

Romans 8:26-39

If a man understands Romans, wrote Calvin he has a sure road opened for him to the understanding of the whole of Scripture.

If Romans is the high peak of the Bible then chapter 8 is the high peak of Romans. As I mentioned a few weeks back this chapter contains the greatest concentration of references to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, as there are 17 references to him. This morning we begin our study with the final reference to the Holy Spirit in this chapter – his intercession.

Before we get to this aspect of the Spirit's ministry in our lives I want you to see the outline I will follow this morning.

1. The Spirit Helps by interceding for us 8:26-27

2. The Father causes all things to work together for our good through 5 unshakable convictions – foreknew, predestined, called, justified and glorified. 8:28-30

3. The Result is we are safe and secure as nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. 8:31-39

I. The Holy Spirit Helps by Interceding for Us Romans 8:26-27

In the same way as the Spirit enables us to have hope in the midst of our groanings so the Spirit comes to our aid in our weakness, specifically when we do not know how to pray.

What does he mean by “*weakness*”? Most likely it refers to our human condition in general, not periods of weakness or weaknesses. By virtue of being human we are weak. We lack understanding, perspective and insight.

As a result there are times we don't have the will to pray or the words to articulate our needs so the Holy Spirit himself, the third person of the Godhead helps us by interceding for us (*εντυγχηανο* – entongkhano). He advocates in prayer on our behalf with “*groanings*” (*στεναγμος* – stenagmos) or a sigh.

The word translated “*helps*” (*συναντιλαμβανομαι* – sunantilambanomai) literally means “*to lay hold along with, to strive to obtain with others, to take hold with another*”. It is as if the Holy Spirit lays hold of our weakness along with us and carries his part of the burden facing us as if two men were carrying a log, one at each end.

NASB translates “*too deep for words*” which does not mean unknown tongues or ecstatic gibberish but rather the groanings (inexpressible words or words not spoken) which the Father hears, understands and responds to. One could call them “*divine appeals for the spiritual welfare of the believer*”.

Why is that so significant? Because when the Spirit groans the Father knows what the Spirit means and those prayers will be answered because they are according to God's will. (1 John 5:14-15).

Think of it like this. We have 2 intercessors: one in heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ, who intercedes for our sins; and one in our hearts, the Holy Spirit, who intercedes for our weakness. This is the last mention of the Spirit's ministry in Romans 8 as Paul moves to the work of the Father on our behalf beginning in vv. 28-30. The remainder of the chapter is all about God.

II. The Father Causes All Things to Work Together for our Good Romans 8:28-30

Verse 28 is surely one of the best known texts in the Bible and often one of the most misunderstood. It contains

one of the most glorious promises in Scripture encompassing everything that pertains to the believer's life. So while it should give us great comfort and encouragement, the truth of the matter is that there are times (maybe more than we want to admit) that we wrestle with the sovereignty of God. Our reality doesn't fit the promise. The verse begins with the statement "*we know*" – *εἶδο* – *oida* meaning to know, perceive, understand. This is truth which is clearly declared in Scripture so that we know it. We may not comprehend it but we know it is true. What do we know?

First we know that God is the guarantor – "*he causes...*". Different translators have interpreted this verse in different ways based on manuscripts and perspective. Some see "*God*" as the subject and have translated it "*God causes...*" (NASB). Others believe that "*all things*" is the subject and rendered it "*all things God works...*" (NIV). Only some early manuscripts have "*God*" as the subject while the majority do not include "*God*" in the text but have his work implied by the statements of vv. 29-30.

Certainly all things don't work together all by themselves as if everything will turn out alright in the end. Things will only work together if God orchestrates them which is clearly stated in vv. 29-30. That being the case it seems best to me to include "*God*" in verse 28 as the subject and translate "*God causes*".

The "*all things*" is comprehensive having no qualifications or limits. That would include pleasures and pains, enjoyable surprises and disappointments, mountain tops and valleys. The point being that God is working them together for good.

The phrase "*work together*" is *συνεργεω* – *sunergeo* from which we get the English "*synergy or synergism*" – the working together of various elements to produce an effect greater than the sum of each element acting separately. For instance talented athletes must work together for team success.

