

The Promise of Security, Part 2

Scripture: Romans 8:28

Code: 45-65

REVIEW

Romans 8 is like a mountain range with many peaks. Verse 28 is the highest peak and most majestic mountain in the range. It sums up the security of the believer in a way no other portion of Scripture does: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

I. THE EXTENT (v. 28b)

"All things work together for good."

All things work together ultimately for the believer's good, and that includes suffering, temptation, and sin. Things that are in themselves bad are overruled by God for our good in the present and in the future.

The ultimate future good is our eternal glory. Verses 29-30 speak of our moving toward glorification and verses 23-25 refer to the redemption of our bodies. We await the ultimate glory of a home in heaven in the presence of Christ. Everything happening to us now moves us toward that glory.

Nothing can overrule God's plan. Verses 29-30 describe an inevitable process: God foreknew us, predestinated us, called us, justified us, and will glorify us. Verse 31 summarizes: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Since God has done so much to guarantee our glory, who can overrule His work? Can death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, or any creature withstand God (vv. 38-39)? The obvious answer is no. None of those things individually or collectively can change God's plan for our ultimate good.

LESSON

II. THE RECIPIENTS (v. 28c)

"To them that love God, to them who are the called."

All things work together for good, but not for everyone. Two phrases identify the recipients of that promise: "them that love God" and "them who are the called."

A. Those Who Love God

In Scripture Christians are alternately called children of God, sons of God, believers, true worshipers, and saints. Here they are identified as "them that love God." From our perspective we are "them that love God." From God's perspective we are "them who are the called."

Nothing is more indicative of our character as Christians than our love for God. "Them that love God" is a wonderful way to describe redeemed people.

1. The motive of our love for God

Believers are often described in the Bible as those who love God.

a) Exodus 20:5-6--"Thou shalt not bow down thyself to [idols], nor serve them; for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." Humanity is divided into two groups: those who hate God (v. 5) and those who love Him (v. 6). b) 1 Corinthians 2:9--"Eye hath not seen, nor heard, neither have entered into the

heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."c) 1 Corinthians 8:3--"If any man love God, the same is known of him."d) James 1:12--"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

2. The degree of our love for God

Why does the Bible frequently identify Christians as those who love God? Why didn't Paul identify believers in Romans 8:28 as "those who are saved" or "those who are the children of God"? I think Paul was affirming a basic element in salvation: true saving faith goes beyond mere belief. James 2:19 says, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well. The demons also believe, and tremble." True salvation produces lovers of God.

a) Ephesians 6:23-24--"Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." Grace belongs only to those who genuinely love God and Christ.b) Luke 6:46--"Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" If we are not obedient, our profession of faith means nothing because obedience is the fruit of love.c) Luke 7:46-47--Jesus said to a Pharisee, "My head with oil thou didst not anoint. But this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore, I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." If we have been forgiven much, we will love much. The mark of a true believer is that he loves God very much.d) John 15:13-14--"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatever I command you."e) 2 Corinthians 5:14--Paul said, "The love of Christ constraineth us."A true believer is someone who loves God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Realize, however, that in this life we will never love God as much as we ought. That's why Paul said, "This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phil. 1:9).

3. The characteristics of our love for God

How can you know if you truly love God?

a) A true Christian praises God's gloryA person with a true love for God is thrilled with who He is. Psalm 18:1-3 says, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised."b) A true Christian trusts in God's powerPsalm 31:23 says, "Oh, love the Lord, all ye his saints; for the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord."c) A true Christian seeks communion with GodLove seeks to commune with the object of its devotion. David said, "O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, to see thy power and thy glory, as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee" (Ps. 63:1-3). Another psalmist wrote, "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are they who dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee" (Ps. 84:2-4).d) A true Christian enjoys God's peacePeople who don't have a love relationship with God are anxious. But when a person finds the perfect object of his love, he will rest. Thus when we come to know God and experience His love, we enter into a peace like no other. Psalm 119:165 says, "Great peace have they who love thy law."e) A true Christian is sensitive to GodWhen God is hurt over something, a true believer will also feel that hurt. Its like feeling the hurt of another family member. David reflected such devotion when he said to God, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of those who reproached thee are fallen upon me" (Ps. 69:9). When God was dishonored, that hurt David.f) A true Christian loves what God lovesWhat does God love? David said, "Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name" (Ps. 138:2). God loves His

