

## **The Ultimate Security of Our Salvation**

Scripture: Romans 8:29–30

Code: 45-66

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **A. The Confusion**

For years people have debated whether a Christian can lose his or her salvation. Perhaps more than any other single doctrine, eternal security has been a dividing issue in the church. That's sad because the Bible is so clear on the matter. It's surprising that so many Christians would deny the straightforward presentation of the doctrine of security in Romans 8. Other texts discuss the security of the believer, but none are as pointed as this. Verses 28-30 are among the clearest passages on eternal security: everyone who has been redeemed by Jesus Christ--without exception--will be glorified. All believers have the assurance that everything works together for their good, so nothing can work against them that could make them lose their salvation. Those who are justified will indeed be glorified.

#### **B. The Clarification**

##### **1. In Romans**

Romans 8:28 says we are forever secure because that is God's purpose. Verses 29-30 explain God's purpose: "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

God causes all things to work together for the believer's good because that's the way He wants it. There's no other explanation. God is absolutely free to make whatever decisions He wants to, and nothing can change that.

##### **2. In Ephesians**

You're a Christian not because of something you decided, but because of something God decided. Paul said, "He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him" (Eph. 1:4). God chose us and "predestinated us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (v. 5). God predetermined to make us His sons and planned our salvation to lead to glorification. Our security does not depend on our ability to stay saved, but on God's ability to keep His promise (Heb. 6:17-18). God planned to redeem us. Therefore salvation is not based on what you decide, but on what God decides. John 1:12-13 says, "As many as received him [Christ], to them gave he power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." We need to receive Christ, but it is God who originates the new birth.

### **Your Decision vs. God's Decision**

Much of contemporary evangelism leaves people thinking their salvation is predicated on their decision for Christ. But how could anyone ever decide for God on his own? First Corinthians 2:14 says, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him." Second Corinthians 4:4 says, "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto

them." Man is ignorant, in darkness, and dead in trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:1). In his natural state he could never muster up enough of whatever it takes to turn around and follow God. God must make the first move. He purposes to save us in eternity past and redeem us for eternity future. There is no loss of salvation in between. Our salvation is secure because it is something God has purposed to do.

## **LESSON**

### **I. THE PURPOSE OF SALVATION (v. 29c)**

"To be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born [Gk. prototokos] among many brethren."

#### **A. To Conform Us to Christ**

We have been called according to God's purpose, and His purpose is to make us like Christ. It is impossible to become saved but never become like Christ. God promised glorification. Heaven, the forgiveness of sin, and the gifts of love, joy, peace, and wisdom are mere by-products of salvation. The main reason God saved us was to conform us to the image of His Son.

God is redeeming an eternally holy, Christlike, glorified community of people. When you became a Christian, the conforming process began. And that process must be fulfilled because it is God's holy purpose. Romans 8:17 says that because we are children of God, we are "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." We were made sons of God so that we might be heirs, and our inheritance is to be like Christ and to inherit all that belongs to Him. The teaching that people can lose their salvation is unbiblical because God's purpose in salvation is to conform us to the image of Christ.

The Greek verb translated "to be conformed" in verse 9 means "to bring to the same form with." We will be made into the same form as Christ.

##### **1. Bodily conformity**

Philippians 3:21 says that the Lord "shall change our lowly body, that it may be fashioned like his glorious body." Our glorified bodies will be like Christ's glorified body. Outwardly we will be conformed to the postresurrection body of our Lord, but I don't think that means we will look alike. Every human being is different, but we have basically the same body. Our bodies work in the same way, in the same environment, and by the same principles. When we go to glory, we will receive glorious bodies that operate in the same environment and by the same principles as the resurrected, glorified body of Christ.

