

The Christian's Consolation

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 8:28

Preached on: Sunday, February 5, 2012

Will you join me this morning by taking your Bibles and turning to Romans chapter eight? We have now come to verse 28 in our study of this magnificent epistle. Let me read the text to you this morning. Romans chapter eight verse 28.

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”¹

I am a great admirer of classical music, especially great symphonies like Beethoven's Fifth. And like all great symphonies, which is really an extended musical composition scored primarily for orchestra, you will hear the melody being played throughout in various forms. And sometimes there will be other melodies that will be more dominant, but in the background you will always hear that same melody some place repeated. In fact, the word “symphony” is derived from Greek word συμφωνία (soom-fo-nee'-ah) which literally means agreement of concord of sound. And sometimes this dominant theme, as I say, is in the background, but eventually it will emerge in the end in a dramatic and more glorious way than it began in the grand finale.

Dear friends, I believe that Romans eight is a symphony of grace and the melody that we hear throughout Romans eight is that theme of the assurance of the believer. And it can be heard in the very opening sonata beginning in verse one of chapter eight.

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”²

Oh, what a lovely melody that is. This is the song of the gospel of God that resounds in the hearts of the redeemed. Think about it. The guilt of our sin has been forever removed because we are in Christ. He paid the penalty for our sin. He satisfied the justice of God. He took our sin and gave us his righteousness. And we are not only forever freed from the penalty of sin, but also from its very power. Why? Because of the sanctifying influences of the Spirit of God.

And this is what you hear in the opening movement of Romans eight, this great symphony of grace, all the way through verse 11. And then the theme of assurance can be heard more in the background in the second movement with respect to the Christian's obligation in verses 12 and 13. Then we are no longer debtors to the flesh but to the Spirit who empowers us to put to death the deeds of the flesh. And that moves into another movement of the Christian's confirmation in verses 14 through 17, that it is the Spirit who validates the genuineness of our faith. And the sound of that melody can, again, be heard in the next movement of the Christian's glorification, verses 17 through 18 where the Spirit instructs us on how to be triumphant sufferers given the glory that

¹ Romans 8:28.

² Romans 8:1.

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awaits us. And then it goes into a slow and sorrowful movement of the Christian's lamentation in verses 19 through 25. The theme of assurance can still be heard there, but in the minor key.

Like creation, we groan within ourselves as believers, grieving over the corruption of our sin and the corruption that we see in the world, longing for the return of our precious Savior. But we do this with a confident hope because we experience the first fruits of the Spirit.

And then we hear that melody of assurance again in the Christian's limitation in verses 26 through 27, that although we do not even know how to pray as we should, the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. And, yes, that glorious frame of assurance can be heard in the movement before us today, that of the Christian's consolation, as we will examine in a moment. And it will move through to the Christian's progression in verses 29 through 30 and ultimately that magnificent air of eternal security, of blessed assurance will reach its full climax, verses 31 through 39. That is the grand finale, that of the Christian's exaltation. There we will celebrate the work of Christ as we read it and understand it, the one who intercedes for us at the right hand of God knowing that there is absolutely nothing that can separate us from his love. That will be, shall we say, the hallelujah chorus, the triumphant joy of the saints.

Because of Christ we overwhelmingly conquer all the sorrows of life through him who loved us. And, dear friend, if you know Christ and you listen carefully, you will hear those sweet strains of assurance in every movement of the symphony of your life. S

Sometimes it will reverberate with the songs of praise that we sing together. Sometimes we will hear it in a sermon that we might hear. But we will always hear it.

“There is therefore now no condemnation.”³

And sometimes when doubt and discouragement sets in and we are living life in the minor key, God asks us to be still. He asks us to listen. And although it might be in the minor key, you will hear that whisper within your heart. Don't be afraid. Rejoice. Stand firm.

God causes all things to work together for good, because there is no condemnation.

And before us this morning we will focus on this wonderful truth that God, indeed, causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

And, dear child of God, it is in these words that the Christian finds such enormous

³ Ibid.

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consolation. Don't you know that those early saints in Rome when they first heard this read to them, don't you know that they had to have wept with joy when they understood that, indeed, God is working in their life? Don't you know they said, "Oh, I can't wait to memorize that. How can I get my copy"?

Well, here in verse 28 the inspired apostle gives us all good reason to be comforted, because here we have an inconceivably glorious promise that gives us confidence that, indeed, our faith is secure, our salvation is secured by the one who ordained it and the one who never ceases to work on our behalf until he brings us to glory.