Word; the person who loves God also loves His Word. As the psalmist said, "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.... Oh, how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.... How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth" (Ps. 119:72, 97, 103).g) A true Christian loves whom God lovesFirst John 5:1-2 says, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and everyone that loveth him that begot loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments." If you are a child of God you will love Him, keep His commandments, and love His children.h) A true Christian hates what God hatesA true believer hates evil because he is inextricably intertwined with God Himself, who is pure and holy. When Peter realized he had denied the Lord three times, "he went out, and wept bitterly" (Matt. 26:75). Such love for God rejects the evil of this world. That's why 1 John 2:15 says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."i) A true Christian longs for Christ's returnSecond Timothy 4:8 says a special crown awaits all those who long for Christ's return.j) A true Christian obeys God's commandsObedience is the most obvious mark of a true believer's love for God. Christ said, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John 14:21). Those who keep God's commandments truly love Him.

True Christians love God: their hearts' desire is to know Him, glorify Him, commune with Him, and obey Him. We don't obey as completely as we ought, but that's our desire. We identify with Paul, who said, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). Show me a person who doesn't have those desires, and I'll show you a person who isn't redeemed. A believer loves God--even though at times he may fail Him.

Can an unbeliever generate that kind of love for God? No. Romans 3:10-11 tells us no one can do good on his own, no matter how hard he tries. Believers "have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1).

Unbelievers, in contrast, are at war with God. A person who is at war with God--who is ignorant, in darkness, and hopeless--cannot love God on his own.

There are only two kinds of people in the world: those who love God and those who hate Him. Unregenerate people don't see themselves as haters of God, especially if they are religious, but that is in fact the case since they do not obey God's Word and obedience is the overarching mark of genuine love for God. Those who love God keep His commandments, and those who hate God don't. Those who are Christians don't love God as much as they should, but their hearts' desire is to love and obey Him. How can people who are dead in sin--who hate God--ever be turned around to love God?

B. Those Who Are Called

God's call is what changes a person from a hater of God to a lover of God. Christians didn't decide one day to stop hating God and start loving Him. Our fallen human nature keeps us from doing that. By calling us, God made us into people who love Him. The apostle John said, "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The identifying mark of a Christian is love for God, yet that love first came from God Himself.

1. The calling defined

Matthew 22:14 says, "Many are called, but few are chosen." That verse appears in a parable about people who are called to come to the Lord. Here the call is an external invitation: many people hear the gospel and are invited to respond to it. However, only a few are "chosen." That's an internal call from God. Matthew 7:14 confirms that not many people will be saved: "Narrow is the gate, and hard is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

That internal call is God's moving into a person's heart and turning it around, bringing about redemption. In the epistles "called" refers only to what theologians term an effectual call, meaning those whom God calls He redeems.

a) Romans 8:30--"Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."b) Romans 9:11--"The children being not

yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth." Salvation originates from the effectual call of God--His divine purpose and choosing--not from anything we have done or will do. You love God because He first loved you. You responded to the gospel because God changed your heart--He initiated your salvation. As Martyn-Lloyd Jones said, "God interferes with our life" (Romans, vol. 6 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975], p. 190). And He interferes with our life in a significant way: His divine act initiated our salvation and ultimately leads to our glorification.

2. The calling described

People frequently ask me if I believe in predestination. I do because the Bible teaches it. Election and predestination are both in Romans 8:29-30, which tells us we are saved because God called us. Paul realized he was "called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:1). He didn't come to Christ on his own. Quite the contrary, God ordained him into the ministry while he was an unbeliever traveling to Damascus to persecute Christians. Paul had little to do with his conversion; he simply obeyed what God told him to do. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to "the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1:2). Verse 24 also refers to God's effectual call: "Unto them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

If you are a Christian, it's because God called you. Don't ask me why He picked you; I don't know why He picked me, but rejoice just the same.