Good translates *αγαθος* – *agathos* meaning useful, beneficial or good. The "*good*" is what is good from God's perspective, not necessarily from ours. It certainly doesn't mean that everything will turn out good in this life. Our good from God's perspective in view of verse 29 is conformity to the Son of God. Here we begin to think like, act like and live like Jesus. Our character is changed so our conduct changes along with it.

Those who love God (middle of v. 28) could be a group of believers who love God more than others. However, since Paul described them from the divine side as those who have been called, and since all believers are called, those who love God must refer to all Christians. This is the only place in Romans where Paul wrote of the believer's love for God; everywhere else he referred to God's love for the believer.

How do we know with clarity that God is providentially working in our lives for our benefit? "*For*" or you could translate "*because*" beginning in v. 29 Paul gives us 5 stages or statements regarding God's work on our behalf: Foreknew...Predestined...Called...Justified...Glorified.

Let's take a few minutes to look at the definition of these words and the implication for us in our everyday Christian living.

Foreknew – *προγινωσκο* – *proginosko* a compound word meaning to have knowledge beforehand, but it much more than prior intellectual knowledge. The Greek word *ginosko* denotes a personal relationship of care and affection. For instance John 17:3 eternal life is defined as knowing God – being in a personal relationship with God. Therefore to "*foreknow*" carries the idea of selection for a purpose.

It is used five times in the New Testament (Rom. 11:2 1 Pet. 1:20; Acts 26:5 and 2 Peter 3:17). So to say that God foreknew is to state that God selected with a purpose. That purpose is our predestination. Those whom he foreknew he predestined...

Predestined – προορίζο – proorizo meaning to decide beforehand, to predetermine, to decree or to set a boundary or a future goal. When we see the word “*predestination*” what is the first thing that comes to mind? We think in terms of eternal destiny – heaven or hell or a place.

The word is used only six times in the New Testament, two of which are in vv. 29 and 30. That leaves four others so let's view them briefly:

Acts 4:27-28 where God is said to have determined beforehand that Pilate, Herod and others would be the ones to crucify Christ.

1 Cor. 2:7 – God predetermined his wisdom

Eph. 1:5 – we were predestined to adoption

Eph. 1:11-12 – we were predestined to be to the praise of God's glory

Return to Romans 8:29-30 and note the goal of predestination – first for us to be conformed to the image of Christ and second for Jesus to be glorified. God has predestined us to be like Christ and we are in process now for a certain future. For as John states when we see him we will be like him – 1 John 3:2. That is the boundary or goal that God has set for us because he loves us.

Called – καλεο (kaleo). This is the inward call of God where the Holy Spirit begins to work and leads us to faith in Christ. It's what theologians call the effectual call of God (2 Tim. 1:9).

Justified – δικαιοο (dikaio) – to render a legal judgement of righteous in which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us and we are justified.

Glorified – δοξαζο (doxazo) – to render or make glorious. We will be made perfect, whole, and complete. It is what we shall be in heaven. 2 Cor. 4:17 – there awaits us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond comparison.

Note the tense of the verb “*glorified*” – past so it's written as if it is already accomplished. The very ones that God foreknew these without the loss of one will be glorified. God does not choose us, predestinate us and call us to a place but to a person, a likeness, a relationship which is conformity to Christ.

III. The Result is we are Safe and Secure both Now and Forever Romans 8:31-39

Paul introduces the last nine verses of this chapter with a concluding formula, which he has already used three times (6:1, 15; 7:7): What, then, shall we say in response to this? (31a). The apostle's answer to his own question is to ask five more questions, to which there is no answer. He challenges anybody and everybody, in heaven, earth or hell, to answer them and to deny the truth which they contain.

Question 1: If God is for us, who can be against us? (31b).

If Paul had simply asked, '*Who is against us?*' there would immediately have been a barrage of replies. For we have formidable foes arrayed against us. Indeed, the world, the flesh and the devil are together marshalled against us, and are much too strong for us.

That however is not the question Paul asked is it? The essence of his question is contained in the '*if*' clause: '*If [rather, 'since'] God is for us, who can be against us?*' This is another example of a 1st class conditional clause in Greek where the "*if*" is assumed to be true which makes the result clause true as well. Since God is for us, who can actually oppose us?

