**Romans**

***How to be a Christian without Being Religious!***

**Lesson 15: Who Can Be Against Us? (Romans 8:28-39)**

By the time Paul wrote this portion of his letter to the believers in Rome (8:28-39), he must have been overwhelmed with wonder at the realization of all the privileges that accrue to believers:

* peace with God (5:1)
* a brand new life to live in Christ (6:4)
* freedom from the power of sin through our union with Christ (6:1-14)
* freedom from the law’s condemnation (7:1-25)
* power to the live through the indwelling Spirit (8:1-27)

Furthermore, Paul must have been overwhelmed by the truth that believers are actually “sons of God!” Believers have been adopted into God’s family; thus, they are both heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. Moreover, believers have a confident hope in the coming resurrection and are willing to wait for it patiently knowing that, one day, they will share in Christ’s glory. Paul must have been thinking this was too good to be true. How could it be? But it was true then, and it is true now!

In verses 28-39, Paul concludes this chapter with some of the greatest truths found in all of Scripture. Paul soars to new theological heights and offers incredible words of assurance. He writes: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (v. 28). Verse 28 is one of the most comforting verses found in the Bible. Down through the centuries, countless believers have been encouraged by these words on long, dark nights and through great hardships. Once again, Paul writes, “We know!” This word “know,” comes from the Greek word *oida*. It means to have full or complete knowledge without any doubt or uncertainty. We know beyond a shadow of doubt! What do we know? We know, as God’s children, that he will take the circumstances of our lives and work them out for our good. It doesn’t matter what those circumstances are—good or bad—ultimately, God will work them out for our good.

In all things  
 God works  
 for the good  
 of those who love him,  
 who have been called   
 according to his purpose.

Do you see who is at work? God!

In which things does he work? All!

Do see you his ultimate goal? Our good!

For whom does he work? For those who love him and have been called by him!

Do you love him? Have you been called by him? If yes, then understand that God will work in all things, the good, the bad, the easy, the difficult, the pleasant, the painful; yes, in all things, God works for your good. However, this does not mean that God works in all things for the good of *everyone*. He is only working for his children—believers. Believers are a very privileged group, and God is working for them to ensure that everything that happens in their lives works to bring about good for them. What is that ultimate good? To be more and more like Jesus—God’s son. Stott comments,

*We do not always understand what God is doing, let alone welcome it. Nor are we told that he is at work for our comfort. But we know that in all things he is working towards our supreme good. And one of the reasons we know this is that we are given many examples of it in Scripture. For instance, this was Joseph’s conviction about his brothers’ cruelty in selling him into Egypt: ‘You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good’…the saving of many lives…The same concurrence of human evil and divine plan had its most conspicuous display in the cross, which Peter attributed both to the wickedness of men and to ‘God’s set purpose and foreknowledge.’[[1]](#footnote-1)*

Why is God working to make sure all things work for the good of his children? First, because God loves his children. John writes, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Second, because God has a plan and purpose for the life of every believer. What is that plan? The answer is found in v. 29: “For those God foreknew he also predestined **to be conformed to the likeness of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” God’s plan, from before time began, was to have a family. Thus, God has been calling men and women to himself, through his foreknowledge, for the purpose of conforming them into the likeness of his son, Jesus Christ. The word “foreknowledge” is a very interesting word. So what does it mean? First, let me tell you what it does not mean. It does not mean that God looked down the tunnel of time, saw those who would hear the gospel and believe, and then chose them. Stott continues,

*If God predestines people because they are going to believe, then the ground of their salvation is in themselves and their merit, instead of in him and his mercy, whereas Paul’s whole emphasis is on God’s free initiative of grace.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

According to Keller, “foreknowledge” means *forelove*. Keller explains,

*In the Bible, when we are told God “knows” someone, it means he has set his love on him in a personal way. For instance, when Jesus says to some: ‘I never knew you’ (Matthew 7:23), he doesn’t mean he won’t know about them, but that he will have no relationship with them. Therefore ‘foreknew’ means ‘forelove’…thus, God set his love on us back before the beginning of time. This is stunning!”[[3]](#footnote-3)*

There is a lot of mystery in these deep terms, e.g. predestination, foreknowledge, and called. Therefore, it is better to approach them in great humility, acknowledging that we cannot really understand God and his ways. God foreknew certain people before time began, and those people were predestined to become a part of his family and to be conformed into the likeness of God’s son, Jesus. Thus, Jesus became the “firstborn (highest honored) among many brothers.” Think about it—if you are in Christ, then Jesus is your brother. What a place of high privilege we have in Christ!

