

January 22, 2017

Ephesians 1:3-10 / I Peter 1:1-2 / Romans 8:29-30

The Order of Salvation (#1) – Foreknowledge, Predestination and Call

If you've ever wondered about the part GOD plays in bringing about the salvation of people, this text will answer that question! For in this text Paul's intent is to approach the topic of salvation from the divine side of things, accentuating the part GOD plays in bringing us to salvation. It's something he will quickly summarize here, before going into much greater depth on it in chaps. 9-11.

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When I preach from a text that speaks on what WE AS PEOPLE must do to be saved, I always focus on, and emphasize, that. But, here in this text, that's not at all what Paul wants us to focus on. Because here (and continuing throughout the next 3 chapters) Paul's purpose is to open for us the curtain that hides the deep mysteries of God from our sight – and especially the mystery of His free and sovereign grace in electing certain people unto salvation.

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He tells us the PART GOD PLAYS in saving us, by showing us the divine side of conversion. The side that would forever be hidden from our eyes – if Paul had not shared it with us. These are things that could never be known if God hadn't revealed them to Paul, and Paul in turn hadn't revealed them to us (in texts like this one).

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For what Paul is telling us here, is that ultimately, in the final analysis, when we witness anyone's true conversion to Christ, what we're really seeing is God working out in the present the sovereignly predestined plan he had for that person from eternity past!

A plan in which **GOD CARRIES OUT SIX DIVINE ACTIONS** to bring about the salvation of all who ever have been, or ever will be, truly saved. They are all **VERBS** that have **GOD AS THE SUBJECT** performing the actions.

So they are, without question, things GOD DOES in the lives of individuals whom Jesus, Paul & Peter refer to as either, “the Elect” (Mt. 24:22-24 / Rom. 11:7 / I Peter 1:1) / “those God Predestined” (here and Eph. 1:5-11) / or “His Chosen Ones” (John 13:18 / Rom. 8:33 & 11:5 / I Peter 1:2 & 2:9).

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And today, due to time constraints, we will only cover three of those Six Saving Acts God Performs. The **FIRST** comes to us in v. 29, where Paul writes: “Those God **FOREKNEW**, He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.”

The word “foreknew” comes from the compound Greek verb “pro-egno” – “pro” meaning “before” and “egno” (from the word “gnosko,”) which means “to know.” So the first thing we are told is that our being “predestined” somehow hinges on God “knowing us beforehand” or “before we ever existed.”

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And here I need to tell you, this is where we find the greatest disagreement over the interpretation of these verses. It all revolves around what the word “foreknew” means.

The most common understanding, or the view people generally hold to (or want to hold to) is this: That what God “foreknew” were the decisions and responses people would make to Jesus before they ever actually make those decisions. And on the basis of His “fore-knowing” or “foreseeing those things,” He predestines to salvation those whom He sees will eventually choose Him anyway.

Which means (if we follow this line of understanding) that “God’s elect” or “His chosen ones” (whom He predestines to salvation), are simply those people who God sees in advance – would “elect,” or “choose,” by their own free and unassisted will, to trust in Jesus.

Those with this understanding, then, would say: It is “*our future God-foreseen choosing of Him*” which acts as the basis for “*His eternity-past choice to predestine us to salvation.*”

Yet there are many problems with this view! Because the people who hold to it wrongly take the word “foreknew” to refer to a “foreknowledge of future events or facts.” God (they say) saw from eternity past who would repent, trust Christ, and choose to live a godly life, and on the basis of foreseeing those things, He “predestined” such individuals to salvation.

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But this is the problem. Nowhere in this text does it state that God predestined people on the basis of foreseeing any future response of faith, or repentance, or moral reformation on their part.

It is very important to note that the word “foreknew” is not used in reference to a prior knowledge of FACTS about people, or RESPONSES that they would make.

It says, “***THOSE*** He foreknew He also predestined...” That is, what He foreknew were not facts but people! And His decision to predestine them was NOT MADE on the basis of knowing things they would do, but on the basis of knowing THEM as individuals (and before they were ever born)!

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That’s one of the reasons I had to reject that view. Because the word “foreknew” as it’s used here, very simply means that God “knew certain individuals in advance – *in a relational way* – before they ever existed.

In every text where GOD is said to be the One foreknowing PEOPLE, it means: “*To have a relationship with beforehand*” / “*to love beforehand*” / or “*to have affections for beforehand*” (as in Acts 2:23, Rom 11:2, I Pet 1:2, I Pet 1:20).

The word “*Gnosko*” is the N.T. counterpart of the O.T. Hebrew word “*Yada*,” which means “to know intimately” or “to be intimate with,” either sexually or relationally. It means, “to have a close, intimate, personal, love relationship with” or “be bonded to with deep affection.”

Gen. 4:1 and 4:25 use it this way where we read: “Adam knew Eve and she bore him a son.” Likewise, Matthew uses this word “*Gnosko*” (the Greek equivalent of Yada) in Matt. 1:25 where he says of Joseph: “*Joseph took Mary as his wife, but He did not KNOW her (He was not sexually intimate with her) until after Jesus was born.*”

And Jesus, speaking in John 17:3, prays: “*Now this is eternal life, that they may **KNOW** you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*” And what does the word “know” mean there? Not just “knowing facts about God,” but having a personal, intimate, affectionate love relationship with God! We must **KNOW** Him, **NOT** merely know information about Him.

