

Romans 8:28-30

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. Please take your copy of God's Word and join me in Romans chapter 8. Romans 8, 28-30. Let's briefly put our attention on verses 26 and 27 and then we will press on.

Our third point for last week's sermon was, the Spirit groans for glory. Verse 26 and 27 say, 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. 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.

So verse 26 begins, Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Paul says, Likewise, just like the creation groans for glory, which was the first point, verses 19-22, and Christians groan for glory, verses 23-27, the Spirit groans for glory as a help to us in our present weakened state.

God the Spirit, with groanings too deep for words, prays to God the Father on our behalf. The communication between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and the need for their communication is a grand mystery for us.

[1 : 56] But it happens nonetheless. And Paul is communicating something of this mystery to us here for our comfort. For the Christian, those who hope for what we do not see, verse 25, namely, our adoption as Son, the redemption of our bodies, this thing we call our glorification, we wait for it with patience, by the power of the Spirit who intercedes for us, when we don't know what to pray, and He always, as God, prays according to the will of God.

So we can be sure that the intercessions of the Spirit are answered with the power and presence of our Trinitarian God. Now, this is as brief as I think I can be concerning these two verses, and maintain faithfulness to the great comfort that they should bring us.

But that is the point. That is where Paul has been driving us to, as we live in the in-between, the already and the not yet. The Spirit groans for glory, our glory, and He groans on our behalf.

So don't underestimate the significance of this truth. Whether you feel it to be true, or experience it to be true, if you are in Christ, it is true.

The Spirit of God prays for your hopeful perseverance in the faith. We have such an advocate with us as we live in these days.

[3 : 38] Which brings us to today's text. I'm sorry if that was too brief for you, but I really want to spend some time on verses 28 through 30. So before I read it, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's Word to us.

It was written for His glory and our good. And so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

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

And those whom He predestined, He also called. And those whom He called, He also justified. And those whom He justified, He also glorified.

Now Paul begins verse 28 with the phrase, And we know. We join with creation and the Spirit in groaning for glory with hope and patience.

[4 : 48] And then Paul says, And we know. Every other world religion sets the locus of salvation on the adherent, their devotion, their affections, their works.

Christianity is altogether different. If you are a Christian, then you place all of your confidence not on yourself, but on God's gracious working on your behalf.

We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in the personal work of Jesus Christ alone. What is it that we know?

Let's consider this confidence that Paul says we have. This confident knowledge in the following three points that emerge from today's text.

So, number one, we'll consider our confidence in God's providence. Number two, our confidence in God's purpose. And number three, our confidence in God's plan.

[5 : 59] Bonus points for alliteration this morning. Number one, our confidence in God's providence we see in verse 28. Right? And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

Before I say anything on this point, I want to first define the word providence. It's likely a word that you have heard before. It's not a word that we find in our text, although it's an idea that is found here.

Providence is God's purposeful sovereignty. God is sovereign, which means that he is the ruler of everything and that he possesses the power to rule over everything.

It's a statement of him as a being. God is sovereign. Job expresses this reality in Job 42.2 where he says, I know you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

There's the sovereignty of God. I know that you can do all things and that no purpose, now here's his sovereignty in action, in providence, can do no purpose of yours, can be thwarted.

[7 : 16] God powerfully reigns. He is sovereign. And in verse 28, we see God's sovereignty expressed providentially. It has purpose.

Right? It's not aimless, but it is aimed at something for a people. God's providence is always active on behalf of his people.

Notice that Paul qualifies in this verse a particular people. It's those who love God. In verse 23, he called Christians those who have the first fruits of the Spirit.

Here he says, those who love God. If we can recall all that Paul has said in this letter thus far, this phrase should not surprise us, although it may because it's been a while since we've studied the rest of the letter.

In Romans chapter 5, verse 10 and 11, Paul says, says, if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life.

[8 : 27] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. You see there, this idea, we who were once haters of God, his enemies, have, by Jesus' death and life, been made those who rejoice in God, those who love him.

I hope and pray this morning that you are one of those who love God, that his character and his ways are desirable to you. You have affections for God.

I hope and pray this morning that you have the confidence to say, and we know, because what we know is a precious, precious truth.

It's an incredible thing to know all things work together for good. Now, Paul does not say that all things are good, but he is saying unequivocally that God providentially accomplishes his purpose through the means of all things.

And this is a comprehensive statement. When Paul says all things, he means all things. And we need not question this.

[9 : 52] And we know all things work together for good. If you are a Christian and anything and everything that happens in your life is being used of God for your good.