Now this morning as we approach the text, I would like to look at three primary proofs of all of this. We will look, first of all, at the basis of our confidence; secondly, the scope of our confidence; and, finally, the evidence of our confidence, all of which will result in the Christian's consolation.

So, first of all, what is the basis of our confidence that God is, indeed, doing all of these things? Well, notice, closely, at the very first word of verse 28, "And." And what? What is he referring to?

Well, this little word is really a connective link in the chain of arguments that Paul has been developing to demonstrate the multiple proofs of how God has secured our salvation forever. So he says:

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good."⁴

My, this is a dogmatic assertion. We know, he says. In the original language this literally speaks of we have knowledge. We have information available to us. We are able to know this great truth that God causes all things to work together for good, that in his sweet providence he orchestrates all the variables of our life to accomplish his purpose, his purpose which is ultimately to bring us into conformity with his dear Son for our good and for his glory.

Now the question would come up, well, how do we know? It is interesting. He doesn't explain it because he doesn't need to. It is an axiomatic truth? It is self evident. Those early saints knew as we all know about this divine work.

We know for really two reasons. Number one, we know on the basis of the Word of God. By this time the saints in Rome had access to the Old Testament. They had access to the gospels. They had access to Acts, to James, to Galatians, to 1 and 2 Thessalonians, to Hebrews, to 1 and 2 Corinthians plus all the teachings of Jesus and the apostles many of which are not recorded. And throughout the entire Word of God we see that he reveals to

⁴ Romans 8:28.

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us his divine sovereignty and his providential work in all things in history among the nations in all that he has created.

In Acts chapter 13 Luke records how Paul and Barnabas preached boldly to the Gentiles that saving grace was available to them. And when they heard that they rejoiced. In verse 48 it says:

“And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”⁵

And perhaps some of the folks there in Rome had been a part of this. But, indeed, they understood that it is on the basis of the Word of God that he is at work in them, because they had believed. Obviously God had been at work and had appointed them to eternal life or they would not have done so.

So we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God on the basis of the Word of God. Don't you remember the song that we were taught when we were children?

Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so.

That is how we know. We know on the basis of the inerrant, inspired, authoritative revelation of our sovereign God who according to Ephesians 1:4 chose us in him before the foundation of the world. There is God at work.

“...that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.”⁶

And in verse 11 the apostle Paul goes on to say:

“...we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.”⁷

Dear Christian, do you realize that God is sovereign over every aspect of your life? In fact, as we look at Scripture, we see that it is God who is the undergirding and guiding force behind all of the circumstances of our life. We see it over and over in Scripture.

In fact, Paul will go on to say in verse 29 of Romans eight:

⁵ Acts 13:48.

⁶ Ephesians 1:4-5.

⁷ Ephesians 1:11.

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“For whom He foreknew...”⁸

Which literally means who he foreordained, who he foreloved.

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.”⁹

Can it be said any clearer? So, of course, we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him. Herein is the first basis of our confidence. It is for this reason that in Philippians 1:6 Paul says:

“For I am confident of this very thing...”¹⁰

Don't you love that?

“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”¹¹

What a comforting truth. To know that my life in Christ is not like some ship at sea without any rudder, without any captain, hopelessly adrift, somehow subject to wherever the wind and the tide takes me. But, instead, I have a captain who is going to see me to the safe harbor of glory.

Now, sadly, there are many believers, many of which are my dear friends... and I might even say most believers who deny the sovereignty of God in salvation. They reject the fact that it is God who is the one who initiates salvation, who preserves and who brings it to completion. Many people will insist that somehow salvation is a cooperative effort, if you will, a joint venture between God and man, that it is man, not God, that must initiate salvation. And many people will therefore, who believe this, bristle at the terms that we find in Scripture like election or predestination. They would bristle at what Peter said in 1 Peter 1:2 that believers are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Many would insist that God's sovereign church and human responsibility are somehow incompatible.

Well, they are in our minds, but they aren't in God's. Certainly that is an inscrutable mystery that we could never fathom. But many people believe that it is man's free will that is the determining factor in salvation, not God's sovereign will, that God somehow

⁸ Romans 8:29.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Philippians 1:6.

¹¹ Ibid.

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subordinates his will to the will of man, that somehow it is more important to preserve man's free will than God's sovereign will.

Therefore, here is the problem. Because of man's sinful proclivities, because of his tendency towards sin, there is always the possibility that man may not choose to live up to his end of the salvation bargain. And in his sin, in his stupidity, reject or lose what he once decided to take.