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And that’s exactly what “*Gnosko*” means here in v. 29, except that it has the prefix “*fore*” added to it. Which means that God didn’t predestine people because He knew they would choose Him, or place their faith in him, or repent, or reform their moral behavior. It means He predestined them – because He had set His affections upon them and loved them from all eternity past.

He had a love relationship with certain people, “before they were ever born” or “had done anything good or bad” (as He specifically tells us in relation to Jacob in chap. 9:11-13). That’s what the Psalmist called being loved with “***an everlasting love.***” A love He has for His people, long before He ever chose them to be His people! A love that has no beginning and no end, but is “everlasting.”

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As Paul says in Eph. 1:5: “*In LOVE He predestined us to be adopted as children...*” It’s love that guided His choice to predestine certain people, not a prior knowledge of facts, or choices they would make, or virtues they would exhibit.

For as Paul adds in the last part of Eph. 1:5: Our being predestined is, “*to the praise of His glorious grace.*” It is intended to display how very gracious God is, not what a good rewarder He is!

Which means we are NOT predestined is on the basis of some deservedness, or worthiness, or repentance, or faith response on our part. NO! It's out of nothing but sheer grace and an everlasting love for unworthy and undeserving as me and you.

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And the **last**) reason I abandoned the view that God chose to predestine us on the basis of some foreseen response on our part, is because it empties all substance from the word "predestination" and makes using it totally unnecessary. Because there's absolutely no need to "predestine" someone if God already knows they are going to come to Him by their own free choice anyway!

It makes the term absolutely meaningless, needless and useless in the chain of God's saving actions. Which is why people who believe that feel no need to ever talk about predestination.

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Likewise: To say God predestines people on the basis of a choice that Jesus says they can't make without the Spirit's help and a faith they can't exercise apart from His enabling grace – is a bit ludicrous.

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If people were NOT bound in sin, enslaved to sin, captive to sin, or a prisoner to sin, that would be one thing. But Paul has just spent many chapters telling us we are! Jesus says in John 6:44 & 65, "*No man can come to me (and He means in faith) unless the Father who sent me draws him*" or as verse 65 says, "*enables him.*"

Left to ourselves we simply can't do it, says Jesus! It's not possible! Being enslaved to sin as we are, we don't have the ability.

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So, unless God moves upon our hearts and minds, by His grace, we could never come, says Jesus. We can't do it! Which means that for me to believe that God predestines people on the basis of foreknowing a response they could never make, or exercising a faith they could never exercise unless God intervened to make them able to do so,

is to embrace a view of predestination that doesn't fit with the rest of Scripture.

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Then **SECONDLY**, though I've just discussed it to a degree, the word "**PREDESTINE**" (prohorizo in the Greek) means "to predetermine, guarantee, or ensure beforehand." It is "to sovereignly ordain that something comes to pass," or "to make certain it happens."

Thus this text teaches that those God loves ahead of time, or sets His affections upon from eternity past and determines to save, will come to possess the salvation He predestines them to obtain. He decrees it beforehand, as part of His eternal plan, and as Job 42:2 says, "*No plan of His can be thwarted!*" It will come to pass!

As I told the class Wednesday night: "*When God determines He will have you as His own, nothing will stop it from happening!*" That's the purpose of predestination – to ensure that something infallibly comes to pass! God's predestining it to happen, is the ultimate, underlying reason that it does.

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We see this in our text from Acts 13:48. There we find Paul telling the Jews that from then on, he was going to the Gentiles. And he even quotes Is. 49:6 as his justification for doing so. And then Luke records this response on the part of the Gentiles: "*When the Gentiles heard this (that is, God's saving intentions for them from Is. 49:6) they were glad and honored the word of the Lord.*"

And listen to what Luke says next in v. 48b as he explains this: "*And all who were appointed for eternal life, believed.*" (The NRSV says, "destined," the KJV says "ordained," the GNB and CEV say "chosen for eternal life")

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So what's Luke's point? It wasn't their believing that caused them to be destined for eternal life, it was their being destined for eternal life which

was the ultimate cause of their believing. They believed because they'd been chosen, appointed or destined (pre-destined) for eternal life.

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It's nearly impossible NOT to see that's what Luke wants us to understand. They believed because they had been predestined! So, as much as some may kick against the idea, if you were ever able to ask Luke, "*Why are you a believer?*"

He would say the same thing he says in v. 48: "Because God had chosen, appointed or predestined me to partake of His salvation."

It's NOT BELIEVING that causes us to be predestined, it's being predestined that serves as the underlying cause of our eventual belief or faith in Jesus. In John 10:25-26 Jesus essentially suggests the exact same thing.

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Which brings us to the **THIRD** link in the chain of Divine Actions which God carries out in the lives of His foreknown and predestined ones. / And that third action is that He "calls those He foreknew and predestined." / Vv. 29-30: "*Those God foreknew, He also predestined... and those He predestined he also **CALLED**...*"

The question is: "What does Paul mean when he says God "*called*" them?"

