



PRACTICING THE RESURRECTION | ASSURANCE (35)

May 25, 2025

Romans 8:28-30

PURPOSE

To discover and experience Jesus Christ in our midst
To cultivate mutually encouraging relationships
To participate in God's mission to the world

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Discussion Question

- Besides meeting Jesus, what are you most looking forward to in heaven?

PLEASE OPEN IN PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

We're in a sermon series on Romans 8 inspired by N.T. Wright's book "Into the Heart of Romans." Numerous commentators, including Douglas Moo and N.T. Wright, have explained that this chapter's main theme is assurance — providing the Roman believers with hope in the midst of their suffering. In today's passage, the Apostle Paul writes a wonderful promise for all the believers. These verses (28-30), together with the opening verse (1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus") and the closing verses (38-39: "For I am sure that... [nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord") act as the pillars of assurance throughout chapter 8. The Apostle assures us that God will work all things together for good, and that he will glorify us in the end. We're in a sermon series on Romans 8 called *Practicing the Resurrection*, and this week we'll look at the topic of "Assurance."

SCRIPTURE READING

Romans 8:28-30

²⁸And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

BIBLE STUDY

1. Looking at the Bible

- From the passage, share with the group some keywords/themes that stood out to you.

Digging Deeper:

In today's text, Paul frequently refers back to what he had written earlier in the chapter. The "all things" in verse 28 would include the sufferings of verse 17 and the groaning of verse 23. "Conformed to the image of his son, in order that he might be the firstborn" in verse 29 echoes the theme of adoption mentioned in verses 15-17. The final result of glorification in verse 30 reassures us "that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (verse 18). Also, the stages of salvation reiterate the tension between the already and the not yet, as seen in verses 23-25: "in this hope

we were saved,” while we also wait eagerly and patiently for the future hope that is yet to come.

Commentators describe the “good” in verse 28 as our final salvation of being conformed to the image of Jesus, as laid out in verses 29-30. Tim Keller compares it to a “character change”: “He is making us loving, noble, true, wise, strong, good, joyful, and kind as Jesus is.” Jesus tells the rich, young ruler that no one is good except God alone (Mark 10:18). Augustine and Aquinas, borrowing Greek/Roman philosophical terminology, described God as the *Summum bonum* (the highest, ultimate good). Thus, God working all things together for good can also be described as, for the Christian, God working all things in his/her life to draw him/her closer to God and become more like his image.

Jesus is described as “the firstborn among many brothers.” Arians and Jehovah Witnesses have used this description to argue against the Son’s deity, arguing Jesus had a beginning like the rest of creation. In Ancient Near Eastern culture, however, the title of “firstborn” didn’t necessarily mean the oldest child. Rather, it acted more as a status or identity of preeminence and headship. Similar to Colossians 1:15-18, the “firstborn” title is used by Paul to emphasize the Son’s authority and lordship over all creation.

2. Looking at Jesus

At Central we believe that all of Scripture points to Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the theological center of the Bible. Every passage not only points to Jesus, but the grand narrative of the Bible also finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus.

- What is your understanding of salvation? Specifically, what is our role and responsibility in salvation?

Digging Deeper:

Verses 29-30 have often been called “the golden chain of salvation” — the order of how God saves his people. Throughout the New Testament, Paul and other authors use the noun “salvation” (*soteria*) and the verb “to save” (*sozo*) to refer to the multifaceted concept of salvation. As Paul expounds it in verse 30, salvation is an all-encompassing word, including forgiveness, predestination, election, justification, adoption, and glorification. It is also used to refer to physical healing (Mark 5:23) or deliverance from peril (Matthew 27:42).

In terms of the gospel and spiritual salvation, theologians have explained salvation in three tenses: justification, sanctification, and glorification. Justification is when we are forgiven of our sins and reckoned with Christ’s righteousness (Romans 4:6-8, 22-25); we are saved from sin’s penalty. Sanctification is the process of being renewed in God’s image (Romans 6:4-6). We are saved from sin’s power, dying to sin and living unto righteousness. Finally, glorification is when we become perfectly conformed to Christ’s likeness (Romans 8:29) and are saved from sin’s presence. Pastor John Stott refers to Paul’s reasoning with Felix “about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment” as the three tenses of salvation respectively (Acts 24:25). Salvation is then both an event and an ongoing process, glorification being the final culmination. Pastor John Piper explains:

So, Paul says in Ephesians 2:8, “You have been saved.” And he says in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “to us who are being saved.” And he says in Romans 13:11, “Salvation is nearer to us

now than when we first believed.” So, we have been, we are being, and we will be saved — event and process forever.

