

# Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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**Sermon Title:** The Golden Chain of Redemption

**Sermon Text:** Romans 8:28-30

**Rom. 8:28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

**Rom. 8:29** 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.

**Rom. 8:30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

**Main Point:** Christians know that God is at work in every area of their life because God's work of redemption begins before they are born and extends all the way beyond their death.

## **Outline:**

1. Foreknown (8:29)
2. Predestined (8:29)
3. Called (8:30)
  - a. Outward Calling (Matthew 22:14)
  - b. Inward Calling (John 6:44)
  - c. Regeneration (Ezek. 36:26; John 3:3, 7)
  - d. Faith (Eph. 2:8)/Repentance (Acts 11:18)
4. Justified (8:30)
5. Glorified (8:30)

## Introduction

Before we fully jump into today's passage, I think it's important that we pause and just think about the whole Project Paul has been engaging in so far in Romans 8 that has brought us up to this point. We need a bit of a review, and maybe we need to catch our breath just a moment before we round the next corner of the path that Paul has us on.

At the beginning of this chapter, Paul was speaking of what we now have (no condemnation) because of Christ's work. Because we have the Spirit of life, we're no longer bound to the law as we experience it in the flesh (which is death). Paul speaks of our present status through verse 10: we are not condemned. We are living according to the Spirit. We're setting our mind on the things of the Spirit. We're enjoying God's good things now, not just later.

But Paul doesn't stop with our present reality. In verse 11, he lifts our eyes to the future. Before, he was saying God has you *now*. And in verse 11 he begins to say, and he has your future. He's going to continue to care for you, as His child. Even your body will be safe, so you don't even have to be afraid to die, now. Because in Christ you're going to be raised up.

And because that future is safe in Christ, verse 12 shows us how we can live for him right now. In what ways? Well he says, we live freed from obligation to sin right now. He says we're living in a state of mortification right now (8:13). We experience God's assurance in the spirit right now (8:16). We live in hope right now.

Yet, as we reach the end of verse 17, Paul grounds us back in our daily, gritty experience right now. Right now, we suffer, but we also rejoice in knowing that our suffering today is nothing in the light of eternity and the glory of what's coming. Right now we live in a fallen and suffering creation that will one day be set free (8:21). Right now, we live in a symphony of groans. The creation groans. We groan. The Spirit groans on our behalf when we struggle to live with hope, barely even knowing how to pray because we live with so much weakness (8:26).

And right now, we continue to need encouragement from God: how can we persevere when the suffering is often so great? We don't know how to pray, and

we barely know how to think about our sufferings. After all, we can't see around the corner when suffering comes. We don't know what's coming next. And so we easily spiral into fear. Fear that the pain will keep going, fear that we'll lose even more, fear that maybe all of this is happening because God has abandoned me. All of these are temptations for a finite, weak person who still carries around indwelling sin.

So the question is, what do we need in order to face an ongoing life in this world where we're supposed to have every reason for hope and eager expectation, but we feel pulled down by it all... pulled away from hope. Pulled toward self-sabotaging lies. Pulled toward all of the scary what-iffs that we can imagine...

And Paul's answer in today's passage is to say, *God* has you. You don't have you. He has you. And he doesn't just have some of you, or a part of you, but he has... *All* of you. And what he has is the goal of providing you all the good that you will ever need. He is shaping you, in your suffering, in your daily experience, to look like Jesus. He's had you before you were even born, he is the one who first gave you spiritual life, he is the one who called you, he is the one who keeps you believing, he's the one who has pardoned you and given you peace with him apart from any doing of your own, and he will absolutely carry you all the way to the last day when you will be glorified and changed never to sin again.

And so because Paul is so dead set on convincing us that God has EVERYTHING that we need taken care of, we have today's passage where we move from the promise that all things work together to the promise that everything in our own spiritual lives has always been a gift of grace not according to us and our works. In other words, *we* don't have us... He has us. And it's always been Him. And it's always been Him who has carried us every bit of the way.