All of the joys, the sorrows, the pain, the tragedy, all of the positive prognoses, all of the negative prognoses, all of the successes, all of the failures, all of the gains, all of the losses, all things.

Let's not forget that God is working good in the good matters of our lives. We are really ready to forget that. But this truth finds its particular comfort in the troubling matters of our lives.

That's where we find Paul's mind, right, considering the trouble that this life will bring us as followers of Jesus Christ. I want to read to you a hymn that you may be familiar with called God Moves in Mysterious Ways.

It's a hymn about providence. It was written by a man named William Calper, an 18th century British poet, a joy to read, I commend him to you, and a man who dealt with chronic depression the entirety of his life, wrestled often with the assurance of his faith.

[11 : 30] I know that he attempted suicide at least once. Depending on who you read, there may have been some other occasions for it. And he penned this, it happens to be in your hymnals, hymn number 88, if you care to look at it now or at some other time.

Listen to what he wrote. God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

Deep and unfathomable minds of never-failing skill, he treasures up his bright designs and works his sovereign will. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take the clouds ye so much dread, are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace. Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour. The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan his work in vain.

[12 : 47] God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain. God sovereignly, providentially works for our good in all things.

Remember that Paul at the end of chapter 7 has expressed anguish in his battle against his flesh. He has acknowledged that we will suffer in this life in chapter 8 and verse 17.

He has given to us perspective in chapter 8 and verse 18 where he says, For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. He's going on to talk about the groaning of creation and ourselves and the spirit longing for all things to be made new. And now he gives to us this confident comfort in verse 28.

all things work together for good. But what is this good? Some people use this idea as a pleasant platitude that leaves people guessing at what the good might be.

[14 : 03] Kind of floated out there. Well, God uses things for good and then we spend time looking for the good whether we're in the midst of the suffering or we try to look back on the suffering and often it's hard to find.

Paul doesn't leave us wondering. He doesn't leave us guessing. He again qualifies the recipients of God's providence as those who are called according to his purpose.

What purpose? If we're reading carefully, this purpose must be the good that he's referring to and we don't need to guess at what God is doing providentially for his people.

So we have a confidence in God's providence. We also see secondly our confidence in God's purpose.

Notice this in the last half of verse 29. He said, those who before knew, he also predestined, what? This is the purpose, to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he, the Son, Jesus Christ, might be the firstborn among many brothers.

[15 : 23] What is God's purpose as he works providentially in our lives? That we would look more and more like Christ to the praise of Christ.

Note with me the phrase to be conformed to the image of his Son. God says to Israel in Leviticus 19 and verse 2, you shall be holy for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.

And the law emanates from this, showing us what it means to be holy. It's something that's asked of God's people. Peter cites this verse in 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 16 to make the very same point. We are to be like God in holiness, but how is this possible? By being conformed to the image of his Son who is God.

The author of Hebrews in chapter 1 verse 3 says, Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. Progressively becoming like Jesus by the power of the Spirit.

[16 : 38] This is how we keep this command. You can note chapter 8 verses 2 through 11 is all about this active sanctifying process in our lives, moving us from one degree to another of glory, of holiness.

So God providentially uses all things in our lives to bring about our holiness. This is the point. This is what he's at work doing.

This is that purpose that Paul refers to. He is persistently pressing in this direction because he loves us and he means for our lives to glorify him.

It is his providential purpose in your life if you belong to him and he will not fail to accomplish his purpose for you. I hope we can join with Paul this text and elsewhere like Philippians chapter 1 and verse 6 where he writes to the Philippian Christians, I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

He says there, I am confident and I know that he who began the work will definitely complete the work. But the high aim of your Christlikeness is not ultimately you.

[18 : 07] You certainly receive benefit as you grow in holiness. But notice the higher point that's going on here. In order that Jesus might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Firstborn is used figuratively here to refer to the position of privilege, preeminence, or supremacy. Commonly used in this way in the scripture.

So, we are to look more like Christ in order that Christ might be privileged, preeminent, supreme. Another place, Paul writes this, Colossians chapter 1 verse 15 and following Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Certainly Paul doesn't mean there that he was created, no. He's preeminent, he's supreme, he's privileged above all creation. For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth visible and invisible whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities all things were created through him and for him including us.

