

God Rules, We Win

Romans 8:28-39

June 12, 2011

We have been looking at the fact that our salvation comes only by God's grace and it frees us from the power of sin and the condemnation of the law. It is given to all who place their faith in Jesus Christ and stop relying on their own efforts to be good enough. We have seen how people tried, then and now, to abuse this truth by saying that sin is therefore good because adding to our sin makes God look better and more forgiving. Paul denied in the strongest possible terms the idea that we should sin more in order to receive more grace. He couched this understanding in the truth that we are dead to sin and alive to God through our participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This participation is the result of the Holy Spirit regenerating us and is represented by our baptisms. The law could not bring us to salvation. God has made salvation available as a free gift through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Today we follow Paul into the next part of his teaching, and we see with him more about God's authority in the world and what it means for those who are in Christ.

Last week we saw that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because Jesus has already borne God's wrath for their sin on the cross. That was a negative statement—what God has removed from those who are being saved. This week we begin with a positive statement—what God gives to those who are being saved. Paul wrote, *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* (v.28)

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome, so there is the assumption already that those who read it are in Christ and the recipients of God's grace. This is written to believers. Still, Paul felt the need here to qualify the promise. If we are in Christ, if we are identified with God's Son and are made holy and pure through His sacrifice, then **God** works in all things for our good.

The western European culture of which we are a part has been steeped in the scriptures for over a thousand years. We have become very good at claiming God's promises while we ignore His commands and the conditions He puts on those promises. God makes sure everything works out for the good of His people who are called according to His purpose. If you don't love Him, if you are not His, you are on your own.

For those who are God's, however, the promise stands. God is active in every situation in life to strengthen His people, provide for them, show His glory through them, and demonstrate His love for them. It is not based on what they do. It is based on God's gracious gift of salvation and the fact that God carries to completion what He starts.

Paul carries on with this last truth. *“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”* (vv.29,30) What God begins, He finishes. You may remember several weeks back we said that it is all of God. God saves us. He regenerates us through the Holy Spirit. He washes us clean through the sacrifice of the Son on the cross. He

does everything for our salvation. Even our hearts are hard and far from Him until He regenerates us and gives us new hearts with which to love Him. This is what Jesus called being born again. Just as we didn't choose to be born into this world, we don't choose to be born into the next. God chooses us.

God **knew** you from the beginning of time. He knew what your name was going to be and how many days you would live even as He was creating the light and forming the mountains. Even as God was putting the world together, He chose those who would be His own. If you are in Christ, that means He chose you.

Many people take Paul's statement that "those God foreknew He also predestined" to mean that God knew who was going to believe in Jesus and follow Him, and so God predestined those who chose Him. The thrust of Paul's argument goes the other way.

Unregenerate hearts are hard and resistant against God. Until the Holy Spirit gets hold of someone they don't choose for God, they run in fear from Him. God didn't choose you because He knew that you would love Him. You only love Him because He chose you from the beginning of time. For many people this raises serious objections and problems with which Paul deals in the next chapter. We will wait until then to deal with them ourselves. For now, understand that the only reason anybody is saved is because of God's sovereign and gracious **choice**.

What is Paul's more immediate concern is what we are saved to. If we are predestined by God, what are we predestined for? Paul answers, ". . . to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn

among many brothers." The short answer is that we are predestined to be like **Jesus**. God chooses people for the purpose of conforming their characters into the character of His Son so that they may be adopted into God's family and He may share His presence and life with them for eternity. We will never be God. He is wholly other than what we are. He is Creator. We are creation. That never changes. God does invite us to participate in His life, however. He seeks to join us to the love that binds the Father, Son and Holy Spirit together. Jesus is our older brother in this sense. Jesus is the first to know the love of the Father and to be exalted and praised for His obedience, but He is only the first of many.

So, we are predestined in order to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. How does this process happen? "Those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified." Again, from start to finish it is all God's doing. He predestines us. He calls us. He justifies us. He glorifies us. There is nobody other than God doing anything in this list. He starts the process. He moves us through it. He finishes it. Being glorified is the last step in being conformed to the likeness of the Son. This is the fulness of what Paul meant when he said that God works in all things for the good of His people.

What, then should be our response to the fact that God is in control? How should we respond to the truth that God rules, not only over the world around us, but also over the human heart? If we are in Christ, we should rejoice! Paul wrote:

“What, then, shall we say in response to this? 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, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?”
(vv.31-35)

If the Creator of all that exists is on our side, what do we need to fear? If the Father was willing to crucify the Son on our behalf about what do we have to worry? When Paul mentions “all things” he is not talking about material wealth. Paul is not saying that one of the implications of being saved is that you get everything your fleshly heart desires. What Paul means is that, if God predestined you, then He will get you through the whole process of being conformed to the likeness of His Son. He no longer brings charges against us. He has justified us. He no longer condemns us. Our sin is condemned with Christ Jesus on the cross, and we are given victory over it through Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus now speaks with the Father on our behalf. We don’t get the things of this world. We are rich in the things that have eternal significance, however. **Nothing** can bring

charges against us or condemn us if we are in the love of Christ.

The last question then is, what can separate us from the love of Christ? Is there anything that can remove us from the position we have as those predestined by God? Can horrible conditions of life remove us from His grace? Will persecution by those around us demonstrate that we no longer belong to God?

Paul knew from his own experience the answer to these questions was, “no.” He knew he belonged to the Father through Jesus Christ even though much of his life was otherwise miserable. Paul also knew that it had been this way for a very long time. God’s people have always been persecuted by those who have no love for the truth or are too proud to admit their need for God’s grace. Paul quoted Psalm 44:22. *“Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”* Long before Paul’s time it was clear that the righteous do not always see reward in this life. The prophets generally died rejected and alone, often at the hands of the people they were trying to turn to God. Jesus Himself, God the Son, was ridiculed when He taught, rejected, mocked, scorned, and finally crucified by the very people to whom He came to offer salvation. God gave us His Son, and He will give us all the blessings that come with the salvation Jesus brought, but receiving all things from His hands does not mean we will escape hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword. It means these things will not separate us from the love of Christ.

God rules. He is in control. Our eternal destiny is in His hands and is guaranteed by His strength. If it

were up to us to hold on to Him we would have little hope. It is God who holds onto us with the very strength that called the universe into being from nothing and hung the stars in the heavens. Because it is His power and not our own that ensures our salvation and brings us through Paul can answer his question this way:

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (vv.37-39)

If the Creator has us, there is nothing in all creation that can pull us out of His hands. There is nothing made that can outdo and overpower the first Maker. Because God rules, we win. There is no power in heaven, on earth, or under the earth that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. If we are in Jesus we are safe regardless of what winds may blow or what circumstances may arise in our lives. We can rest in His presence knowing that He cares for us. We can be faithful to Him because we know nothing will be able to keep Him from being faithful to us. We can obey Him, even when doing so means we will lose all in this life, because we know that nothing anybody or anything can do to us can separate us from Him. We can face life, with all the pain, sorrow, dangers, joys, and triumphs that it has because we know that our life is

secure in the hands of the one Who made us and has called us according to His purpose. It is His power that holds us. It is His glory to which He is moving us. It is His sacrifice that has saved us. It is His unchanging will that keeps His own.