Paul presents us with what many writers in church history have termed the "Golden Chain of Redemption." Part of the reason for this naming is that writers have taken note of something precious here. When Paul lists off these verbs here he uses the aorist tense for them. Here's what that means: the aorist tense is a completed past action. It means that these are not maybes for God's people, these are FOR SURES. And if you are a believer, they are yours to claim. Not something to just hope for, but something that IS yours.

He gives these five verbs, and speaks of all of them here: foreknew. Predestined. Called. Justified. Glorified. Those are our five points here today. But he grammatically links them together as a single, indivisible work of God. Like a series of links in a chain that all hang together.

You don't get one of these and not the others. They are a package deal. God doesn't lose anyone along the way. It's not like you have people who are foreknown and predestined, but then not justified or glorified, you see. That's why we call it the golden chain. Because it is infinitely precious, and as infinitely dependable as God Himself is. That chain is gold, my friends.

Paul is wrapping us up safely in the arms of God here and telling us: whatever hypothetical thing you can think of that might mean the end of your peace with God, you can put that fear away because in the light of God's grace, it's only a fear. It's not true. Why do we have nothing to fear in Christ? Five reasons.

## **1. Foreknown (8:29)**

The first link in Paul's golden chain of redemption is that we were foreknown.

Paul says, "those whom He foreknew, he also predestined..."

These two ideas here are important and are closely related. "Foreknown" and "Predestined."

It is tempting to fully enter into this topic of predestination at this point, and I do need to say some things about it here. But just know that Paul is going to get more into the topic of predestination in chapter 9, and that's where we're going to really fully dig in. Because Paul knows what your objections are, and he knows why even the word predestination offends you. And he's going to jump in head first in the second half of Romans 9.

But I need to mention something here: if you've never heard of this idea of foreknowledge and predestination before, often your initial reaction will be to be pretty upset and offended by it. I remember one of my best friends in high school, when he heard about predestination as we read the book of Romans, and he

became very angry. He was so angry that he said, “If that is what God is like, I don’t think I even want to believe in him.”

Why did he say that? Because the idea that God’s love is prior to our salvation, and that he doesn’t set that saving love on all people might be difficult for some people to appreciate. The idea that God can show mercy to whomever he wills, and that he doesn’t do that for all fights against the story many of us have told ourselves about ourselves for much of our lives. Especially if we haven’t grown up in a church that has preached the doctrines of grace. It can be very new and very offensive.

We may have wrapped our heads around this mistaken idea that God is trying and striving to save all people in the same way, and to the same degree, and that God is like us: limited, trying to persuade, but he gets frustrated, and can’t stop us or change our hearts, and that He’s ultimately powerless in the end.

And in one sense we like this idea because it would imply that we get to breathe easy that God is very well meaning even if he’s just unable to overcome our stubborn wills. We like the idea that he’s sort of a friendly grandfather, just wringing his hands but ultimately helpless.

And it offends us to be told that God is almighty, and that the weak and limited view of God we wanted to believe isn’t really true, and that we can’t find it anywhere in the Bible.

Romans 9 deals with this question head on by asserting that we are like lumps of clay, and God has a right to do whatever he pleases with his creation.

But we don’t want to think of God as being so sovereign that even our *salvation* is in his hands from beginning to end. We sort of intuit that because we were the one who believed, we feel like it must have been all us, and from us.

And so people have tried to escape the force of this golden chain of redemption in a few ways.

The first way people have tried to deal with their discomfort with this is by trying to dull the force of Paul’s argument. One way they do this is by redefining the word “foreknew” in this passage to mean something very different than Scripture means. They want to say, well “foreknew” just means that the very first thing is

that God looked ahead and saw the person. You can't predestine someone that you don't know will exist someday, after all. It's sort of this view that Paul here is just saying that God sort of passively observed that we would exist.

Well, that does make sense on one level, if you don't think about the rest of Paul's argument... if you just sort of isolate the word "foreknew."

