

God's Role in Salvation

REVIEW: We are still in our series of A Long Look at Salvation. So far through the series, (and this is week nine, so I could almost make a whole sermon just in review) we have looked at God, His glory, majesty, self sufficiency, infinite knowledge, and the many implications those things have for us. We looked at man's problem of misplaced worship. We turned our backs on our Creator to worship His creation instead, which shows us just how serious the offense is, and why hell really is a just punishment. We have seen God's response to our sin - Jesus Christ. We have looked at our response to Jesus Christ, how the condition of the soil of our hearts play a large role in whether the "Same sun that hardens the clay, melts the ice." Finally, last week we looked at repentance, and what godly repentance looks like as opposed to worldly sorrow over being busted.

INTRO: To get to the next part of salvation, which are some of the "fancy" doctrinal terms that we use less than we really should, we have to change our perspective. We are now going to look at salvation from God's vantage point. To do this, we are going to go to some verses that are both loved, and bring the most comfort, and verses that are usually skipped over because they have caused so much confusion and consternation that we don't want to have to deal with them.

Romans 8:28-30

- I. We begin with the oft quoted, and more oft misapplied verse that we all love and brings us comfort - 8:28
 - A. Romans 8:28 gives Christians amazing comfort - and rightly so
 1. But just as it is one of the greatest promises that God has given us
 2. It is also misunderstood
 - B. One misunderstanding of this verse comes from a way it was translated: all things work together for good
 1. From that some have come to the conclusion that everything is working in concert with everything else for good - similar to a chef making soup - each spice, each ingredient combines for the good of the soup (if you are a good cook)
 2. The problem with this conclusion is that the word translated began to have its meaning changed around the time of Paul's writing from meaning "working with or working together" to simply works
 3. The other problem is that there is no indication that all things are working with each other - it could be that all things are working with the Spirit, not with each other
 - C. The second misunderstanding of this verse is more serious

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1. Many of us have used this verse in an effort to bring comfort by saying something like, "Yes, your fiancé ran out on you two weeks before the wedding, but that just means that God has someone even better out there for you" - or "That stinks you lost your job, but there is an even better one for you, after all, all things work together for good..."
 2. Do you see the problem?
 - a) What we are doing is interpreting "good" from a narrow and in many cases materialistic perspective
 - b) What happens if God is defining "good" in spiritual terms
 - (1) Your fiancé left you, because God has a spiritual mission for you overseas, or your character becomes refined in a way you never thought possible
 - (2) Maybe you lost your job to wake you up from being so materialistic and workaholic-like and it saves your marriage, or helps you see the poor people around you that you need to serve
 - (3) What if the "good" from God's perspective was heaven
 - (a) We often, I would say almost exclusively, pray for people to be healed or not to leave this world because in our minds that is good
 - (b) But good to God in that case may be to bring that person home to the ultimate rest with Him
 3. So what God promised here is not that every bad experience would lead to something good or better in this life - it could be death, it could be character refinement, conforming us to the image of His Son
- D. The third misunderstanding we often have with this verse is too broad an application
1. We will often walk up to anyone and say, "You know the Bible says that all things work for good..."
 2. But we never finish the sentence
 - a) "in all things God works for the good of those that love Him..."
 - (1) This is just a way of describing God's people - those that love Him
 - (2) This is not some qualification, like if you love God enough, then the promise kicks in
 - b) But the rest of the sentence also tells us who this promise is for
 - (1) "...for those who are called according to His purpose."
 - (2) Our lives serve a purpose, and that purpose is not our own - it is for the glory of God
 3. And this verse is not for everyone, it is for those whose love God and are called according to His purpose

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- E. This is the verse we like. Often people will skip the next two verse and head straight to verse 31
 - 1. "What then shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us"
 - 2. The problem: Paul just said "What shall we say in response to THESE THINGS"
 - 3. You just jumped from chapter one of the DVD to the last 15 minutes of the movie
 - a) You may like the ending
 - b) But you have no idea how you got there
 - c) So we have to look at verses 29-30
- II. The great divide in Christian history
 - A. There are few things that have divide Christians through the years like the meaning of foreknowledge and predestination
 - 1. So I will be straight with you, I do not bring these things up to cause a rift, or to get all you debate monkeys in an uproar
 - 2. I bring it up because I have to be straight about what God's Word teaches and because we are talking about salvation these issues touch on salvation - and to do so we will be looking at more than just these verses to understand
 - a) One of the first rules in biblical interpretation is let the Bible interpret the Bible
 - B. So if these ideas may make you a bit uncomfortable, understand that your issue is with the Author, not the messenger
- III. Foreknowledge and predestination
 - A. There are a couple of games people like to play regarding these terms
 - B. The first is to play with the definitions
 - 1. So first, let me ask you, as you have read the NT, does Paul seem like he is given to using slang terms?
 - a) No!
 - b) If Paul calls you a fool - guess what He means - you're a fool!
 - c) When Paul said "watch out for these dogs" he didn't mean his posse
 - d) So when Paul uses a term, it means what it means
 - 2. The second way people want to play, especially with the term foreknew is to say that God looked through time and determined who would believe in Him and put their name in the Lamb's Book of Life
 - a) The problem is that this puts God as being bound by time
 - (1) He has to look down through time and figure out who is going to accept Him

