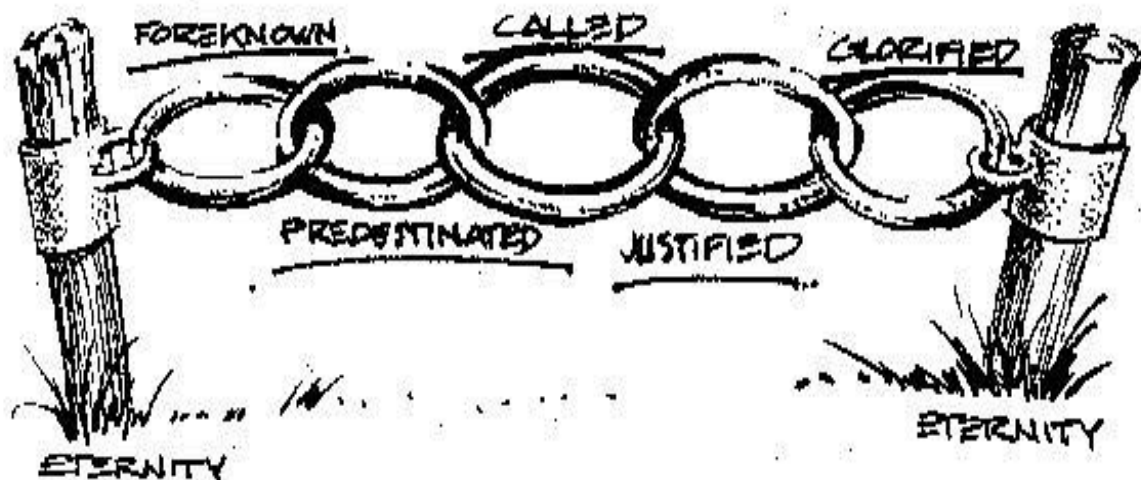


CHAIN OF GRACE



By John G. Reisinger

One of the best loved verses in all of the word of God is Romans 8:28. However, some believers do not realize the foundation upon which this great promise rests. When Paul declares that God works "all things," without a single exception, together for his own glory and the good of his people, that is quite a claim. One might ask, "Paul, how can you make such a sweeping and dogmatic statement?" The next verse begins with the word "for" and Paul's reason for being so certain is laid out in five tremendous statements. These statements have well been called, "The Five Golden Links in the Chain of Sovereign Grace." Let us examine them carefully.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29 For whom he did (1) FOREKNOW, he also did (2) PREDESTINATE to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also (3) CALLED: and whom he called, them he also (4) JUSTIFIED: and whom he justified, them he also (5) GLORIFIED (Rom. 8:28-30).

The first thing to notice is the five things are linked together into one unbreakable chain. If one of them is true then they are all true. The word "for" in verse 29 begins the argument that proves beyond question that all things have to work together for good for the people of God. Paul lists five things that are certain to happen because of God's sovereign purpose. God's people are (1) all foreknown, (2) all predestinated, (3) all called, (4) all justified, and (5) all glorified.

All five of these things are set forth as not only essential to God's eternal purpose of salvation but also as absolutely certain of fulfillment. They summarize the salvation of sovereign grace that begins in eternity with God's foreknowledge and ends in eternity with our full glorification. Each link grows out of the former link to form one unbreakable chain. Every sinner who is "foreknown" is going to wind up totally "glorified." Notice how all five links fit together.

Romans 8:28 is the glorious declaration of hope and assurance. We "know" something for certain. We know that "God works all things together for good" for a group of people described as "those who love God." They are further described as those "who have been called according to his purpose." The second thing gives the reason for the first thing. The first thing, loving God, describes the true character of a child of God. All true Christians sincerely love God. The second thing, "called according to his purpose," gives us the cause that made the first thing possible. God purposed to have some people love him and he sovereignly called these particular people by his power. We love him only because he first loved us. He called us on "purpose" according to his own plan. I am sure you realize that most people think God calls everyone in the same way and justifies only those who are willing to respond to the call in repentance and faith. This is, of course, half true but not true at all in the sense that Paul is talking about calling. It is impossible to fit that idea into this golden chain.

