

Romans 8:28-30

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/rom/rom-8/romans-828-30/>

God promises that He causes every circumstance to conform believers to the image of Christ, with the intent that many would rule with Christ as joint heirs.

Paul uses the same word *called* in verse 28 that he uses in Chapter 1 to refer to the believers in Rome (Romans 1:6–7). As believers, we are saints *called* for God’s purpose. Paul now states a truth that applies to all believers, all who are *called*:

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 (v 28).

We can be tempted to say “Great, then that means God will do such-and-such for me.” But God does not leave it to us to decide what is *good*. God tells us what is *good*. It is *good* for us to be conformed to the image of Christ (v 29). God intends to utilize every single thing that happens in our life to conform us to the image of His Son.

This does not mean it will always be apparent to us how something might be *good*. But sometimes God reveals to us how He is working. For example, even when Paul was wrongfully imprisoned, he saw that God was using it for good, because Paul was able to share the gospel message to the people that guarded him in prison, and other believers were encouraged to share the gospel message without fear, even though they faced imprisonment and death (Philippians 1:12–14).

So Paul saw that God was working through bad circumstances to bring others to Christ and conform them to His image. This letter Paul wrote to the Romans was a letter he undoubtedly hated having to write. His entire ministry was being put at risk by competing Jewish “authorities” seeking to undermine his message. His ministry partners Aquila and Priscilla, fellow Jews who preached the gospel with him years earlier in Greece, had returned to Rome and started a church in their home (Romans 16:3-5; Acts 18:2, 18, 26). They too were doubtlessly in conflict with these underminers, and were desperate to keep the members of their church walking in the Spirit, not by the law.

But because of these difficulties, God used this resulting letter to the Romans to conform millions to His image through Paul’s diligence in writing this epistle.

Paul now sets forth how God causes *good* to come from every circumstance, from *all things*: that each believer will be *conformed to the image of His Son* (v 29).

Paul now uses another term for believers. In verse 28 he referred to believers as being those who are *called according to His purpose*. Now Paul refers to believers as *those whom He foreknew*. Paul then asserts regarding a destiny for each believer, each one who is *called* and who He *foreknew*:

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son (v 29).

Predestined means that something is predetermined. What is predetermined in this particular verse is that every believer will *become conformed to the image of His son, so that He (Jesus) would be the firstborn among many brethren (v 29)*. This indicates that God will utilize every circumstance to accomplish this purpose. Our choices are real, but no matter what we choose, God's purpose to conform believers to His image stands.

Clearly one way we can be conformed to Christ's image is to learn obedience through difficulties, even as Jesus learned (Philippians 2:8). If we don't learn in this life, it appears we will learn in the next, even though our rewards won't be as great if we wait to learn then.

From other passages Paul has written, such as 1 Corinthians 3:11-17 and 2 Corinthians 5:10, it appears there is a process that conforms us to the image of Jesus based on learning from God's evaluation of our choices made while here on earth, even after we are in heaven. These passages use the image of a refining fire burning away impurities. So it seems that all believers will be conformed to the image of Christ, but only those who take advantage of being conformed in this life, by faith, will be joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).

How exactly this process occurs is not delved into here, but what is certain is that we can absolutely count on the fact that every single thing that comes into our life will be redeemed by Jesus to conform us to His image. This includes even our own mistakes, which is very assuring. Perhaps this process ends when all tears are wiped away in the new earth (Revelation 21:4). Regardless of how this operates, it is reassuring to know God will redeem all things. It is also sobering to know that we will be conformed one way or another, and that to be conformed to Christ's image through His sufferings is offered as a vastly superior choice.

The people that are predetermined to be conformed to the image of Christ are the people who God *foreknew*. The debate over this concept usually centers around whether humans choose but God knew, or God predetermined, but people's choices impacted God's choice. This debate generally falls into the category of Greek minds seeking linear solutions. But God is paradoxical to us, and much of life is paradoxical. Nature is paradoxical.

The God described by the Bible is paradoxical. God is outside of time but also works inside of time. Jesus was fully man and fully God (Hebrews 2:3–18). God is everywhere at once but in one place. The only non-contradictory explanation for these descriptions of God is to accept that God is the beginning of all that is or has been, and that is how the Bible begins: "In the beginning God." This is also consistent with God's description of Himself. When asked His name by Moses, God answered that He is the "I Am." God is the very source and essence of existence, so existence does not explain God, but God explains existence.

In the same way, God gave us the freedom to put our faith in Jesus and also foreknew who would become believers. Both are true. How can that be? Because God is God, God is the I Am. So, we who have chosen to believe were chosen by God, we are also called by God to do His will and will be glorified when we receive new bodies (v 23): *and these whom He predestined, He also*

called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified (v 30).

Paul speaks of those whom God *justified* as being *glorified*. This is in the past tense in the NASB translation. In Greek, the word *glorified* is in the aorist tense, which has the sense of something active being done over a period of time. Paul could have in mind that God has a plan for each one of us that has a beginning and an end. He could also be mirroring the Old Testament prophets who often spoke of future events in the past tense to emphasize the certainty with which the future event will come to pass.

God states definitively that He will see to it that we will become conformed, or changed, to resemble Jesus. If we choose to do that while living a consistent life of faith, we will receive an amazing and special reward to be a joint heir with Christ in reigning over the earth in harmony with Him and others (v 17b).

Paul refers to Jesus as the *firstborn among many brethren*. Jesus, because of His faithfulness and sacrifice on the cross, will inherit the new earth (Philippians 2:8-11). He has already been given authority over creation as a human (Matthew 28:18). Believers have the opportunity to be fellow heirs with Jesus if we suffer with Him (v 17b). This is a part of God's plan of restoring the earth to His original design that we see in Genesis 1-3.

Paul began this chapter by telling the believers in Rome that there is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ, meaning there is no heavenly condemnation no matter what we might do, and no earthly condemnation (negative consequences for sin) for those who are living the resurrection life found in Jesus, which comes through daily faith.

The law of sin and death does not have power over believers who walk according to the Spirit of life. Here, Paul is showing that as believers we can know that God chose us and has given us the opportunity to become fellow heirs with Jesus if we suffer with Him (v 17).

Paul will discuss predestination/predetermination more in the next chapter, Chapter 9.

Biblical Text

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. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.