Since God has foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified us who can prevail against God? Let me state it this way: If anyone were to rob us of our salvation and its benefits they would have to be stronger and greater than God Himself. Since God is Almighty no one and nothing is stronger than he is and therefore we are secure. All the powers of hell can set themselves against us but they can never prevail.

Question 2: He who did not spare his own Son, but gave himself up for us how will he not also along with him give us all things (v. 32)?

Paul points to the cross to argue from the greater to the lesser. Since God has given us the supreme and costliest gift of his one Son, he can't fail to lavish us with every other spiritual blessing. In giving the Son he gave everything. The cross is the guarantee of the continuing unfailing generosity of God. Nothing and no one can thwart God's ultimate purpose for us.

Question 3: Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies (v. 33).

God has done all these incredible things for our salvation and blessed us in innumerable ways so what happens if you don't measure up? What happens if you fail? What happens if you don't say the right words or say the wrong words? What will you lose? Nothing!

Why? Because God the supreme judge of the universe has declared you righteous. No one can alter God's decision.

Question 4: 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 (34).

Therefore all condemnations will fail. Why? Because of Christ Jesus

First, Christ Jesus ... died—died for the very sins for which otherwise we would deservedly be condemned. Christ has redeemed us from the curse or condemnation of the law '*by becoming a curse for us*'. **Secondly**, after death he was raised to life by the Father, who thus demonstrated his acceptance of the sacrifice of his Son as the only satisfactory basis for our justification (4:25). **Thirdly**, the crucified and resurrected Christ is at the right hand of God, occupying the place of supreme honor, exercising his authority to save, and waiting for his final triumph. **Fourthly**, he is also interceding for us. His intercession means that he '*continues ... to secure for his people the benefits of his death*'. The end result is that therefore no condemnation, no rejection and finally no separation.

Question 5: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (v. 35a).

To answer the question Paul brings forth a list of seven afflictions to see if anything can come between us and Christ's love for us. (v. 35). Do any of these prove that God doesn't love us? No! Instead in the midst of our suffering (*"in all these things"*), difficulty, stress and affliction we conquer – literally *"over conquer"*.

The word is υπερνικαο (hypernikao) – to hyper conquer, to conquer as it were with success to spare. We are supremely victorious over sin, suffering and the unknown. Now in these final verses Paul reaches his climax – vv. 38-39.

He began with we know (v. 28); he ends more personally with *'I am convinced'*. He deliberately uses the perfect tense (πέπεισμαι - pepeismai), meaning, *'I have become and I remain convinced'*, for the conviction he expresses is rational, settled and unalterable. Paul is absolutely convinced that there is nothing in God's creation or that exists anywhere else that has enough power to separate you from Christ's love.

No sphere of existence (death of life); no power of angelic orders (angels, principalities, powers); no dimension of time (present or things to come); no dimensions of space (height or depth). The language embraces everything, whether in this life or the supernatural realm can ever in any way separate us from the love of Christ. Why? Because we are in Christ.

The doctrine of 'the perseverance of the saints' needs to be re-named. It is the doctrine of the perseverance of God with the saints or better the preservation of the saints.

Conclusion

The chapter began with *"no condemnation"* and concludes with *"no separation"*. It is all God's initiative and God's doing. The only part we played in our salvation is to sin and as Dr. Hoehner was prone to say *"we did that royally"*.

How can I possibly sum up this vast almost incomprehensible display of God's grace and love for us? I have no idea where I got this but found it in some old notes and the best I can come up with is a statement written by Ruth Harms Calkin, author, poet and songwriter:

God I may fall flat on my face, I may fall until I feel old and beaten and done in. Yet your love for me is changeless. All the music may go out of my life, my private world may shatter to dust. Even so, you will hold me in the palm of your steady hand. No turn in the affairs of my fractured life can baffle you. Satan with all his braggadocio cannot distract you. Nothing can separate me from your measureless love – pain can't, disappointment can't, anguish can't, yesterday can't, today and tomorrow can't. Riots, war, insanity, lack of identity, hunger, neurosis, disease – none of these things nor all of them heaped together can budge the fact that I am dearly loved, completely forgiven and forever free through Jesus Christ, your Beloved Son.

Therefore Paul will state at the beginning of chapter 12 to present ourselves as living sacrifices for that is the only reasonable thing to do in light of all that God has done.