal." We see this other places the term predestination is used.

Ephesians 1.5-*he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will*

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.*

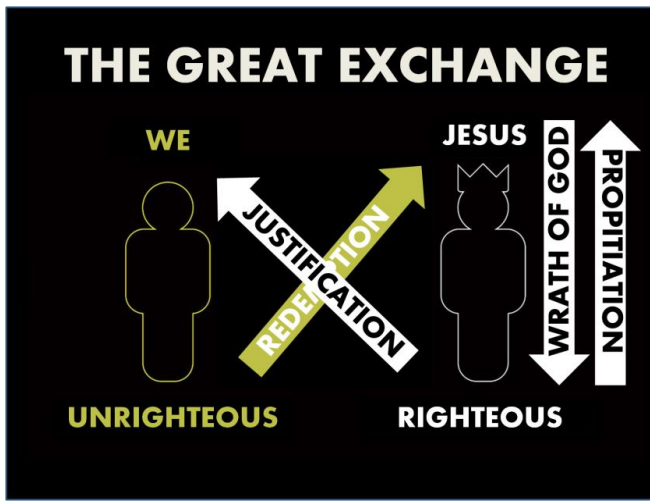
Do you see God's sovereignty written all over predestination? We were predestined *according to the purpose of his will* (verse 5) and *according to the counsel of his will* (verse 11). God's will, not our will, is not only determined in advance by God but is also divinely carried out by God. God is sovereign from beginning to end. Otherwise, the whole idea of predestination is meaningless. If God does not control the plan and the working out of his plan, then predestination is no better than any of our earthly plans. Tonight, we plan to have the Koinonia Singers at church. In fact, we have been planning this for months. But it doesn't mean it is actually going to happen. Their bus could break down on the way here and all of our detailed planning would be for nothing.

But for what were we predestined? The text in Romans 8 is clear. *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.* We were predestined for salvation but this verse takes it a step further. From before the foundation of the world, God planned that we would be conformed to the image of his Son. When does this happen? Are you conformed to the image of God's Son yet? I know I am not. I believe that Paul has in mind the last item of the chain of grace--glorified. Right now we are being conformed to the image of Christ but it will not be complete until death, until we enter God's glory and presence for all eternity.

But before we get to the fifth link in the chain, let's consider the next two--called and justified. Remember, this is an unbreakable chain of grace. It begins with foreknowledge and ends with

being glorified in death. But every believer also experiences every other step in between. Calling is simply being called into relationship with Christ. It is the gospel call to repent and believe in Christ.

But Paul does something that many of us are not used to. He links being called with what



came before and what comes after. So if you are called, you will be justified. Now there's a word we have seen many times as we have worked our way through the book of Romans. To be justified is to be declared righteous and to be credited with the righteousness of Christ. By now, you should be familiar with the Great Exchange. Paul does not bring redemption and propitiation into this passage, but they are assumed.

So the radical idea here is that if you are called, you are also justified. So either this calling is different from what you normally think of calling, which means there are two types of calling in the Bible. The first type of calling doesn't result in salvation and the second does. Or you have to define the term calling different from you might be used to. In other words, all calling is a definite calling. If you truly are called by God, you will be saved. Calling always results in justification and glorification. These cannot be separated.

Now we finally bring this all back to verse 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.* remember that this verse is anchored to verses 29-30 with deep and powerful pylons. Without verses 29-30, there is no verse 28. Do you see how this works out? If God is not sovereign over foreknowledge to glorification, and everything in between, then he cannot possibly make "all things work together for good."

Let me give you one illustration and then we will spend our next time together fleshing out how this applies to every area of life.

Last week, Eric Hesse and his family stopped in to give us a brief update on their support raising for their church planting ministry in Berlin, Germany. I talked with the Hesse family for a while after church and learned about several challenges they are facing.

First, Eric mentioned their pending adoption of a boy from Haiti. That process has taken much longer than they anticipated and is very frustrating.

Second, after almost 2 years of effort, their support raising is only sitting at 60%. They are not permitted to go to Berlin until they reach 100%. They feel an overwhelming calling to Berlin and don't understand why it is taking so long.

Third, last January, Eric resigned as pastor of the Richland Center church that he shepherded for ten years. That's hard. It's difficult to leave when a church is not healthy but it's even more difficult to leave a healthy church filled with people you love. There is a grieving process that goes on. Moreover, they left the church in order to go to Berlin but that is not coming together because of the support raising challenges, all of which can make you question your calling.

Fourth and finally, Eric's mom suddenly passed away in January. So they have four, significant challenges facing them, any one of which is taxing, but the combination of the four is a lot to handle.

I knew that Eric had a strong belief in the sovereignty of God, and particularly this passage in Romans 8. I asked him if he felt like God's sovereignty was holding him together. He

immediately replied, "If it were for the sovereignty of God, I would have quit long ago." Despite his overwhelming challenges, Eric and his family believe that God works all things together for good. You see, he doesn't have to know how or when they will work together. he doesn't have to know why they don't seem to be going according to plan, he just needs to rest in the fact that God will make all things work together.

This is not fate. This is not karma. And this is not wishful thinking. This is a definite promise spoken by a God who has the power to carry out his promise. There is a purpose to all suffering. God has a definite plan and by his power, grace and mercy, he is working it out for your good and for my good.

Rich Maurer
June 22, 2014

¹ Kittel, G., Bromiley, G. W., & Friedrich, G. (Eds.). (1964–). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.