But the motive here is to argue that if it's true that this is just saying God has to know them first, then it might mean that really, every human being is foreknown by God. Every human being, they say, is foreknown, and it's us and us alone that keeps us from going further up the chain of redemption to predestination and justification and so on. In this whole way of thinking, God foreknew everyone, but then because of their unbelief, people ruined the rest of the chain for themselves.

In this way of thinking, God is trying, but people keep ruining God's plan.

All of this is trying to account for why not everyone is saved. And there is this hope that we can say that because of our free will alone, many of the people who are foreknown are sadly never saved.

This approach is just wrong when it comes to this word "foreknew." We use the word "know" today and we use it for something that we've gained information about. At one time I did not know how hot dogs are made, and now I do know how hot dogs are made. I cannot unknow that, as much as I might want to. Right? There was a time when I did not know this thing, and then later I do know it. And when we hear that God foreknows a person, we think it's the same thing. He learns that we will exist. That's what many people try to define "foreknow" as.

But the word "know" in Scripture is active. The biblical verb "to know" is not about intellectual information. To know someone in Hebrew is to love them intimately and choose them. In Amos 3:2 God tells Israel that he alone "knew" them out of all the families of the earth. Does God mean to tell the prophet Amos that he hasn't heard of or isn't aware of other people on planet earth? No, of course not. He's speaking of something special and intimate that he reserves for his people alone.

Jesus tells the hypocrites to depart because he never "knew" them (Matt. 7:23). Now, Jesus certainly had a *mental* knowledge of them. The issue is that he did not have a redemptive love for them. He knew *of* them. But he never knew *them*.

So redefining the word “foreknown” to simply mean an intellectual passive knowing of something that is future... well it just doesn’t cut it.

Now, the second way that some interpreters have tried to dull the force of this “foreknowing” by God is by saying, well maybe it just means that God foresaw something *about* the person. They say, maybe God “knew” that this person would believe. Or maybe God “knew” that they would please him with their lives, and on that basis said, “Okay, they’re in.”

Now, besides the fact that this depends on redefining “know” as passive knowledge, let’s still notice how this undoes the whole argument of Romans that salvation is God’s work from beginning to end. This undoes that.

If Paul was really just saying that foreknowledge here means that God looks ahead to decide whether someone does something to “trigger” or “deserve” his love, then the gospel of grace is effectively destroyed. Because it turns the gospel into a reward for the right human choice.

The problem is, Paul’s whole argument throughout his letters is to say that the whole order of salvation is grounded in the active, free, electing love of God. God does not look forward into time to find a reason to save an individual. God provides the reason entirely from within himself. God actively loves the elect from eternity. God then provides the very faith he requires of us. And that is a gospel that eliminates boasting, and glorifies God’s grace instead of human wisdom or skill or supposed goodness.

Maybe you need more than that answer. Well, we’re going to get to Predestination as the second link in Paul’s chain in a moment, but I want to help you understand foreknowledge in a clear and positive way before we move to predestination, because they might seem similar if we don’t think clearly about what they each mean: Foreknowledge and predestination.

Foreknowledge answers the question of identity: who are God’s people? God’s foreknowing of someone identifies who the objects of divine love are. So in God’s foreknowledge, He actively sets his covenantal affection upon particular individuals. He intimately knows them before they exist (Jer. 1:5). Foreknowledge

isolates the exact persons God intends to save. It separates them from the rest of fallen humanity out of sheer grace. In other words, think of “foreknown” as meaning “foreloved.” We were loved before we were even born by the sheer goodness and kindness of God’s grace – not something inside of us that was worthy.

Now you might say, “Well maybe *all* people are foreknown by God.” But think of this: the Bible does talk about God’s people being foreknown by God. It never, ever speaks of unbelievers or the reprobate as being foreknown. Never. It’s a special term that God uses only for his people. Why? Because not all people are foreknown. Foreknown means foreloved. And that is not something that all fallen people experience in a saving sense. God loves all people *as his creatures* made in his image, and yet he does not *savingly* love all people. That is reserved specifically for those whom he has foreknown.

