

Doctrine of Salvation in Romans

*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**. For whom he did **foreknow**, he also did **predestinate** to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also **called**: and whom he called, them he also **justified**: and whom he justified, them he also **glorified**.*

Romans 8:28-30

Purpose

God, in His infinite wisdom and power has called sinners to salvation through the gospel of Christ according to His purpose. *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3:23) The central theme of the book of Romans is about the Righteousness of God, and being sinners, all of us are unable to meet up to the standard of the Holy and Righteous God. In fact, what all sinners deserve is eternal separation from God, and death is our just reward. *“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* (Romans 6:23) The apostle Paul clearly states here that eternal life is the gift of God. Nobody can do anything to earn their salvation. The Jews in the Old Testament tried to obey the Law (Ten Commandments) by establishing more laws of their own, but none was able to keep them perfectly. This is in perfect harmony with the John Calvin’s teaching on “Total Depravity”. Wherefore, God accordingly to His divine purpose and grace, has pre-ordained the perfect salvation plan by His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ when Adam and Eve sinned against Him. *“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”* (Romans 5:12). *“For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.”* (Romans 5:17)

Why does God want to save us? The answer can be found in Romans 5:8 *“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* This is because He loves us unconditionally, for we are His created beings, created in His image for His purpose. As believers in Christ, the called according to His purpose, we are no longer condemned, but live to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. What better way to glorify God than to be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ? *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”* (Romans 8:1)

Foreknow

God, in His sovereign will and by His grace has, before the foundation of the world, ordains the salvation of His people whom He loves. The word “foreknow” which is “*proginosko*” in Greek, conveys

the idea of a deep intimate knowledge and love of a father who delights in his children. As John Calvin puts it, "the adoption by which He had always distinguished His children from the reprobate." In other words, God have chosen some to be His adopted children and have loved them before they were even born. It is not because He sees any good in them, for they in their depraved sinful state are incapable of choosing or pleasing Him. *"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one."* (Romans 3:10) Salvation is entirely by the grace of God and His love on whomever He shall have mercy and compassion. *"For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."* (Romans 9:15) Herein is God's Unconditional Election as proposed by Calvin. While it seems unjust for the righteous God to elect only some to be saved, we need to realise that we are His created beings and He is the all-powerful creator of the entire universe. As the Apostle has written *"Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?"* (Romans 9:21) If not for His unconditional love, all sinners shall receive their just sentence which is eternal death. This is a mystery that our finite minds cannot fully comprehend until we meet our Lord Jesus face to face.

Predestinate

God, by His grace and mercy to them whom He foreknow (have loved), have also predestinated them to be conformed to the image of His Son. God alone is the author of salvation from the beginning to the end. Everything that God does is with this eternal purpose in mind. We, who are the called, have no contribution in this salvation process. Even the faith to believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ comes from God. The Greek verb *"prohorizo"* means "to mark out the boundaries beforehand". In other words, believers are fore-ordained by God. Predestination is the execution of God's eternal purpose which is for the believer (adopted child) to be like Christ (Son of God). This is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit which begins the moment the believer is saved and continues until the Lord returns. *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."* (Romans 8:14)

The Greek for "image" used here is *"eikon"* where we get the word "icon" which is derived likeness. This predestination is the purposeful act of God through the working of the Holy Spirit in believers transforming them into the likeness of the "firstborn" (Jesus) in the family of God. And we have the assurance that what God has fore-ordained, He will perform it to the end. *"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:38-39)

This doctrine on predestination is closely associated with "Perseverance of The Saints", the fifth point in the Five Points of Calvinism.

Called

God, our heavenly Father, by His irresistible grace has called, and continues to call His adopted children into His family. In Romans 1:1, the apostle Paul begins his salutation by testifying that he was *“called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God”*. This effectual calling to those whom God foreknew and predestined is the work of the Holy Spirit. This spiritual birth according to God’s pre-determined time, when the gospel of Christ is declared according to His word, and through saving faith which comes from God, cannot be resisted by God’s chosen people, who shall come to repentance and accept Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and Lord. In this entire salvation process, the believer (child born) exerts no effort except to cry out to God. It is the “call” of God that brings His eternal purpose of Salvation in Christ to realisation. *“For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;”* (Romans 9:11).

Justified

God, who is holy and righteous, cannot pardon sin purely on the grounds of repentance. Therefore, in order for God to pardon a sinner and still remain righteous, the penalty for sin must be paid in full. The good news is this penalty has been fully paid by Jesus Christ. This is the reason why Jesus Christ, the second person of the Triune God, has come into this world in humiliation as a man, lived a perfect and sinless life, and was crucified on the cross at Calvary on behalf of God’s elect to appease God’s wrath. Justification is a judicial act of God where He pardons sinners and accepts them as righteous in His sight. The atoning work of Christ not only saves His brethren from eternal death, it also restores them back to God. *“Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.”* Romans (5:9-11) Christ did not die for all sinners, but only those who God the Father has foreknown, predestined and called. This is known as “Limited Atonement” as proposed by Calvin.

Salvation is free because Jesus paid the price. More than this, we are made righteous not because of our own good works, but the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. *“Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.”* (Romans 4:6-7)

Therefore, even justification is the work of God’s saving grace by faith in Christ Jesus. *“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:”* (Romans 3:24) *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Romans 5:1)

Glorified

God, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, shall also transform our mortal bodies into glorious bodies that are incorruptible when our Lord returns in glory to receive His bride (the church). *“But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”* (Romans 8:11) While we are in this world, we can only behold the glory of Christ by faith while we are still in our carnal bodies. Therefore, the Holy Spirit in us waits for that glorious day when we can behold the glory of Christ by sight in our new glorified bodies. The apostle Paul reminds us of this *“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”* (Romans 8:22-23)

This is the eternal hope that we, as believers have in Christ Jesus our Lord. But why does Paul speak of this future glorification as if it has already happened? The reason is that whatever God, who is not bound by time, has decreed it shall come to pass. In other words, as far as God is concerned, it has already happened. The same is true for “did foreknow”, “did predestinate”, “called”, and “justified”. Even though we are still in the process of being conformed to the image of Christ, a process known as sanctification, it is only a matter of time before this is complete (glorification). This may be the reason why Paul did not mention sanctification.

Conclusion

The perfect salvation plan of God discussed above is the work of God the Father, His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit that works in us. As a sinner, there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. But as a believer in Christ, what we can do is share this wonderful Gospel truth with someone who is still outside Christ.

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 10:17)