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- (2) But God is not bound by time - yesterday is not a thing that God knows about, it is a place where He is. 6 months from now is not a time that God knows about, it is a place where He is
- b) The second problem, and the bigger issue is when God is bound to look through time and figure out who will choose Him, that means the that faith to believe originates from YOU
 - (1) Go to Ephesians 2:8-9
 - (2) The faith to believe in God's grace is not from you
 - (3) It is a gift from God with the reason being so you have nothing to boast in
 - (a) You cannot say that you were smart enough to believe
 - (b) All you can say is that God captured your heart
 - (c) You have nothing to point to other than the cross of Christ
 - i) Paul said it best in Galatians 6 when he said, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."
 - (4) Faith does not originate from us, it comes from God
 - (a) In fact, the Bible is clear that the human nature is corrupt and is hostile toward God
 - (b) We could not generate faith even if we tried
- C. This has been the negative side of foreknowledge (what it is not), so let's look at what it is
 - 1. If you look at the root word in foreknew, which is know, how is it used in the Bible and what does it mean
 - a) Amos 3:2 "'You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.'"
 - (1) The word "chosen" in Hebrew is yada - it means chosen, to know, or to have sexual relations
 - (2) Each of those definitions points to a special relationship taking place
 - (3) So when you plug in the word "known" it reads, "only you have I known" with the idea of chosen
 - (a) God obviously knew other families on the earth
 - (b) So the way He knew Israel was in some way different or special - He chose the nation of Israel
 - b) Psalm 1:6 and Matthew 7:23 work together to further help us understand
 - (1) Psalm 1:6 "For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction."
 - (a) The word for watches over is the same word - yada

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- i) I think the translators use the various ways in which to translate to help us moderns better understand
- ii) We often think of words one dimensionally - like love for example - I hope you do not love your wife the way you love a good hamburger
- (b) So the Lord knows the way of the righteous - does He not know the way of the wicked - has it escaped Him somehow?
 - i) No, because He knows they are wicked - so He has to know them
 - ii) He obviously knows the righteous in a different and special manner
- (2) But let's go to Matthew 7:23 "Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"
 - (a) One of the scariest verses in the Bible by the way
 - (b) What does He say, "I never KNEW you"
 - i) Who does he say it to - the evildoers (the wicked)
 - ii) So the knowing here has to be something beyond mere knowledge
 - iii) One more verse should help clear this up
- c) Genesis 4:1 from the ESV "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.'""
 - (1) In the pew Bible it says plainly, "Adam made love to his wife"
 - (2) The original word is the word to know
 - (3) So obviously there is knowing (in a general sense) and there is knowing that produces junior over there
 - (4) There is a way of knowing that is intimate and filled with love, and a way of knowing that just knows stuff
- 2. So the word in Romans for foreknew we could in a sense translate foreloved, or fore-chosen
- 3. Go to Ephesians 1:3-6
 - a) In love He predestined us
 - b) He foreloved us before the foundations of the world
 - c) All of this takes place before we ever came to be on earth - God chose us, He set His affections on us, He predestined us to be like His Son, Jesus
- 4. Now for the theological debaters and folks in the room, you may be thinking, "This is just Calvinism!"