## **2. Predestined (8:29)**

The second link in Paul’s golden chain of Redemption here is predestination. Paul says, that “the ones he foreknew he also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.”

Now, you might wonder: after what the Pastor just said about being foreknown, isn’t predestination here a little redundant? Aren’t foreknowledge and predestination the same things? They aren’t.

Because remember: foreknowledge answers the question of identity: who are God’s people? So then what is predestination? Well instead of answering the “who”? Predestination answers the “where?” What is – to speak really plainly – the *destination* of the foreknown and foreloved people? What is God doing with them?

God decided not only whom he would save, but he decided what he would save them *for*.

That language of predestination speaks to the place we were assigned prior. Before we were even born, Paul says, it was decided that because God foreknew

and foreloved us, God also knew what His goal and plan for our life would be. And the answer is, his plan has always been for us to become holy, to look like Jesus.

I just want you to see that some people try to avoid the implications of God's foreknowledge and predestination by saying that "well maybe someone can have prior links in the chain but not have the later ones." There have been those who have been offended by the idea of God's election by trying to argue that maybe someone could be foreknown but not glorified. Maybe you could be called but not justified.

Now, if you did that, you'd be getting far from Paul's text at that point if that's how you tried to argue, because you'd be ripping apart the links in the chain, and destroying Paul's argument for our security in Christ. It's a very flimsy chain if it can just be torn apart like this.

Charles Spurgeon pointed out that there are no breaks in the links of Paul's chain of redemption. Each step in salvation is wedded to the previous one, beginning with the foreknowledge, which is wedded to predestination, which is perfectly linked with the next items: calling, justification, and glorification.

Here's what Spurgeon said: "The called man is the predestined man. Let him be sure of that. And the justified man shall be a glorified man. Let him have no doubt whatever about that."

### **3. Called (8:30)**

The third link in the golden chain of Redemption is calling. God's people have been called. In verse 30 Paul says that those whom he predestined he also "called."

We've been foreknown by God, predestined by God, and then called by God. What does this call look like? Theologians often distinguish between two types of calling.

First, there is an *outward calling*. We see this in Matthew 22:14, where Jesus says, "Many are called, but few are chosen." This is the general gospel presentation. It goes out to everyone who hears a sermon or reads a Bible, or has a friend who shares the gospel with them. That's the outward calling. Paul is going to talk more

in Romans 10 about the incredible need of people to share the gospel. This outward calling is really important.

But while the outward call is necessary (you've got to hear the gospel if you're ever going to be able to believe it), but it isn't sufficient on its own to save us. If left to our own stubborn wills, we would all remain deaf to the good news of Jesus Christ.

That is why we desperately need the *inward calling*. Jesus says in John 6:44, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." Sometimes this is called an effectual call. When God calls his foreknown people inwardly, he doesn't just invite them and hope they will come; he brings them to life. He gives them a new heart. It's effective grace that does what it intends to do. Ezekiel 36:26 describes this *regeneration* beautifully: "I will remove the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." Jesus calls this being "born again" (John 3:3). That's the inward call.

And what is the result of this new heart? *Faith and repentance*. We hear the gospel, we see our need for Jesus, we recognize our sin, we turn away from it, and we rest in Christ alone for our peace (Eph. 2:8, Acts 11:18). This is our response to all of these things that God has done: he's foreknown us, he's predestined us, he's called us, and so we believe! And we respond with faith and repentance. It's something that only someone who has had their heart of stone removed can ever do.

Now, it's possible that you might be listening to this and not yet have placed your faith in Christ. And if you are not a Christian here today, you might hear all this talk of predestination and calling so far and feel a bit paralyzed by it. You might say, "Well, I don't *feel* predestined. I don't feel anything different. I can't see any reason to think that I'm called." I would urge you: please do not get hung up on this question, and absolutely do not use it as an excuse to stay away from Jesus!