When verse 29 says, "For whom he did foreknow," it must be referring to a specific identifiable people. They are the identical same people who in verse 28 "love God" and have "been called." All of those who are "foreknown" are also "predestinated to be conformed into the image of Christ." The foreknown ones and the predestinated are the same identical people. All those who are foreknown and then predestinated are next "called." Being called is the first step taken to bring guilty sinners out of the graveyard of sin and death and ultimately glorify them in heaven in full redemption. The order of these things is important. It is especially important in the next step. All those who are called, because they have been foreknown and predestinated, are also all "justified." In other words, everyone, without a single exception, who is called is always justified. That is not what I learned in Bible school.

In Bible school I learned that God called all men without exception and those who, with their free will, decided to respond were then justified and predestinated to be eternally secure. The predestinating purpose of God always followed the sinner's willingness to answer God's call. It is obvious that is not possible in this passage of Scripture. According to Paul, our calling follows and grows out of our predestination and not vice versa. If that were not true, the text would say, "God calls all men, and justifies only those who are willing to believe." However, the text puts the order exactly in the reverse order. We were not predestinated to ultimate glorification because we were willing to believe, but we were made willing to believe only because we had already been predestinated. Calling is merely the first step towards the foreordained end of total glorification and all who have been foreordained to that end will be called and justified. The Holy Spirit clearly states that all, without exception who are called are also justified. It is impossible to be called, in the sense that Paul is using the word "called," without also being justified.

Obviously Paul is talking about effectual calling, or regeneration. The first result of being called is that we are justified, and the final climax of God's work is total glorification. All those who are justified will most certainly be glorified. That fact is so certain that Paul speaks of it as all ready past, and so it is in the eternal purposes of God. This is the only place in Paul's writings where he jumps from justification to glorification and skips sanctification. It is not because he quit believing that sanctification was essential, but in this argument he is talking about the "eternal purpose of God" and present and ultimate glorification are certain for every foreknown, predestinated, called, and justified one.

Let me paraphrase these verses and answer the question, "How can I be sure God will do what he promised in Romans 8:28." I can be sure because "Those," all of them and only them, who have been foreknown by God in electing grace, are certain of ultimate salvation (total glorification) because God has sovereignly purposed to conform them, all of them and only them, into the image of Christ. God's first step in this gracious purpose is to effectually "call" them, the foreknown and predestinated ones, all of them and only them, by the power of the Holy Spirit through the gospel. Those, all of them and only

them, whom he calls he also "justifies" and applies to them the righteousness of Christ. It is impossible to be foreknown and predestinated and not be called just as it is not possible to be called if you were not foreknown and predestinated. Likewise it is not possible to be called without that calling producing justification. Those, all of them and only them, who are justified are already glorified in the sovereign purposes of God. In God's mind it is a "done deal."

I do not wish to be repetitious, but it is essential to see how these five things are part of one whole.

(1) THOSE God *foreknew* - all of them and only them -

(2) he ALSO *predestinated* . . .

THOSE he *predestinated* - all of them and only the m -

(3) he ALSO *called*

THOSE he *called* - all of them but only them -

(4) he ALSO *justified*

THOSE he *justified* - all of them and only them -

(5) he ALSO *glorified*.

If we look carefully at the word "foreknow" in verse 29, we notice it does not say "what" God foreknew, but "whom" he foreknew. Paul is not talking about information God had before hand but about something which God did. He "foreknew" these people in the same sense that he "called" them and justified them. See William Sasser's article on page 3.