Notice Paul’s language — the subject and the verb tense — throughout the passage. The subject is God, and the verb tense is in the past tense (aorist tense in Greek). God is the sole agent in our salvation; there is nothing we add or contribute. The Westminster Catechisms repeatedly describe the stages of salvation as “an act of God’s free grace.” Paul has repeatedly instructed the Roman believers to “live according to the Spirit” (verses 5-14); however, even the Apostle’s commands to “work out your own salvation” is followed with “for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). Also, the aorist tense in Greek is used to signify that the action is completed. Similar to Jesus’ cry on the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30), Paul uses the past tense to emphasize that God who started this good work in us will bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6).

3. Looking at our Hearts

- If it were possible to revisit experiences in your life, would you change things, or do you view those experiences as having been essential to your personal growth and character?

Digging Deeper:

We saw that “good” in verse 28 refers to our salvation — being conformed to the image of Christ and glorified (verses 29-30). Theologians from Augustine to Aquinas have explained that the three enemies of the Christian are the world, the flesh, and the devil. They are also mentioned in the Council of Trent (the Roman Catholic Church) and in the Book of Common Prayer (the Anglican Church). In Ephesians 2:2-3, Paul writes on “the course of this world,” “the prince of the power of the air,” and “the passions of our flesh.” Romans 8:28 assures us that God works all things for good, which would include the attacks of the enemy — namely the world, the flesh, and the devil.

We can see clear examples of this in the Old Testament. Joseph was sold as a slave by his brothers and imprisoned due to a false accusation. The world intended to harm him, but Joseph later reflects, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20). Through the world’s evil (the sins of Joseph’s brothers and of Potiphar’s wife), God saved the Egyptians and nearby communities from dying of famine. We see Jonah, in his pride, refuse to obey God’s command to go to Nineveh. In his disobedience of going the opposite way, Jonah encounters sailors who were pagans, but through meeting Jonah, they learn to fear the *Yahweh* God and worship him (Jonah 1:16). God used Jonah’s weakness of the flesh and his rebellious attitude to reach the sailors. In the Book of Job, Satan wanted to see Job curse God, but Job remains faithful, and through his testimony, he comforts those in affliction (2 Corinthians 1:4).

Everyone has past mistakes, sins, and pain they wish to remove. However, Paul assures us that God, in his miraculous power, can work all things together for our good, including the temptations of the world, our sinful flesh, and the attacks of the devil. We see this most clearly in the cross, which Peter attributed both to the wickedness of men and to “definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23).

4. Looking at our World

- Verse 28 assures us that God works all things for good, “for those who are called according to his purpose.” How might this verse address the question of how both evil and an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God can coexist?

Digging Deeper:

The English translation can be misleading; all things do not naturally work for good. Rather, God works (or *causes*, as some translations render) all things to work for good; he is the agent who actively works in our lives (John 5:17; Philippians 2:13). This is a tremendous assurance, but notice the conditional phrases Paul includes in the beginning and end of this verse: “for those who love God” and “for those who are called according to his purpose.” This promise is a necessary limitation, as Paul is not communicating an all-encompassing optimism that “everything will be fine” or “it will somehow work out.” As “good” refers to our salvation (verses 29-30), the Apostle is assuring the readers that God will finish this work of salvation in us and cause everything in our lives to advance toward that goal (Philippians 1:6).

The promise of Romans 8:28 is very encouraging for those going through suffering. On one hand, the Bible shows that suffering is evil; it isn’t naturally good, but God works it for good. This is contrary to other religions that teach to embrace suffering as natural and unavoidable. Stoicism and Buddhism would instruct their followers to get rid of the emotional response or the passion/desire that can lead to suffering. Hinduism would see suffering as part of the cyclical karma; the suffering is caused by the evil they committed in their past lives. However, the Scriptures never speak lightly of suffering and clearly teach that it is unnatural and evil.

On the other hand, this verse also shows that there is a purpose behind suffering. Atheists would find no meaning in moments of suffering, which are simply unlucky accidents. But for Christians, we have nothing to fear or be anxious about when things go wrong, as we believe that everything is under God’s control. Proverbs 16:33 says, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.” Jesus encouraged his disciples saying, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:29-31). Swedish theologian Anders Nygren concludes, “Thus all that is negative in this life is seen to have a positive purpose in the execution of God’s eternal plan.”

SHARING Share your prayer requests, thoughts, hopes and fears for the coming week, and as you do consider how this passage might give light to what you are sharing.

KINGDOM Pray that we would see ourselves called by God.

PRAYER Include other prayer requests.

SENDING God’s word is a lamp to our feet. Christ’s teachings are a light to our path. May God’s word take root in our lives. May Christ’s love nourish and sustain us. Amen.