Paul goes on to say, “And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (v.30). In verses 29-30, Paul reveals five incredible verbs to describe what God has done not merely for some, but for all “those” who are in Christ, that is, for all true believers. This group that God “foreknows,” he also predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies. Consider each of these words which apply only to God’s true children. (Remember, these are mysterious terms. We can only understand them to the extent Scripture provides illumination!)

**Foreknew:** God set his love on us. He foreknew his children in a personal way. This term refers to a deep, intimate, personal relationship with God. God foreknew, set his love upon, his children even before he created them.

**Predestined:** God pre-determined to conform believers into the very likeness of his son. Yes, God determined, even before creation, to transform us who belong to him by faith, the ones he called by grace, to be with him one day in heaven, to be perfect like his son and to share in his glory. Once a man places his trust in Jesus, he is on a predetermined path to glory.

**Called:** When God calls a man, the Spirit provides illumination and deep inner conviction. 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 explains this process. “For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.” These verses speak to God’s electing love— another deep mystery. When God calls a man, that man responds by faith. Keller explains, *Anyone who is called by God in this sense must eventually become justified and glorified. This is therefore an internal illumination that God sends to awaken us to the truth.[[4]](#footnote-4)*

**Justified:** As we have already learned, to be justified is to be “declared righteous” in God’s courtroom. All guilt and condemnation are removed. The believer stands blameless before God forever. Justification comes to all whom God calls and whom were foreknown by him.

**Glorified:** To be glorified is God’s predetermined destiny for every one of his chosen children. Glorification is the end of the chain that began with justification and was followed by sanctification. Glorification is so certain it is as if it has already happened. John alludes to this in 1 John 3:2, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” Wow! Consider this: One day, every believer will be perfectly holy, like Jesus. We will never know sin again. Believers are destined to live in glorified bodies, in a glorious city that will be illuminated by the glory of God. Keller expounds,

*Now, Christians are able to look back “down” the chain, and know that before creation God fore-loved them, and predestined them to be justified. And a Christian can look “up” the chain, and know that in eternity they will know unimaginable glory in his presence. If we love God, we are called (v 28). And if we are called people, then we are fore-loved, predestined, justified, soon-to-be-glorified people. This is wonderful![[5]](#footnote-5)*

**What Shall We Say in Response?**

*What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long: we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”* (Verses 31-36)

In these verses, Paul reminds believers that we should have no doubt about things God has promised to “work out” for his children. How can there be any doubt? If God is for us, who can stand against us? No one! If God was willing to give that which was most precious to him, his very own son, how much more willing is he to give us all the things he has promised—eternal life, a home in heaven, glorified bodies, and himself, forever? And who can bring any charge against us? Yes, there is an accuser (Revelation 12:10), and his name is Satan. But consider this, we have an Advocate and his name is Jesus. 1 John 2:1 states, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” I am so thankful that Jesus stands before the Father in heaven as my Advocate to defend me when Satan makes accusations against me. All Jesus has to say to his Father is this: “I paid the price. His sins are covered, and I remember them no more.” Whenever you are overwhelmed by guilt due to some past sin that you have truly confessed, you need to remember the words of Paul, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Furthermore, those who are in Christ Jesus belong to God. He is our Abba, Father. And nothing can ever separate us from his love. Nothing! Not trouble! Not hardship! Not famine! Not nakedness! Neither danger nor sword! And not even sin! Though believers face persecution and death in this world, neither can separate us from the love of God. Even in the face of death, believers are victorious. Chapter 8 concludes with this blessing,

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Verses 37-39)

With God for us and with us, who can stand against us? No one! Thus, we are more than conquerors. Consider this; we have the same power in us that raised Jesus from the dead! Jesus said, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Jesus will never leave us nor forsake us. Therefore, we should never be afraid. God is with us and, one day, Jesus is coming back for us. We should live each day with confidence in his Word and in the hope that soon we will be with him and be like him forever. Do you have this hope? Are you living as a conqueror? Are you convinced that nothing can separate you from the love of God? If not, read his promises and know that if you have been called by God, one day, you will stand, glorified, before him.