Nowhere does God command you to peer into the hidden decrees of God to discern if you are elect before you act. He doesn't tell you to come if you *feel* called. He simply tells you to come. And he promises, "The one who comes to me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37). You may one day look back and understand the invisible grace that drew you, but right now, all you need to feel a sense of

your sin and your need for Christ. If you hear his voice today, follow the call. Answer it. Believe in Christ. Repent of your sins. Come to him. Rest in Christ by faith.

#### **4. Justified**

The fourth link in the golden chain of redemption is justification.

Paul says, “And those whom he called he also justified.”

Paul is saying, this person we were just speaking about who was foreknown, and predestined, and who has inwardly been given a heart to believe in Christ is also then justified by God when they believe.

To be justified means to be declared completely righteous in the courtroom of God. Notice that this immediately follows our calling and our faith. The moment you are drawn to Christ and place your faith in Him, all of your sins are credited to Jesus on the cross, and all of His perfect, spotless righteousness is credited to you. The first five chapters of Romans were Paul making this argument.

The fact that Paul spent so much time on the topic of justification should indicate to you just how important this is to building you up, stealing away your fear, and giving you comfort in the gospel.

Justification is the great objective anchor for the struggling Christian. When you are dragged down by the “what-ifs” and the fears of suffering we talked about earlier, the enemy will inevitably try to whisper that God is punishing you, or that maybe you’re too weak to hang on. But if you are justified, there is no condemnation left for you. God has already struck his gavel down. You are entirely accepted, not based on your own works, but based on the finished work of Christ.

Notice so far, it’s all his doing. He foreknows. He predestines. He calls. He justifies. He does it!

#### **5. Glorified**

The fifth link in the golden chain of redemption is glorification.

My one-sentence definition of glorification: “Glorification is the final, perfect culmination of redemption in which a believer's soul is made sinless at death to immediately enjoy God's presence, and their body is ultimately raised imperishable at the resurrection to experience complete, eternal holiness and joy in fully beholding Him.”

A bit ago, I mentioned that all five of these verbs in this passage are aorist verbs, which speak of them as past tense and completed. But this is the one in the bunch that might seem not to belong. Because unlike those other four links in the chain that we've seen before, we know that this one hasn't happened yet! And so does Paul.

In verse 17 he says that the glory we will experience has not yet been revealed.

In verse 23 he says we're still awaiting the complete fulfillment of our adoption.

In verse 25 he says we're still waiting for our glorification with patience.

Okay, Paul knows that our glorification hasn't happened yet, so why does Paul use the aorist tense here, then? It's not actually completed yet. Well grammar experts call what Paul does here the “proleptic aorist,” which describes a future event that is so absolutely certain to happen that you can actually speak of it as already having been accomplished.

Here's what that means: Paul wants us to know that in the mind and decree of God, your future glorification is already a done deal. It hasn't happened yet in time, but it's so certain that you can hold that hope of your glorification as tightly as you can hold onto anything in your life, including the other chains of redemption.

Glorification is the moment we are finally and fully conformed to the image of the Son. But that process of shaping us has already begun in Christians.

Think about this: what has God told us is His central priority for your life as a Christian? Your true good is holiness and conformity to Jesus.

Are you willing to dedicate—or re-dedicate—yourself to being shaped into Christ’s likeness today? Are you willing to put an end to your own selfish pursuits if they conflict with the glorious plan God has told us he is working out in us right now?

God has you in His grip, from eternity past to eternity future.

## **Conclusion**

As we conclude today, I want to leave you with a gentle challenge. Regardless of how you may currently feel about the idea of predestination, let me encourage you to accept the terminology of Scripture. Seek to let God’s Word tell you things that might even make you uncomfortable. In the coming weeks—especially as we enter into the deep waters of Romans 9—begin praying that God would make you open to His truth, even if it tramples on some old ideas or traditions you may have previously held. The most important thing is that we are persuaded by God’s Word, not by our own philosophies or prejudices.

Rest in this Golden Chain today.

If He foreknew you, He predestined you.

If He predestined you, He called you.

If He called you, He justified you.

And if He justified you, beloved, you are as good as glorified already.

*Let's pray.*