And here there are only two possibilities. 1<sup>st</sup>) Some say it refers to what we call the general or universal external call, which all who hear the Gospel summons to trust in Christ, receive. That is, the Bible's invitation, or every preacher's or evangelist's invitation, to receive or come to Christ in faith for salvation.

2<sup>nd</sup>) Others say it refers (and I will show how it does refer) to the more limited, specific and internal call which the Holy Spirit extends ONLY to God's chosen ones, when any preacher invites lost sinners to come in faith to Christ. We already saw an example of this in Acts 13:48. But there's an even more striking example of it in Acts 16:13-14.

There Paul, Silas and Luke come to the city of Philippi. And on the Sabbath they go outside the city gates and down by the river where they find the “place of prayer” where some Jews had gathered for worship.

Then Luke records this in v. 13b: *“We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira who was a worshipper of God.”*

And listen to what Luke says in v. 14: *“The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”* There were many women there listening to Paul, but God only opened the heart of one of them.

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It’s a perfect example of the two kinds of “calls.” Paul shares the Gospel with all of them and encourages them all to believe, not just Lydia – that’s the outward, general, external call of the Gospel to repent and come in faith to Christ. And they ALL received that call.

But Luke notes that one of them (named Lydia) received another call in addition to the call all the others received. An internal call extended to her alone, whereby the Lord opened her heart to respond to the Gospel message. Of course, God could have opened the hearts of every single person there (and maybe with some He did later) – we don’t know. But at this time He didn’t.

Out of all the women present only she received the effectual call of the Holy Spirit. The call that opened her heart and made her able to do what Jesus says she couldn’t do unless the Father, through His Spirit, drew her or enabled her.

And it’s that inward, effectual, heart-opening call that makes people able to positively respond to the Gospel. That’s the “call” Paul is talking about here in vv. 29-30.

You know how we know that? Because Paul goes on to say that ALL who receive the call he's speaking about, are justified and glorified! And THAT (as we just saw from Acts 16) is not true of the general, external call of the Gospel – which many never do respond to, ever.

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Yet, here, Paul clearly says, *“Those whom God called, He also justified...”* Which means that everyone who receives the “call” Paul is speaking about here in v. 30 is saved by receiving it. *“Those He predestined He also called, and those he called He also justified...”*

Thus R.C. Sproul is right when he says: *“Now we grant that the Bible does not explicitly say that ALL those God calls He justifies. We are supplying the word ALL... But when we supply the word all we are responding to an implication of the text... For if Paul does not mean that all who are called are justified, the only alternative would be that SOME who are called are justified. If we supply the word “some” here, we must supply it throughout the golden chain.*

*Then it would read like this: Some of those He foreknew He also predestined, and some of those He predestined, He also called, and some of those He called He also justified, and some of those He justified He also glorified. This reading of the text leaves us with a theological monstrosity – a nightmare. It would mean that only some of the predestined ever hear the Gospel and only some of the justified are ever saved or glorified.”*

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So, my friends, the “call” that God’s foreknown/predestined ones receive, is the “call” that effectually opens their hearts to respond to the Gospel. A call that melts their hearts (as opposed to all those around them) and ensures a positive response to the Gospel in those who receive it. Always!

Spurgeon describes this internal and effectual call this way: *“A man is not saved against his will, but he is made willing by the operation of the Holy Ghost. A mighty grace which he does not wish to resist, enters into*

*the man, disarms him, makes a new creature of him, and he is saved..."*

*"When God first came to me, did I not spurn Him? When He knocked at the door and asked for entrance, did I not drive Him away, and do spite to His grace? I can remember that I often did so, until at last, by the power of His effectual grace, He said, 'I must, I will come in;' and then He turned my heart, and made me love Him..."*

*"There are some here who are laughing at salvation... scoffing at Christ, and mocking the gospel. But I tell you some of you shall yet come.*

*"What?!" you say, "Can God make me become a Christian?" I tell you yes, for herein rests the power of the gospel. It does not ask for your consent; it gets it. It does not say, will you have it? But it makes you willing in the day of God's power."*

What an awesome message! When God determines to have some-one, He will have them! They can fight and resist and do battle and shake their fist at God and tell Him they will never come! I did that almost the whole 12 years I ran from God!

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So yes, I tell you (as with Spurgeon) if God has determined to have you, have you He will! You can rebel all you want, but He will have you. You can try to harden your heart all you want, but He will soften it. You can run from Him with all your might, but some day you will rest in His arms. You can hate Him now all you want, but one day you will love Him! No one is so hardened that God cannot bring them in! Even those who say:  
*"You will NEVER change my heart!"*

For if He set His affections on you from all eternity past, He will win your affections for Him before you pass from this world. And what a glorious victory that will be! That is the effectual call that God at some point extends to those He fore-loves and predestines unto salvation. And when He extends it, you will NOT want to resist it.

Spurgeon was right: "He will not save you against your will, but will make you willing by the power of the Holy Spirit."