##### **2. Spiritual conformity**

We will be like Christ in a spiritual sense as well: we will be perfect inwardly, not just outwardly. Residing in us will be the very holiness of Jesus Christ. The divine, incorruptible nature He gave us at our redemption will be freed from our earthbound flesh. We "shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

God predestined us to be conformed "to the image [eikon] of his Son." An icon is a statue made to look like someone or something. The likeness is not incidental or accidental—it is a calculated, replicated image. Eikon is used of a son who is the image of his father. It is used that way in Hebrews 1:3, which describes God's Son as "the express image of his person." We too will be a direct replication of His image, for when Christ appears, "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Paul said, "We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). When you came to Christ, your spiritual blindness ended and you began to see the glory of the Lord. Now as you move from one level of glory to the next, you are becoming more and more like Christ until the day you actually see Christ and become like Him.

#### **B. To Make Christ Preeminent**

While our conformity to Christ is vital to God's purpose, it is but a secondary purpose leading to this:

"That [Christ] might be the first-born [Gk., prototokos] among many brethren." That's a reference to preeminence, not chronology. In Jewish culture the firstborn son inherited all his father possessed. He uniquely represented the dignity of his family and carried the family name. He was the preeminent one. God saved us to make us like Christ so there will be a redeemed, glorified humanity over which Christ will reign supreme.

Philippians 2:9-10 says God has exalted Christ "and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." He wants to bring to heaven a redeemed humanity that will spend all eternity glorifying the prototokos--the preeminent Christ. Colossians 1:18 declares that Christ "is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence."

### **Why Did God Create Us?**

God created us so there would be a group of people who would give Him the glory He deserves. Once the rebellion began in the Garden of Eden, God set out to redeem humanity. His goal in salvation is to bring believers to glory--to create an eternally redeemed community of people like Christ, whom they will glorify, worship, revere, and praise forever.

God saved you not just to keep you out of hell or to make you happy. His ultimate reason is to conform you to Christ's image so you will be able to give glory to the One who is most glorious. In Hebrews 2:11 Christ calls us brothers. Now He didn't have to make us His brothers. He could have made us His servants. He didn't have to bring us into His family, but He did. Even though God wants us to glorify Him and His Son, He also desires intimacy with us. He wants us to be one in essence with Himself.

God gives us joy, peace, and a future in heaven--all elements of His grace to sinners. Yet we must not let those blessings obscure the apex of the divine purpose. Christ is the central point of redemptive history, not you. That's humbling in one sense but reassuring in another: if God saved you, He will glorify you to fulfill His purpose in bringing you to salvation. God's plans don't get thwarted. If they did, He wouldn't be God.

## **II. THE PROGRESS OF SALVATION (vv. 29a-b, 30)**

There are five elements in the unfolding plan of salvation:

### **A. Foreknowledge (v. 29a)**

"Whom he did foreknow."

God's redemptive plan began with His foreknowledge.

1. It includes foresight

Some people assume foreknowledge is the same as foresight. They envision God in heaven looking into the future with binoculars to see who will choose to believe in Christ. If He sees you will believe, He chooses you; if He sees you won't, He doesn't. God does have foresight: He can see everything that will happen in the future. He knows exactly what people will do. However, if salvation is based only on God's foresight into the decisions of individual men and women, that means man secures his own salvation--an obvious contradiction of Scripture. Also, the foresight view, instead of solving problems, leaves us with a couple:

a) Why did God create unbelievers? Just believing that God knew who would and would not accept Christ doesn't explain why God allows people to go to hell. Some will say it's His choice to send people to hell; He knows it's going to happen. But if God knew certain people would go to hell, why did He bother creating them? b) How does a sinner obtain saving faith? While God knows what is going to happen in the future, that still doesn't explain how sinners get saving faith. How can a person who is dead in sin, blinded by Satan, unable to understand the things of God, and continuously filled with evil suddenly exercise saving faith? A corpse could sooner come out of a grave and walk!

## 2. It includes foreordination

God's foreknowledge is not a reference to His omniscient foresight but to His foreordination. God does foresee who is going to be a believer, but the faith He foresees is the faith He Himself creates. Jesus said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.... No man can come to me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him" (John 6:37, 44). John 1:13 says Christians are "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it [faith] is the gift of God--not of works, lest any man should boast." Saving faith comes from God.

Acts 13:48 says, "When the Gentiles heard ... they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Salvation is ordained of God. It ultimately ends in eternal life and glory and a person's being conformed to the image of Christ. The Gentiles in Acts 13 believed because they were ordained to do so.