**DAY 1**

1. Read chapter 7, pages 77-84, in *How to Be a Christian without Being Religious*.
   1. What is the all-important condition for Romans 8:28 to apply to one’s life?
   2. What are some typical reactions on the part of most Christians when they encounter trials and hardships? (See cartoons on page 79.)
   3. What is the other condition included in Romans 8:28 for life application?
   4. What is God’s ultimate plan for believers?
   5. What is the difference between being a Christian and settling for “being religious?” (See bottom of page 83.)

**DAY 2** Read Romans 8:28-30.

1. Romans 8 is considered by some to be the greatest chapter in all of Scripture. Additionally, Romans 8:28 is not only one of the most comforting but also one of the most quoted verses in all of Scripture: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*.
   1. Notice that Paul begins this verse with the third person plural word “we.” With that in mind, to whom is this verse addressed?
   2. What does it mean to you that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him?”
2. *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers* (verse 29). What do the following terms mean to you? Try to express this in your own words after reading the cross references below.

* [God] foreknew (Amos 3:2 begins, “You only have I **chosen** of all the families of the earth.” The word “chosen” comes from the Hebrew word *yada*, which means “to know.” Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:1-2)
* Predestined (Acts 2:23, 17:26-28; Ephesians 1:4-5, 11)
* Conformed to the likeness of his Son (Romans 12:2; Philippians 1:6, 2:12-13)
* Called (effectual; John 11:43-44; Ephesians 1:18; 2 Timothy 1:9)
* Justified (Acts 13:38-39; Romans 3:24, 5:1, 10:10; Titus 3:5-7)
* Glorified (Romans 8:30; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 1 John 3:2)

**DAY 3** Read Ephesians 1:3-14 - Spiritual Blessings in Christ

These twelve verses of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians are contained in one sentence in the original Greek language. It is often referred to as a “doxology” because it declares all the blessings that believers have in Christ. This doxology also expresses praise and honor to the Giver, God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of the blessings that come from God the Father (v. 3), then those that come through the Son (vv. 4-13a), and finally, those that come from the Holy Spirit (vv. 13b-14).

1. What blessings come to the believer from God the Father and through whom do they come?
2. *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.* (Ephesians 1:4-6)
   1. The Bible does not contradict itself. On the contrary, the Bible interprets itself. It is beneficial to compare verses in one place to verses in another that concern the same topic or subject. Here in Ephesians we are given further insight into the mysterious doctrines surrounding God’s part in salvation. How does the above-listed passage (Ephesians 1:4-6) reinforce truths you have learned from Romans 8:28-30?
   2. What is God’s purpose for those whom he chose before the creation of the world?
   3. When will this purpose ultimately be realized (1 John 3:2)?
3. *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.* (Ephesians 1:7-8)
   1. How did Jesus accomplish our redemption (1 Peter 1:18-19)?
   2. What did God lavish upon those who are in Christ?
4. *And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.* (Ephesians 1:9-10)
   1. What is the mystery of God’s will?
   2. To whom has he made known this mystery (Matthew 13:10-17; Revelation 1:11, 19-20)?
   3. When will this mystery be put into effect (Acts 3:21)?
   4. Who will reign over heaven and earth one day (Philippians 2:9-11)?
5. *And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.* (Ephesians 1:13-14)
   1. How does God effectively call his children?
   2. What does it mean to be in Christ and why is this so important (Romans 8:9)?
   3. What is one of the roles of the Holy Spirit based on Ephesians 1:14?

**DAYS 4 and 5** Read Romans 8:31-39

1. What proof do believers have that God will “graciously give us all things?”
2. In terms of a believer’s eternal standing before God, can anyone bring any charge against us that will stick?
   1. Who is our Advocate (1 John 2:1)?
   2. What is Jesus doing for us even now (John 17)?
   3. Can anything, including death, or anyone, including Satan, separate those who are in Christ from the love of God?
   4. What happens to a believer at the moment of death (Philippians 1:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:8)?
3. So far in this study of Romans, what have you learned about the great promises that are in store for God’s children (true believers)?
4. When Paul penned his last letter, 2 Timothy, he was imprisoned in Rome under Nero (66-67AD). He knew that his work was done and that he was nearing the end of his life. Chained like a common criminal, Paul languished in a cold dungeon. He acknowledged that he was *already being poured out like a drink offering*, and that *the time had come for his departure*. He had *fought the good fight*. He had *finished the race*. He had *kept the faith*. *Now there was in store for him the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, would award to him on that day* (4:6-7). Paul longed for Christ’s appearing. Do you? Paul was prepared to die and to go and be with the Lord. Are you?

1. Ibid., 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Keller, 50-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)