So with that theological system, it is therefore man, not God, who guarantees salvation. Big problem.

Obviously this believer will never fully enjoy the assurance of salvation, because his security will always be in jeopardy, because he refuses to believe what God has said.

So he will not share this confident assurance of Romans eight. He will not enjoy this consolation. He will not agree with Paul's phrase, "And we know..." Because he would say, "We really can't know."

I would also add, if you are listening to me this day without Christ you cannot enjoy this consolation, because God is not causing all things to work together for your good, because you do not love him. And his wrath abides you, in fact, abides upon you. In fact, all the things in your life are ultimately working towards your doom unless you repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we know these things on then basis of the Word of God, secondly, on the basis of experience.

Like those early saints, every believer who has come to Christ knows experientially the fullness of grace in his inner most being. I would submit to you that there is no honest believer that would ever say that he came to God on his own simply by exercising his own free will.

I ask you. What influence did you have on your physical conception? None. The chromosomes of your parents were created by God. They came together at conception by God. And, therefore, I would submit to you that the same is true in your spiritual conception and rebirth. It was all of God.

Paul said in Titus three verse five that he saved us. And he goes on to say:

"...according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior."¹²

¹² Titus 3:5-6.

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My friend, if you know Christ, ultimately it was God who caused you to be born again. Jesus said in John one and verse 13 that we:

“...were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”¹³

In chapter three verse eight we are born of the Spirit, Jesus said.

In John 6:44 he said:

“No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him.”¹⁴

The word “draw” means to drag. It means to compel by force. And I am so glad that he did that with me, because had he not done so, I would have never come to him, nor would you have ever come to him.

In Romans nine verse 16 Paul speaks of salvation had he says that it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, referring to human effort, but on God who has mercy.

So even on the basis of our experience in our new birth we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God. He is the one that drew us to himself in the first place. So he had to have been at work and continues to work.

1 John 4:19 tells us that:

“We love, because He first loved us.”¹⁵

In fact, even our act of faith is a gift from God.

In Ephesians chapter two beginning in verse nine, you know this text so well. It says:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship...¹⁶

In other words, we are the product of his skilled craftsmanship.

¹³ John 1:13.

¹⁴ John 16:44.

¹⁵ 1 John 4:19.

¹⁶ Ephesians 2:8-10.

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“...created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”¹⁷

Literally, he has made us ready in advance. So, of course, God is at work. He is the one that overruled our spiritual rebellion. He is the one that breathed life into our spiritual corpse. He is the one that caused us to voluntarily exercise our will to repent and believe in Christ.

Beloved, never lose sight of the fact that it was God who brought you to Christ for salvation. The initiative, the power and the glory all belong to him. So, indeed, we know by his word and experience. You will recall what Paul said in Romans verse 16 of chapter eight.

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”¹⁸

There is another example of him working.

Galatians 2:20.

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.”¹⁹

So, we know on the basis of the Word of God and experience, therein is our confidence. Well, what is the secondly the scope of our confidence? In other words, is there some boundary of security beyond which we cannot cross? Is there a realm of existence that we might enter into where God will no longer operate within us, where his work will somehow cease, where there will no longer be a guarantee of the glorification of our bodies? Said differently, is there something we might do that would cause us to lose our salvation?

Well, let's look at the text. What is the scope of our confidence? We are told:

“And we know that God causes all things...”²⁰

In other words, without exception, no limits, no boundaries.

“...all things to work together for good to those who love God.”²¹

¹⁷ Ephesians 2:10.

¹⁸ Romans 8:16.

¹⁹ Galatians 2:20.

²⁰ Romans 8:28.

²¹ Ibid.

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What an amazing promise.

And you say, “ Well, but what if I stop loving God?”

Well, if you stop loving God, that proves that you never loved him in the first place, that God's work was never working to begin with.”

1 John 2:19 tells us:

“They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us.”²²

Now think of the limitless scope of our security. Do you realize that this means that everything in the life of a believer, ever circumstance, every good thing , every bad thing, every trial, every sorrow, every suffering, every stupid mistake, all of our weaknesses, our ignorance in prayer, even our sin—most of which we are not even aware of. Even our sin are somehow used by God that his hand is at work in everything.

I would ask you. Was it not your sin that God used to originally bring conviction to your heart that you might repent and believe? Do you not see how he even used that? What a marvelous truth. He says God causes all things to work together.