God doesn't merely see what will happen in the future, but ordains what will happen. The Bible clearly teaches that God sovereignly chooses people to believe in Him. The epistle of 1 Peter begins, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the sojourners scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father" (vv. 1-2). We are elect by God's foreknowledge.

## 3. It includes forelove

God predetermined to love us. "Foreknow" (Gk., prognosis) is the key word in Romans 8:29. The word know is often used in Scripture to speak of a love relationship. Genesis 4:17 says, "Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bore Enoch." That doesn't mean Cain knew who his wife was or what her name was; it means he knew her intimately. Joseph was surprised when Mary became pregnant with Jesus because he had not yet known her intimately (Matt 1:18, 25). Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them" (John 10:27). God told Israel, "You only have I known" (Amos 3:2). He didn't mean He knew only about the Jewish people. According to Matthew 7:23 the Lord will someday say to unbelievers, "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." In that case there was no predetermined love relationship, as when a man knows his wife.

God's foreknowledge means He predetermined to love certain people. He foreordained the redemption of those people, and could foresee it all happening in the future. So foreknowledge is a predetermined, foreordained, foreseen love relationship. Romans 8:28 says we are "called according to his purpose." Before the world began God purposed to love us and redeem us so we might be conformed to Christ's image. Second Timothy 2:19 says, "The Lord knoweth them that are his." Christ knows us intimately.

## **B. Predestination (vv. 29b, 30a)**

"He also did predestinate.... Moreover, whom he did predestinate."

The Greek word translated "predestinate" (proorizo) means "to appoint" or "mark out beforehand." In Acts 4:27-28 it speaks of Christ's crucifixion: "Against thy holy child, Jesus, whom thou has appointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the nations, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, to do whatever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." The word "foreknowledge" is also used in reference to Christ's crucifixion (Acts 2:23). If we say God's foreknowledge is simply foresight into the future, that means He saw what Jesus--on His own prerogative--was going to do and reacted to it. That is heretical. But if we understand foreknowledge and predestination to mean that God predetermined Christ's death to redeem mankind, then it follows He could also predetermine who would be redeemed.

## **C. Calling (v. 30b)**

"Them he also called."

Here's where God's eternal plan intersects with your life. In eternity past, He predetermined to love you--He predestined your salvation. God's calling begins when He moves into your life on this earth, within the boundaries of time.

Romans 8:28 says, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called." "Called" refers not to an outward but an inward call. God turns a person's heart to Himself--a heart that could never turn to God, know Him, understand the gospel, or know hope on its own. The context of Romans 8:30 shows God's call to be a saving call: "Whom he called, them he also justified." And that calling is an effectual or effective call--it's not an invitation to just anyone, and it's an invitation that will inevitably be received. Since God predetermined to love us, foreordaining our salvation in eternity past, He has to fulfill that by moving into our lives.

When God calls us He convicts our hearts. He draws us away from sin and toward the Savior. Paul said, "[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" (2 Tim. 1:9). You were called to salvation to fulfill a purpose that was planned before the world began. That's why we are secure in our salvation. We were saved to be like Christ as part of a redeemed community who will exalt His holy name forever. Since that was God's plan before we were born, He will fulfill it, working out all things toward that good end.

#### 1. Through the gospel

God's call comes to us through the gospel. Paul said, "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation ... unto which he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

### Perplexing Paradoxes

Contemporary Christianity has a shallow view of salvation. Many people don't understand the security of the believer. God, in eternity past, chose us to believe in the truth (2 Thess. 2:13). But there must be a response on our part. Now I don't fully understand how those two come together. Does that mean people go to hell because God didn't choose them? No. The Bible says they go to hell because they reject the gospel (John 3:18).