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- a) Please hear me on this, I do not pledge myself to any theological system of thought, or any theologian, I am not a groupie of anyone other than Jesus Christ
 - (1) I always get frustrated by those that are more excited to be a denomination than they are to be a Christian
 - (2) I may have been raised in Baptist churches, but I am NOT a baptist - I am a Christian
- b) So what I am doing today is calling it like I see it - when you study the root words behind foreknowledge it points very clearly to God making a sovereign choice before the world began
 - (1) "Those that God set His affections on, He predetermined to conform them to the image of His Son."
 - (2) That is what I read there - God made a choice and set His affections on us to make us like His Son
- D. One common objection you hear to what I am laying out there is, "Is it fair that God chose some for salvation?"
 - 1. Two things to say in reply to that objection: First, if each and every person was destined for hell because we ALL sinned and fell short of God's glory, then I would say that anyone God takes to heaven is a blessing of overwhelming proportions
 - a) God was under no obligation to save you
 - b) He could have said, "I set you guys up in the most beautiful garden ever, no thorns, no mosquitos, no hard labor to get food. Gave you a beautiful wife, and a handsome husband. I gave you one rule out of everything and you couldn't follow it. If you want to go your own way, fine, I will not stop you!"
 - c) But that isn't God. He desires to be in relationship with each one of us, and the fact that He reached down and set His affections on us is amazing
 - d) It should instill a sense of gratitude like you have never experienced before
 - 2. The issue that disturbs people even more is that God making a choice to save some makes God unfair to the others.
 - a) But ask yourself this question: If salvation is achieved by God looking through history and choosing those who He knows will accept Him
 - b) Is it fair that God even bothered to create anyone that He knew would not accept Him?

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- E. Which brings up one more common objection to this understanding of foreknowledge and predestination that I am laying out here today: Does that mean that God forces people to love Him?
1. Generally, this question is often raised because it gives people an out for not submitting to God's Word
 2. God never forces anyone to love Him - that would make God a cosmic rapist
 3. The fact is that when God reveals Himself to us, people fall in love with Him and worship Him
 - a) Think of Paul - completely antagonistic to Jesus Christ
 - b) But when Christ was revealed to Paul, Paul loved and served the Lord for the rest of His life - even giving up His life for the gospel
 4. Think how this has played out in either your life or maybe people that you have known
 - a) We have heard people give testimonies of not being interested in Christ at all, but then they meet someone that brings them to a Bible study
 - (1) They go kicking and screaming at first, but find that it wasn't that bad, even though they still think religion is a joke
 - (2) So what do they do, ask to come back next week
 - (3) Do you understand what is happening - God is wooing you
 - (a) He is reaching out to you in those moments
 - (b) Revealing Himself in small ways
 - (c) Showing Himself to you, so that you eventually will fall in love with Him
 - b) When you tell me that you can look back on life and see how God was reaching out to you
 - (1) He sent this person into your life that quietly modeled what life in Christ is like
 - (2) He allowed this circumstance to happen to shake you from the direction you were heading in
 - (3) You had a mother or a grandma or grandpa that prayed every day for you to give up your way of doing things for the better way in Christ
 - (4) All of that is God wooing you to Himself!
 - (5) The choice is still yours, but when you really understand who God is, and what He has done for you, who wouldn't want Christ above all things?

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- F. Now I am going to skip over verse 30 because we are going to attack it in future weeks - But I do want to jump ahead to those verses we usually skip to when reading Romans 8 - verse 31

IV. We are more than conquerors

A. "What then shall we say to these things..."

1. What things?
2. The fact that God set His affections on you before the world ever began, the fact that He predetermined to conform you to the image of His Son, He called you, He justified you, and will see to it that you will be glorified (or translated to heaven).
3. So what do we say to that..."If God is for us, who can be against us!"
 - a) Gives that verse a different flavor doesn't it?
 - b) How for you is God? He set His affections on you before the world was formed
 - (1) If God is that "for you" who can be against you?

B. Keep going in the verses - 32-33a

1. Now all of us can have charges brought up against us right?
 - a) If I played a video of every thought action and motivation of my heart on the screen I would probably run out of here screaming into the night, never to return - and you would probably do the same
 - b) We are guilty
 - (1) However, sadly we compare ourselves to some fool that is not as far along the path of sanctification as we are and we start to feel pretty good about ourselves
 - (2) Instead, we need to compare ourselves to God's perfection, and holiness - then we will be put in our place
 - c) But understand this - do not let God's foreknowing, foreloving, predetermining call on your life give you reason to brag and boast!
 - (1) All of it is an act of mercy by God alone!
 - (2) If you look through the Bible you will see that God chose people that we shake our heads at wondering why them - they were far from heroes
 - (3) Same thing goes with us - we are all a bunch of morons but God graciously chose us
2. Here is why no charges can be brought against us - because it is God who justifies
 - a) Justification is a legal term
 - b) God has declared us right
 - (1) The highest court imaginable has declared us right before the charges that could be brought against us

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- (2) If God justifies, who can bring a charge against us?
3. And this is where we leave you today - with justification - the next step in our long look at salvation