To work together it translates the Greek verb συνεργεω (soon-erg-eh'-o). We get our word synergism from that. And what it literally means is that God takes the various aspects of our lives, none of which, by the way, tend towards good in and of themselves, but he takes the various aspects of our lives and in the power of his providence he actively intervenes and orchestrates every variable for good.

Well, what does that mean, for good? Well, it is for our present good in this life, but also for our ultimate, our final good when we are fully and finally conformed into the image of Christ.

There is something technical here that is very exciting and I want to share with you. Grammatically the verb “works together” as well as the participial phrase, “those who love him” are both in the present tense.

Now this is very important and here is why. This tells us that not only is God continually working in our lives at all times, never stops, but those for whom he works are continually in love with him. Think about that. God's continual working produces precisely what he intends. And that is our continual love for him. Isn't that an amazing thought?

²² 1 John 2:19.

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This is why our salvation is eternally secure, because of God's work, not because of our working in ourselves, but because of his working in us.

Think about the many ways that God has revealed to us how he works in our lives for our good and his glory. There were so many as I was meditating on this. I just had to stop my list because it just kept going on and on. I will give you a few.

In Deuteronomy 13:10 he promises to protect his own. And he says that he guards his own as the pupil of his eye. The pupil of your eye is the most sensitive and well protected organ in your body. That is how he sees us.

Psalm 91 verse one.

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty."²³

Think of those figures: shelter, shadow. They depict protection, security. God himself protects those who dwell and abide in him.

In verse four of Psalm 91 he says:

"He will cover you with His pinions..."²⁴

Another word for feathers.

"...And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark."²⁵

He uses the term pinions, wings, shield, bulwark. So here he uses the figures of a bird protecting its young with its wings and that of a warrior protected by a large body shield and even as our standing fortress like a wall.

These are the ways that he works for us.

Verse 11 of Psalm 91.

"For He will give His angels charge concerning you, To guard you in all your ways."²⁶

Can you imagine that? He dispatches his holy angels on our behalf.

²³ Psalm 91:1.

²⁴ Psalm 91:4.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Psalm 91:11.

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Hebrews chapter one verse 14.

“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?”²⁷

Think of another way. You know the great text there in Matthew six where the Lord tells us, “Don’t be anxious about your food, your drink, your clothing.”

In verse 32 he says:

“...your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.”²⁸

Can you imagine the countless ways that the providence of God must orchestrate and control all the variables of our life to fulfill that promise? Talk about working.

The Lord even ordains our afflictions to teach us to trust him. You remember the sufferings of Job. And after a while Job began to demand an audience with God to somehow plead his case. In his heart he is beginning to think, “Lord, this isn’t fair. Surely you lack information here.”

And, of course, as you recall, God spent chapter after chapter intimidating him with his glory and never even explained to him why he had ordained these things to happen. But finally Job answered in deep repentance and said:

I know that Thou canst do all things, And that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.²⁹

And finally he says:

I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees Thee; Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.³⁰

Isn’t it amazing how God even uses our suffering to somehow expose our sin and draw us closer to him so that we can experience more fully the glories of his grace to experience his power in our life to watch him prove himself powerful on our behalf?

²⁷ Hebrews 1:14.

²⁸ Matthew 6:32-33.

²⁹ Job 42:2-3.

³⁰ Job 42:5-6.

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Psalm 119 verse 75 the psalmist wrote:

“Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Thy word.”³¹

Verse 71 he goes on to say:

“It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Thy statutes.”³²

And actually in verse 75 he says:

“I know, O LORD, that Thy judgments are righteous, And that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me.”³³

We can all identify with this, can't we? The ways that God has brought some great difficulty into our life. I think of 2 Corinthians 12. Remember the story of Paul's thorn in the flesh, a messenger from Satan that God allowed to be sent to buffet him? Again, who ordained the trial? God did. God was at work in him. And why did God do that? Well, to keep him from exalting himself and that he might experience the grace and the power of God in the midst of his weakness.

“Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”³⁴

You see, only God could have done that. Only God could have produced that kind of response.

Let me ask you. Do you ever thank God for the times you were slandered and maligned? Or do you seek retaliation?

You know, if you thank God you will know most certainly that it is God that is at work in you to do that, because when you are slandered if you say, “Lord, even though these things are patently false, even though these things are wicked, I know that I have sin in my heart that is far greater than what this person has said about me. So, Lord, I thank you for the slander, because I know that you have brought this into my life ultimately for my good and for your glory. Lord, I thank you for this because it reminds me of the depths of my sin and it reminds me of the breadth of your mercy and the heights of your grace. Lord, I am so prone to pride. I thank you that you humble me and that you teach me to depend more upon you. And in the midst of all that, I enjoy just the richness of this

³¹ Psalm 119:67.