And he is before all things and in him all things hold together and he is the head of the body the church he is the beginning the firstborn from the dead that in everything he might be preeminent for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of his cross so we are to be conformed to the image of a son so that Christ will be magnified so God works all things together for good the good that we would look more and more like Christ to the praise of Christ what an absolute comfort this is we have our perspective aimed where it needs to be right when we're thinking rightly everything that comes our way all of the troubles of this life are meant to bring about a greater good for us to the glory of

[20 : 30] Christ this momentary life right this present momentary suffering that's not even worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us when all of the details of this difficult life press down on you you will need this comfort perhaps you have already needed it perhaps you need it now I guarantee in your life you will need it press on in pursuit of Jesus Christ you will suffer in this world what do we do when we suffer we need a robust theology of suffering and we found such richness here in Romans 8 for those times I'm grateful across the years just by grace becoming committed to verse by verse exposition of the Bible working through and seeing people sent out from here going places getting terribly ill overseas coming back to us suffering great loss and having people say thank you for teaching me to suffer and don't think that I've suffered in the way that many people have suffered and so you ask the question well how have

I done that and it's just that we've taught the Bible and the Bible teaches us how to suffer and to suffer well J.I. Packer once said this is on the back of your bulletin this morning if you ask why is this happening no light may come and I just want to insert at that point I think specifically why is this happening is what he means why is this happening no light may come but if you ask how am I to glorify God now there will always be an answer so we have reason to have confidence in God's providence and confidence in God's purpose working all things that we would look more like Christ for the praise of Christ and we should have confidence in God's plan so we'll see this at the beginning of verse 29 as well as verse 30 verse 29 the first half says for those whom he foreknew he also predestined goes on to say to be conformed to the image of a son and verse 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 now there are some hot words in these two verses they're words that many pastors don't touch too hot to handle words that have been highly contested vastly ignored and grossly misunderstood before

I proceed to tell you that the words foreknew and predestined mean just that I want to fix your attention on why Paul is using these words to communicate these truths as we study the Bible we have to study the Bible in its context it's altogether possible to believe something to be true and to believe it wrongly it's also very possible to see something taught and because you can't reconcile it with other things to reject it as true so the context always matters greatly Paul here is not trying to pick a theological fight he is not working to open up some soteriological debate in fact he is going to spend chapters 9 10 and 11 working out the implications and answering the objections to the truth stated in verses 29 through 30 there's a lot of ink spent on the thing that he's saying right here in verse 29 and verse 30 he is going to go to great effort to defend these doctrines why contextually just think for a moment why why is he pressing these truths

God's sovereignty in our salvation to the forefront right now it's because he wants to root our confidence in our future glory in God's plan God's God's word and so we can't ignore what it says we can't just pass over it because it makes us uncomfortable it's not there for that it's there for our

comfort and so Paul says for those whom he foreknew he also predestined another place he says it this way Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 4 the father chose us in the son before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him this word foreknew is a compound word that means more than simply knowing something before on its surface that's what it seems to be communicating but it's more than that because the

Bible uses the idea of knowing someone in terms of special intimacy Paul's picking up that language in this compound word right an example Old Testament Genesis 4 and verse 17 Adam knew his wife Eve they became one flesh right elsewhere Matthew New Testament example chapter 1 and verse 25 right Mary became pregnant having not been known right loving intimacy Paul is saying that God has a predetermined love for those he plans to call his own and this is a vast truth and it is one that should be altogether humbling!

[27 : 17] and bring about great gratitude for God's loving kindness towards people who deserve hell who have been his enemies who have no good possession of ourselves and yet God in his loving kindness has saved us those he foreknew he also predestined and this word means to mark out a point or determine beforehand the result for every person who belongs to God so he foreknew us and he set us on a course right a definitive result that would come to pass in our lives it is not possible to dance around the meanings of these words and stay faithful to the text I know they raise a ton of questions Paul knows that they raise a ton of questions and they are questions that should be wrestled with for sure we should ask the questions and we should go to the text to find the answer to the questions and we should settle in when all of the complexity doesn't quite get solved for us

I hope that you will engage with Paul as we study the next three chapters it will take some time to be sure in the meantime I hope you ask lots of questions we can talk much about this but we cannot deny that if we are to have the confidence that Paul here states we are to have then we must be confident in God's plan beloved this is a pillow for your weary soul to rest upon you find yourself living in the tension of this world the already and the not yet as you suffer for the name of Christ as you battle against your flesh you need to know that God will finish what he started it depends on you very little it depends greatly on him you will not weather well the storms this life will assail you with apart from an anchored confidence in all that

