

## What In The World Is Calvinism? (VII)

*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. For those God FOREKNEW He also PREDESTINED to be conformed to the LIKENESS of His Son... And those He PREDESTINED, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.” Romans 8:28-30*

Romans 8:28-30 are extremely important verses to be familiar with when you are dealing with the subject of Calvinism. Calvinists believe that these verses represent “The Golden Chain of Redemption” which proves their teachings that God always intended that ONLY a few people (known as the “elect” by Calvinists) would be saved by Him. All of the “elect” were PREDESTINED to favorably respond to God’s CALL through the gospel. All of the “elect” were PREDESTINED to have God-given faith to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. So, according to Calvinists, ONLY the “elect” were predestined by God to be justified and glorified. All other human beings that were created were PREDESTINED by God to sin against Him, reject the gospel, and to be punished in Hell forever...all to the glory of a SOVEREIGN GOD who “willed this” (according to Calvinists)!

Southern Baptists have traditionally rejected this “reformed theology” that is based on the teachings of John Calvin (1509-1564) who played a big role in the Protestant Reformation. While many do believe that God is “all sovereign” and works out all things “in conformity to His own will”, most Southern Baptists do not believe that it has ever been God’s “SOVEREIGN” will to create human beings that He would never ALLOW to have an opportunity to be saved and “escape” eternal punishment in the lake of fire. Even Jesus taught that HELL was a place created “for the devil and His angels” (Matt 25:41). If God intended most men to end up in hell, why didn’t Jesus teach that it was created “for the devil, His angels, and all humans that were NOT PREDESTINED to be part of the “elect” group”???

The key to understanding what the Bible is saying when God “predestined” someone to be saved, is to discover what Paul meant in Romans 8:29 when he wrote “those God FOREKNEW He also PREDESTINED...”. For Calvinists, they define the word “foreknew” with expressions like “fore-loved” and “fore-elected”. They believe Paul is saying that EVERYONE God “foreknew” will ALL be called, justified, and glorified. They interpret “foreknew” as a divine action to choose only a “few” human beings to love and to predestine to salvation. But is this the “correct way” to translate the word “FOREKNEW”?

The English word “foreknew” in the bible is used to translate the Greek word “proegno”. This Greek word can be interpreted properly in three different ways ACCORDING TO THE CONTEXT OF THE PASSAGE in which it is used. It can mean:

- 1) To KNOW something BEFOREHAND (i.e. ahead of time) “or”
- 2) To KNOW something INTIMATELY (by loving and accepting and approving it) “or”
- 3) To ELECT, FOREORDAIN, and PREDETERMINE something.

Of course, Calvinists teach as if the word “foreknew” in Romans 8:29 can ONLY be defined by option #3. However, Paul’s entire argument for writing Romans 8:28-30 is not to teach SALVATION as being something PREDESTINED to happen. Rather, he is encouraging the “BELIEVERS” in Rome that ALL “BELIEVERS” are PREDESTINED to be “conformed to the image of Jesus Christ”! In Chapter 4 of the Book of Romans, Paul proclaimed that “Abraham BELIEVED God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” (Rom 4:3) If Paul was using Romans as an epistle to teach Calvinism, he could have easily written “Abraham was FOREKNOWN by God, and so was credited as righteous.” But Paul clearly did not intend his arguments on how a person obtains salvation to be based on PREDESTINATION. Rather, Paul was teaching that FAITH and BELIEF in what God says to a person determines whether or not that person will be saved. That’s why Paul ends chapter 4 with “The WORDS ‘it was credited to him’ were WRITTEN not for him alone, but also FOR US, to whom God will credit righteousness-for us WHO BELIEVE in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.” (Rom 4:23-24)

Therefore, following this context, Paul is saying that even though Abraham struggled to “obey” God (Rom 4) and even though WE struggle to “obey” God (Rom 6-7), God uses our BELIEF based on FAITH (Rom 5) to credit us as “righteous” and guarantee us “eternal life” (Rom 5:17-21). Paul then uses Romans 8 to convince true “believers” that God is “IN THEM” (Rom 8:9-11) and “believers” are PREDESTINED to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). Paul clarifies the context of Romans 8:29-30 by first stating in verse 28 “that in all things God works for the good of THOSE WHO LOVE HIM...”. If the ELECT is the subject matter of those God “FOREKNEW” (v. 29), then why did the Holy Spirit not clarify this issue through Paul and have him write “those God CHOSE”, or even “those God ELECTED”. Instead, Paul was led to write “those who LOVED GOD.” Paul is obviously teaching that those who are “predestined” are those who have chosen to “love” God. Love (i.e. “agape”) is not Love if it is FORCED on someone. And the Bible teaches us that “We love because He first loved us” (1Jn 4:19). The subject matter of Romans 8:28-30 are those who have heard the “gospel” of how God “so loved the world” (John 3:16) and have freely chosen to “believe” this message (Rom 10:9-10) and “receive” Jesus, as their Lord and Savior (John 1:12-13).

This “contextual” interpretation of Scripture means that Romans 8:29 can be understood to say “For those God KNEW IN ADVANCE would respond to His love and love Him back through FAITH and BELIEF in Jesus Christ, He also PREDESTINED to be conformed to the likeness of His Son...”. God didn’t make these people love Him. But He knew in advance who would!

A careful study of God’s Word will lead all of us to understand that God KNEW EVERYONE before ANY of us was born (Psalm 139:15-16) and HE LOVED EVERYONE enough to die for ALL of us and to offer ANY of us salvation if we would just BELIEVE (John 3:16-18). So if ANY of us end up in everlasting punishment in a place called “hell”, it is not because God CHOSE that path for us...rather we chose that “destiny” for ourselves!

Now that you know the basic “arguments” behind Calvinism, next week I will explain some of its “dangers”. Until then, be like the Bereans who “searched the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” (Acts 17:11) - **Pastor Louis**