³² Psalm 119:71.

³³ Psalm 119:75.

³⁴ 2 Corinthians 12:9.

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fellowship. Lord, thank you for this. Thank you that your power may be perfected in my weakness.”

You see, friends, that is how God works in us.

Think of Hebrews chapter 12 how he disciplines those that he loves. Sometimes he withholds blessing. Other times he brings great trials into our life. Verse 11 says:

“...afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”³⁵

You see over and over and over again the Scripture we see the many ways that God works in our lives.

I was thinking about the ministries of the Holy Spirit that is such a dominant theme here in Romans eight. And I listed most of them. I won't give you the reference, but here is what happens within us just by the work of the Spirit. He strengthens us. He is our source of unity. He is our access to the mind of God. He intercedes for us in prayer. He works in our conscience. He is our teacher, our source of illumination. He empowers us with spiritual gifts. He is our source of liberty, power and fellowship. He causes us to bear spiritual fruit. He is our source of preaching with power, our channel for true worship, our strength and our guide for walking in this life. He is our guard of the truth. He is the seal or the guarantee of our inheritance. He is the one who leads us not to sin. He is our source of witness concerning Christ. And he is the source of Scripture which is our spiritual food.

God works, doesn't he? So, indeed, the basis of our confidence that God is at work in us is through his Word and experience. And the scope of our confidence is that he works in all things. There is nothing we can do to terminate his work, because the very work that he is doing would prevent us from even having that desire. Do you understand that?

God's continual working produces precisely what he intends and that is our continual love for him.

Now, finally, what is the evidence of our confidence of this great security? How do we know that this really applies to us, that we are the recipients of this magnificent working?

Well, the test is simply this. Do you love God? Notice verse 28 again.

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.”³⁶

³⁵ Hebrews 12:11.

³⁶ Romans 8:28.

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Notice it does not say those who believe God or believe in God. There are many people who believe in God. Many people have an intellectual understanding of God even the God of the Bible. Many people will even affirm certain biblical doctrines. But that doesn't make a person a Christian.

James 2:19 says:

“...the demons also believe, and shudder.”³⁷

Ah, but to love God now that is all together another matter, isn't it? By love this doesn't refer to some sentimental schmaltzy kind of emotionalism. Now certainly love will include emotion, but it is far more than merely a feeling.

Dear friends, all through Scripture we see that love is action. It is not abstraction or simply emotion. Jesus said in John 14 verse 21:

“He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me.”³⁸

If I say that I love my wife, but I live as if she doesn't exist, if I treat her as if she doesn't matter, if I treat her as if I am the only important thing in my life, if there is no self sacrifice, if there is no demonstration of this love, if I have no concern for her needs, if I have no desire to be near her in sweet fellowship, if I do not delight in her more than any other my claim to love her is false.

Well, such is the case with many Christians. They believe in God, but there is no evidence in their life that they love him.

But, dear friend, if you know in your heart that you do love God and others can look at your life and say, “Yes, this man, this woman loves the Lord and keeps his commandments,” then you can be assured that you love him because he first loved you and he is at work in your life. And you can know for certain that he is working all things in your life to bring you safely and to bring you surely into his presence, blameless with great joy.

And, as you continue on in your pilgrimage through life, you are going to find that your love will grow. Indeed, we are commanded to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, with all of our strength. This means that our greatest joy, our greatest delight is found in our relationship with him. This is what it means to love God.

Remember what David prayed in Psalm 63 beginning at verse one.

³⁷ James 2:19.

³⁸ John 14:21.

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O God, Thou art my God; I shall seek Thee earnestly; My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh yearns for Thee, In a dry and weary land where there is no water. Thus I have beheld Thee in the sanctuary, To see Thy power and Thy glory.

Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise Thee.³⁹

My friends, this is the stuff of genuine saving faith. This is the stuff of a person who truly loves God. In fact, I would also add a man's love for God can be manifested most clearly in how he responds to adversity in his life. When suffering is at its greatest he will say as Job did:

“Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.”⁴⁰

When confronted with his sin as David did or as David was he will say as David did, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

And then ever after the Lord took his child, what did David do? He went into the house of the Lord and he worshipped him.