Paul does not stop with just laying out the theological foundation upon whom our hopes rest, he applies it in a personal and practical way. Look carefully at his argument in the following verses:

31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? 32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. 34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. (Rom. 8:31-34)

The question in verse 31 is asked in the light of the great facts laid down in verses 28-30. "These things" are the truths that Paul has just stated. "God for us" means that God is for us in electing grace, for us in calling us out of death and sin, for us in robing us in the righteousness of Christ, for us in giving us the Spirit of adoption, for us in sealing us unto the day of redemption, etc. Our only response to these great things is to shout "Glory to God for such amazing grace!" God is "for us" not as a judge for our judgment is past. He is "for us" as our Heavenly Father and has pledged his everlasting love to us. He is "for us" as the sovereign controller of all things. We could go on and on and shout some more.

Verse 32 is a powerful argument that gives assurance beyond description. The argument is simple. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* In other words, if God literally "delivered" up his Son unto the death of the cross, and he did, will he not do everything necessary to protect the investment for which he paid such a high price? If

God has already given us the best gift of all, his blessed Son, will he keep back the second and third things? Do you see the logic of Paul's great assurance.

Verse 33 is one the greatest verses in all of the Word of God on assurance of eternal salvation. *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.* When the highest authority in the land grants a pardon, no lesser authority can touch the individual thus pardoned. President Gerald Ford pardoned Richard Nixon following the Watergate scandal. Historians and philosophers may argue whether Ford acted wisely or unwisely, but one thing is certain, once Mr. Ford, acting as President of the USA, pardoned Nixon there was not a court or law agency that could touch him. No one has the authority to supersede the highest office. If God, as Governor of the universe, pardons and justifies a sinner, then nobody can ever touch that sinner.

But Paul does not couch his point in terms of God justifying "a sinner." He makes his point by referring to the sinner as one of "God's *elect*." Gerald Ford, for reasons of his own consciously chose to pardon Richard Nixon, and Ford had the right to deliberately pardon Richard Nixon simply because of his position of presidential authority. Nixon's guilt or innocence was not at all the key factor. Everything hinged on Ford's authority. Just so God has the sovereign right to choose some sinners, here called "God's elect," and justify them in spite of their sin and wickedness—and not a soul in heaven, in hell, or on earth can open their mouth and object! That is the force of the phrase "it is GOD (the sovereign Creator, Lawgiver, and Judge) that justifies." If he is for us, who indeed can be against us. If God almighty himself chooses a man and then justifies than man, who can contradict God's decree. Who shall lay anything to God's elect? It is God himself, the ultimate authority, who declares the elected ones to be justified.

The reason no one can bring a charge against the elect is the fact that there is not a single piece of evidence that can be found against them. Nixon's mistake was in destroying only 18 minutes of a crucial tape. God has destroyed our entire tape! Every charge against the elect has been answered and paid in full by their Surety. Every obligation they owed to God and his holy Law has been rendered in full in the person of Christ and has been recorded to their account.

When anyone accuses a child of God concerning his standing with God, that person is really accusing God—and the "anyone" includes the Christian himself. A true child of God allowing himself to be tyrannized by his conscience is actually accusing the authority and justice of God himself. God will never condemn those whom he has justified and he justifies all that he chose unto salvation. Oh, that the sheep of Christ would learn the difference between godly sorrow that leads to repentance and the despairing anguish of spirit that is laid on their conscience by the ambassadors of Moses. God's people are not criminals awaiting the bar of judgment. The Judge is their heavenly Father and has pardoned them of every sin.

Again, Paul does not leave the matter to mere abstraction. Verse 33 is the sure *fact* and verse 34 is the reason or foundation upon which the fact rests. Paul is not satisfied with declaring that "no one" can lay a charge against Christ's sheep, he shows that even the Holy Judge himself, who most obviously and justly could condemn, cannot condemn us. Verse 34 is a "bullet proof" argument.

Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. (Rom. 8:34)

Christ is the judge. The Father has given all judgement over to the Son. Christ is not only the only person who can take a sinner to heaven, he is also the only one who has authority to send a sinner to

hell. "All authority" to judge and to save is in his hands (John 17:1-3). Every sinner is in the hands of Christ to save or damn as he chooses.

First argument: The Judge is the one who died for us and paid our debt. Will he condemn the very people whom he died to save? Will Christ willingly take the debt upon himself and then hold us accountable for the same debt. The very idea is ridiculous. No, no, we are sure that not a single one of those for whom he died can ever be condemned by Christ the Judge.

Second argument: The one who died under the penalty of our sin carried those sins into the grave. It was the righteous Father that put him under judgment on the cross and then sealed his tomb with the seal of righteousness. Ah, but the glory of the gospel message is that God himself broke that seal and raised his Son from the grave leaving our sins behind.

Third argument: The Father not only raised our blessed Lord from the dead but also seated his victorious Son upon a throne. Our blessed Lord is "seated at the right hand (place of power and authority) of God almighty, the Governor of the universe. Our Lord is the Judge of all men. The Judge is also our Savior who died in our place. The Judge is the same one who has given the absolute assurance of acceptance when we come to him by faith in his atoning work.

Fourth argument: Our Lord has not just been raised from the dead and glorified in heaven as the victor. He "ever lives" for the purpose of "making intercession for us" (Heb. 7:25 and Rom. 8:34). Do you see Paul's logic? It is ludicrous to imagine that Christ, the Judge, would die for us and make intercession for us out of one side of his mouth and then condemn us out of the other side of his mouth. It is impossible that he could save us and condemn us at the same time! Oh, that tenderhearted believers would feel the fullness of this soul liberating truth. The one who died for your sins is the same person who is seated at the right hand of God and he is praying specifically for you. Isn't that glorious!

In Romans 8:26, Paul reminds us that the Holy Spirit is in us and not only helps us to pray but actually makes intercession for us when we do not know how to pray. In verse 26 the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity is IN us praying, and in verse 34, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, is at the right hand of God praying that we will be kept safe and secure forever! We have the third Person of the trinity praying *in* us, and the second Person of the Trinity in heaven praying *for* us; *we are going to make it in spite of the Devil, trials, and even our own sinful hearts!* We KNOW we are going to make it, yea, we know we have *already made it*.

The grand conclusion of the assurance given to us in the five golden links in the chain of grace is laid out in Romans 8:35-39. Again there is a logical question: "Who can separate those described in verses 28-34 from the unchanging love of God?" The answer is simple, "nothing or nobody in heaven, hell, or earth"! There is not a single power in the universe more powerful than the love of God for his elect. As you read verses 35 through 39 remind yourself that in every generation, including the present one, there were children of God some where in the world enduring every one of the things described, and their Shepherd King sustained them and caused them to triumph even in death.

What an argument for assurance of eternal salvation!

If you really want to understand the logic and glory of the chain of grace, go backwards with the five links. Start with ultimate glorification in heaven.

Who are the people who will finally and surely reach heaven and be glorified in sinless perfection?
Answer: All of those without exception, but only them, who have been justified.

Who are the people who are certain of being justified before God in the righteousness of Christ?
Answer: All of those without exception, but only them, who have called by God's grace and power.

Who are those people who are certain of being called by God unto salvation? Answer: All of those without exception, but only them, who have been predestinated by God to be conformed into the image of Christ.

Who are the people who are certain of being predestinated to be conformed into the image of Christ in glory? Answer: All of those without exception, but only them, who have been foreknown, or chosen in electing grace, to be purchased by Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

Those are the people that Paul can assure, "We are more than conquerors." Not only can no one ultimately do us eternal harm since all things would be worked for our good (v. 28), but even the worst of things will be used to minister to us in fulfilling God's eternal purpose. The horrible things in verses 35-39 will plainly serve to make the victory more glorious in eternity. However, let us never forget that we are more than conquerors only "through him that loved us and washed us in his blood."