We find many references to the internal call of God throughout the epistles:

a) Ephesians 1:11--"In [Christ] we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." b) Philippians 3:14--"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Paul was called to the race to run for the prize. c) 1 Thessalonians 2:13--"When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the word of men but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." d) 2 Timothy 1:9--"[God] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

You and I were called before the world began. God called us in eternity past so He could glorify us in eternity future. That's why it's impossible to lose our salvation. Why do all things work together for good to those who love God? Because they are the "called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30). We have been called to glory. God predestined us "to be conformed to the image of his Son" (v. 29). We are not complete until we are like Christ. God is working that out now. Jesus said, "Those that thou [the Father] gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost" (John 17:12). God planned salvation to be eternal.

How Does God Call Us?

God calls us by His Word and His Spirit. Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (NASB). Can a person be called and saved without hearing about Christ? No. Some people believe a person can be saved without knowing it, a teaching known as hyper-Calvinism, but Scripture says saving faith requires hearing about Christ (Rom. 10:14). A person first has to know the facts.

God also calls us by His Spirit. We are born again by the Spirit (1 Pet. 1:22-23). The Spirit convicts us "of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). He recreates us. We are baptized into the Body of Christ in Him (1 Cor. 12:13). The Spirit and the Word are the agents of God's call.

III. THE SOURCE (v. 28d)

"According to his purpose."

You couldn't save yourself, and you can't keep yourself saved. God had to save you and He has to

keep you saved. He is our source of security. Ephesians 1:4 says, "He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame." God chose us for ultimate holiness--that is the supreme guarantee of glory. He planned our glorification and nothing can stand in the way of that.

How does God know whom to set His love upon? I don't know--that's something He predetermined before the world began. But let me tell you something wonderful: God will not change His mind. He will not reject you if you are already saved. Romans 11:29 says, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

IV. THE CERTAINTY (v. 28a)

"We know."

We who love God know that we have been called and that all things work together for our good because that's what Scripture tells us. It grieves me that so many Christians don't know what the Bible says and therefore fail to experience the incredible rest that belongs to those who know their salvation is eternal. Others quote Romans 8:28 as a fact, yet they aren't confident of its truth.

CONCLUSION

All things do work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose. The supreme illustration of that is the death of Jesus Christ. The worst thing that ever happened in human history turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to us. God works to overrule everything for our ultimate good and glory!

Focusing on the Facts

1. Can anything overrule God's plan to glorify us? Support your answer with Scripture.
2. Who are the recipients of the promise that "all things work together for good"?
3. Exodus 20:6 divides all humanity into two groups. What are they?
4. Why did Paul identify Christians as those who love God in Romans 8:28?
5. Explain what the Lord was saying in Luke 6:46.
6. What characterizes the believer's love for God?
7. What is the most obvious mark of a believer's love for God?
8. Can an unbeliever initiate love for God on his own? Explain.
9. Explain the difference between an external call and an internal call.
10. What does Romans 9:11 point out about the call of God versus the effort of man?
11. Explain how God calls us.
12. Can a person be saved without knowing any facts about Christ (Rom. 10:14)?
13. What is the source of our eternal security? When did God choose us to be saved (Eph. 1:4)?
14. What is the supreme illustration of the truth that "all things work together for good to them that love God"?

Pondering the Principles

1. The Bible identifies believers as those who love God. How would you rate your love for God? Do you express your love consistently, regardless of your circumstances? How do you express your love for Him? Be specific. What do your answers reveal about your love for God? Determine what you need to do to make your love for God more of what it should be.
2. Review the section on what characterizes the believer's love for God (pp. 4-6). Carefully consider each characteristic. Which are your strengths? Which do you need to work on? Determine how you can strengthen the ones you need to work on, and ask God to help you.
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, and 2 Timothy 1:9. What do these

verses say about your calling in general? Now look up the following verses and describe what you are called to specifically: 1 Corinthians 1:9; Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 4:1-3; Hebrews 9:15; 1 Peter 1:15; 2:9; and 3:9. Thank God for calling you to salvation and to all the other things you've been called to!

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