When life is at its worst, ask yourself. Do you run to the lover of your soul out of your love for him and then say with the psalmist:

Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.⁴¹

“But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Thy works.”⁴²

Dear friends, if this describes you, if this describes how you handle adversity in your life, then you can rest assured that you love God and that he is at work in you. But notice yet another fascinating description of the kind of person in which God is at work. He says at the end of verse 28:

“...to them who are called according to his purpose.”⁴³

³⁹ Psalm 63:1-3.

⁴⁰ Job 13:15.

⁴¹ Psalm 73:25-26.

⁴² Psalm 73:28.

⁴³ Romans 8:28.

The Christian's Consolation

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 8:28

Preached on: Sunday, February 5, 2012

Even as our love for God originates from him, so, too, does our calling. And this is a process that Paul will go on to describe in verses 29 and 30 that we will look at the next time we are together.

Now, a real brief theology lesson here as we begin to wrap this up this morning. It is important to understand that there are two ways the term "called" is used in Scripture. There is a general, a universal call and then there is a special or what is sometimes called an effectual call.

The general, universal call is that work of God by which he invites all men to Christ. For example in Matthew 11:28 Jesus said:

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."⁴⁴

It is universal as to time and extent. All men of all times are, thus, invited to salvation. However, this universal call can be resisted. It can be rejected and yet we know that men are morally responsible for rejecting this call.

But there is also a special or sometimes it is called an effectual call. And that is that calling of God which certainly and inevitably results in men responding in faith and accepting God's offer of salvation. And that is the kind of call that we have here in this text. This is the kind of call that we also see in verse 30.

Paul said in Ephesians 1:18:

"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling."⁴⁵

There it is.

2 Timothy 1:9 Paul speaks of the Lord:

"...who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity."⁴⁶

Literally before time began.

Now this special, effectual call of God can only be known by his results. And for this

⁴⁴ Matthew 11:28.

⁴⁵ Ephesians 1:18.

⁴⁶ 2 Timothy 1:9.

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reason it is often known as the efficacious call, because it is effectively accomplishing the purpose of the call and that is to bring men to salvation. So God effectively operates upon the human will so that it freely and voluntarily chooses to come to Christ for salvation.

You will recall in John 6:45 at the end Jesus says:

“Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.”⁴⁷

Remember the great story of Lydia in Acts 16, the seller of purple. She hears Paul teaching some others and we read in verse 14:

“...and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.”⁴⁸

This is that special call. And the instrument of this special call of God is the Word of God and agent is the Spirit of God. And what a thrilling thing it is to watch that at work. I know some of you. I have talked with you lately. Some of your children are in that process of hearing that call. And it is wonderful to watch the Lord work. And routinely we see this universal gospel call going forth all around the world from pulpits such as this and other places. And all those whom God has elected to save in eternity past will ultimately respond as we read in Acts 13:48.

“...and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”⁴⁹

Now, every believer has been chosen and called by God and Paul is going to expand upon this in the next couple of verses. And as a result, we were given that gift of faith once and for all. But I want you to understand in some sense that calling continues on throughout our life as God continues to work in us according to his purpose. Well, what is that? Well, verse 29 he will tell us.

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.”⁵⁰

This is God's glorious plan of redemption that he ordained before the foundation of the earth. And that is why Paul spoke about his calling in Philippians 3:14 and said:

“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ John 6:45.

⁴⁸ Acts 16:14.

⁴⁹ Acts 13:48.

⁵⁰ Romans 8:29.

⁵¹ Philippians 3:12.

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So here is the point of all of this. You can have full assurance of salvation. You can have utmost confidence of this great claim that God is causing all things to work together for good in your life if, number one, if you love God and if, number two, you are called according to his purpose. And how do you are? By seeing yourself become more like Christ. That is the test.

Think about it. You would not love God unless you had been effectively called. And you wouldn't be acting more like Christ unless he foreknew you, foreordained you and predestined you to become conformed in the image of his Son. What an astounding glorious consolation.

May I challenge you, dear Christian? Make a list of all the key issues in your life this afternoon, next week: the good things, the bad things. And then lay them before the Lord and thank him for all that he is doing in your life knowing that he is working all these things together for good, for your good and for his glory. And, dear sinner, I plead with you. If you are living in rebellion, if you have no love for God, today is the day that I would ask you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved that he might begin this work in you as well that you might today experience the miracle of the new birth.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these glorious truths that ignite our hearts to praise. May we never lose sight of them. May we constantly be in awe of them and be lost in the wonder of it all. And, Lord, use the truths of the gospel this day to save those who will believe. I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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