God has guaranteed for you in the person and work of Jesus Christ for as many people as have rejected these truths and been angry at me in the process I will not grow tired of continuing to proclaim them for those who will believe and find the comfort found in them I love you too much to not be clear about what the scripture says about God's plan in your life so I just won't I have nothing novel to say there's a lot of novelty out there a lot of people trying to dance with these kinds of theological concepts we do well to look to the church of the past to see what they believed about these things to deal with the text plainly as God's word and understand why why might we be taught these big and grand truths so that we would be comforted and so that we have a place to rest in the mighty hand of our

God verse 30 says those whom he predestined he also called so prior to the foundation of the world he had knowledge of a people and he set them on a course and then and then he called them he actually did the work of calling them each and every one of you if you are in Christ you were called the spirit of God made Christ work on your behalf effectual in your life it's a doctrine we call irresistible grace he took you from spiritual death to spiritual life and he caused you to believe he gave you that gift of faith that Paul talks about in Ephesians chapter through that we might be saved through it John chapter 15 verse 16 Jesus says you did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit altogether humbling we sing a song out of an old Baptist seminal sadly not in our current Baptist seminal but in an old Baptist seminal called my Lord I did not choose you and I think it makes some people really uncomfortable to sing that song but guess what the words of Jesus you've got to do something with it right Jesus says matter of factly you do not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit the response to such a thing should be why me Lord wretched man that I am why me it's because of his loving kindness he desires to express in his people and see his people come to Christ likeness that Christ would be honored and those whom he called he also justified he accomplished the saving work justified by grace alone through faith alone in

[32 : 58] Christ alone if you look at how the trinitarian God is active in this process God the father foreknew and predestined Christ completed that work in his death and his resurrection and the spirit

makes it effectual in the lives of all who believe in him justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone Romans chapter 4 verse 4 and 5 now to the one who works his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due and to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly his faith is counted as righteousness and those back to verse 30 whom he justified he also glorified now remember earlier in chapter 8 we're longing for this glorification we're longing for glory that's to be revealed to us we're longing for the adoption as sons and this renewal of our bodies but here

Paul states it as a completed work already accomplished by Christ remember he's comforting us yes yes this life will be a challenge you will suffer inside and outside but guess what God will complete the work that he began these verses are all about God's unstoppable plan to pursue his people to the end and this text is contained a brief order of salvation the main point of which is that God acts God accomplishes God maintains and this should be a great comfort to us so our confidence God providence is seen in this text and our confidence in God's purpose and our confidence in God's plan and I hope that you share in that confidence with me this morning now because I just don't know where all of you stand as we read these verses and what you understand to be true in your bulletin and for our response of reading this morning we ask the question what do we believe about

God's purpose of grace and the answer to that is found there in your bulletin this is from our current statement of faith and this answer is found it's borrowed from the New Hampshire confession of 1833 nothing new and novel here what did those Christians believe about God's purpose of grace and accompanied!

with it is roughly 50 references! if I did a quick count of them so I want you to see that you have a concise statement here that is worth your consideration and your study you may not be able to wait as we work through the next three chapters so I'm going to read that for you and I just want you to hear it and I want you to perhaps follow along and I want you to consider doing some study on your own as you're considering these things we believe that election is the eternal purpose of God according to which he graciously regenerates sanctifies and saves sinners that being perfectly consistent with the free agency of man it comprehends all the means in connection with the end that it is a most glorious display of God's sovereign goodness being infinitely free wise holy and unchangeable that it utterly excludes boasting and promotes humility love prayer praise trust in God and active imitation of his free mercy that it encourages the use of means in the highest degree that it may be ascertained by its effects and all who truly believe the gospel that it is the foundation of Christian assurance and that to ascertain it with regard to ourselves demands and deserves the utmost diligence I would draw your attention to a phrase toward the end there that says it is the foundation God's eternal purpose and salvation the foundation of Christian assurance our confidence sits upon God's sovereign plan for our lives so I hope you'll consider it and wrestle with it and believe it in closing I want to read to you the rest of the chapter it's very difficult to stop at verse 30 and not go on and

[37 : 51] Lord willing we'll consider these verses further Christmas eve morning Paul says this what then shall we say to these things what's he talking about verse 29 and 30 what then shall we say to these things if God is for us who can be against us he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also with him graciously give us all things who shall bring any charge against God's elect it is!

God who is to condemn Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised was at the right hand of God who indeed is interceding for us who shall separate us from the love of Christ shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword as it is written for your sake we are being killed all the day long we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered no in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us for I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord let's pray together