The paradox of God's choice and man's response isn't the only paradox in Scripture. For example, who wrote the book of Romans? Paul did, and so did God. Every word is pure and from the mind of God. Yet every word is also from Paul's heart and his vocabulary. How could Romans have been fully written by both God and Paul? We know it was but can't fully explain it. Is Jesus God or man? He was both. Christ was not a blend of God and man. He was 200 percent Himself: 100 percent God and 100 percent man. Who lives your Christian life? Paul said, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor. 9:27). He also said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). Which is the right answer? Both you and Christ live your life. Most major doctrines in the Bible have aspects we cannot fully explain. When we attempt to bring God down to our level, there is still much we won't understand. Let's go back to our original question: Why do people go to hell? If a person rejects Christ, he's responsible. But if a person comes to Christ, that means he was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). There's no other explanation.

#### 2. By grace

God's call to Christ also comes by grace. Don't think you must be better just because God chose you. We don't know why God chose you or me. One small hint appears in Ephesians 1:6, which says God predestined us "to the praise of the glory of his grace." Whatever the reason, God chose us for Himself. Galatians 1:6 says He calls us "into the grace of Christ." We are called to salvation through the gospel and by grace.

#### D. Justification (v. 30c)

"Whom he called, them he also justified."

The Greek word translated "justified" means "to be made right." How do you get right with God?

When you deal with the sin in your life. How does that happen? When God takes your sin and puts it on Christ (Rom. 3:23-25). When God moved into your heart and called you to faith in Christ, you became right with God.

Is there time between God's calling and our justification? I don't know. That's like asking how much time it takes for a bullet to go through two sheets of paper. The distinction between calling and justification is theological; there isn't necessarily a time lapse. You are called to be justified. The calling takes place when God moves to change your heart. Justification is the result.

#### **E. Glorification (v. 30d)**

"Whom he justified, them he also glorified."

That passage is in the past tense. Your glorification is so secure that God speaks of it as if it already happened, as did your calling and justification. In one great moment of eternal time God determined that all those things would happen to you. The moment He predetermined to love you, the outcome of your salvation was just as sure as its beginning.

### **CONCLUSION**

You were saved unto glory, and all things are working toward that end. God's purpose is to make you like Christ as part of a redeemed humanity over which Christ will be preeminent. You will glorify and praise Him forever. Before the world began, God predetermined to love you and foreordain your salvation. In time He moved into your heart and called you away from your sin. He made you right with Himself through Jesus Christ, and destined you to be glorified. That is the great basis of your eternal security.

### **Focusing on the Facts**

1. What doctrine, perhaps more than any other, has been a dividing issue in the church? Why is that surprising?
2. How do we know believers are secure forever (Rom. 8:28)?
3. When did Paul choose us 1:3 (Eph. 1:4)?
4. What does our security depend on? Explain (Heb. 6:17-18).
5. What do many think salvation is predicated on? Respond to that belief biblically.
6. In what ways will we be conformed to Christ? Discuss what is involved in each aspect of transformation.
7. What is the significance of the word "image" in Romans 8:29?
8. What does it mean that Christ is "the first-born among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29)?
9. What do some people suggest about God's foreknowledge? What problems are we left with?
10. Where does the faith God foresees come from?
11. Using Scripture, support the fact that God sovereignly ordains people to salvation.
12. What is know often used to speak of in Scripture, and how does that relate to God's love for us?
13. What does the Greek word translated "predestinate" mean (Rom. 8:29-30)?
14. What happens when God calls us? How does His call come to us?
15. What hint does Ephesians 1:6 give about why God chose to save us?
16. What does it mean to be justified (Rom. 8:30)? Discuss the relationship between God's call and justification.
17. Explain why Romans 8:30 describes believers as already glorified.

### **Pondering the Principles**

1. One aspect of God's purpose for salvation is to create an eternally redeemed humanity that will glorify Christ forever. Why is Christ worthy of glory? How often do you focus on glorifying Him? Make a list of things you can praise Him for, and lift them up to Him in prayer.
2. Romans 8:30 says that those whom God justified He also glorified. Our salvation is as good as

done. We can definitely trust God for our eternal security. Do you have that same kind of trust in God for the temporal things of day-to-day life? In what ways do you show a lack of confidence in God? Do you, for instance, tend to worry? What are you telling God when you don't trust Him fully? Cultivate a habit of trusting God in every aspect of your life. Since He can guarantee your future glorification, He certainly can take care of you in your present circumstances.

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