

96-09-13a

As we prepare to resume our study in Romans this evening, let's pause as we always do before we begin and settle our minds and seek the ministry of the Holy Spirit, set aside the cares and the distractions of the day, and prepare ourselves to concentrate and to be ministered to by the truth that is in God's Word. Shall we pray? Father, we thank you once again for preserving us and protecting us, providing for our needs and blessing us in so many wonderful ways. We thank you for the opportunity that we have tonight to study your Word.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will guide us, lead us into all truth, and that as a result we will be better equipped and better enabled to fulfill the plan that you have for our lives. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. We resume tonight in this great central portion of the letter of Paul to the Romans in chapter 8. We have spent our past two lessons on Romans 8, 28, and 29.

This is perhaps one of the most discussed passages in the New Testament. It has been dissected, it has been cut in half and in quarters and in eighths and sixteenths. It has been analyzed from many different theological perspectives.

It has been the basis for a wide variety of theological statements. And I think that as a result of the perspective that we have gained through our study of the context in which this passage rests, the broad context of the entire letter and the immediate context of chapter 8, we have substantiated our understanding that this passage, as with the bulk of this letter, concerns itself with believers, with the choice that believers face, with the issue that is central in each of our lives. We have jobs, we have families, we have people with whom we deal from day to day.

We have pressures, we have problems, we have joys, we have a lot of things that make up our life. But as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, as people who were created by God for a purpose, it is essential that we understand what God's plan for us is after we receive Christ as Savior. The great push in Christian circles is evangelism and to get people saved.

That's a worthy ambition, it's a wonderful thing that happens, but we would be at a great disadvantage in our military if all our soldiers did was concentrate on recruitment and if everyone was a recruiter and everyone was encouraged in recruiting techniques and was sent to canvas the area and bring in more recruits and we had nothing but a recruiting focus. We have been recruited for a purpose, we have been called and summoned by God for a purpose. This letter concentrates on what that purpose is and we're going to see that there are echoes and restatements of these central truths throughout the New Testament.

So we are at one of the foundation pillars of understanding in terms of our life as believers here in chapter 8. Romans 8, 28-30 says, Now we know that all things work together for good, to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among

many brethren. Moreover, whom he predestined, these he also called.

Whom he called, these he also justified. And whom he justified, these he also glorified. We have talked about the central words in verse 28, the fact that this is something that we know.

It's always significant when Paul uses this phrase, we know or do you not know, because in his mind this knowledge ought to make a difference. It ought to change the way we live any given day. The fact that we know that God is working these things together.

We have seen what the good is, that the good is God's purpose, not necessarily our perspective on circumstances. We think a certain circumstance would be good when we're single, we think it would be good to be married, when we're poor we think it would be good to be rich, when we're sore and aching we think it would be good to be well and free of pain. We look at good and bad in terms of our view of circumstances, but that's not what this verse does.

It's concentrating on God's objectives, God's purposes, God's bringing together of all the threads in history to glorify himself and reveal his character through his son Jesus Christ. We have also seen this idea of love for God. We know that this was the summation that Jesus gave of the entire Old Testament law and prophets, that we love the Lord our God, that we love one another.

It is the command that Jesus left believers, it is the mark of disciples of Jesus Christ that we love God and love one another. Love for God is a motivation, it propels us into the plan of God. It isn't a platitude, it isn't something that we say so that people will accept us as a Christian or as a fellow church member or as a good person.

It ought to be a living influence in our lives if we truly love God. We can compare it to other loves that we have, love for a hobby, love for a person, love for a vocation. There are many things that we have a strong positive feeling about and as a result of that we take action.

We might love certain kinds of music and it motivates us to get copies of that music and listen to it and enjoy it. We might love a person and we pursue them, we spend time with them, we make time for them. It's a factor in every decision we make.

Love for God should be that kind of influence in our daily life. We saw that love for God and the calling of God are two factors that characterize believers for whom this verse is true. Probably the biggest difference in what we are seeing in this verse from what we generally hear about this verse is that it is not referring to our salvation, calling to salvation, predestination to salvation.

This is talking about that subset of believers, the relatively small fraction of believers who after salvation develop a love for God and who recognize the summons that God has issued. We're going to see a little bit more about that tonight as we go forward into verse 29 and 30. But all things, everything that's mentioned in chapter 8, we gave a list last time of all of these different factors that Paul mentions in chapter 8 that affect our lives as believers and that work together for

this good that he mentions.

And so now we pick up tonight in verse 29. We know that all things work together for good for a particular category of believers. Now this is very important.

We have to remember in this context that Paul has reduced the group that he's talking about within the group of believers to that subset of believers. There's an inner core of the body of Christ that this verse and the subsequent verses apply to. And we're going to see the evidence for that and the persuasive nature of the context here for that reading.

Because in my observation of commentary and interpretation on this passage, virtually all standard interpretation says, well this is now talking about Christians at large. And we're going to see some things tonight that will provoke us to perhaps arrive at a different conclusion. We've already seen that these two qualifiers in verse 28, those who love God, those who are the called according to His purpose.

And there's a difference between being summoned and being someone who is characterized by that summons or who is responsive to that summons. And that's the sense that we have here in verse 28. Those who are sensitive to the calling, who respond to the calling, who function in the light of that calling, that's who's referred to here.

Because these two qualifiers refer to the very same group. It's not an either or. Like, well, if you love God or if you are called, it's both and.

They're the same. They're two descriptions of the same group. If you love God, you do respond to His summons.

If you love a person and they call up and say, could you please come over? You'll knock yourself out. They may live in a different state. But if they need you and if you love them, you go.

Love is a motivation to respond when that person calls. God has called. And those who love God respond in an energetic way to His summons.

So that's important to keep in mind as we go into verse 29. And as we saw last time, probably the most important word in this verse for understanding what Paul is saying is the second word in the English here, for whom. The first word there is because.

And if your Bible says for, you might cross it out and put because. This is the Greek conjunction Hoti, H-O-T-I, and it is translated because. It gives an explanation for what has preceded.

Why does everything work together for good for this particular group that love God and respond to His summons? Because He knew about them ahead of time. Whom He foreknew, this group in verse 28 was known by God in eternity past. And they are known as a category, the emphasis here, although God has individual knowledge of each and every member of the human race,

believer, unbeliever, faithful, unfaithful.

Moral, immoral, God has an individual knowledge of every thought and every intent of every heart that has ever been or ever will be. But in this particular passage, what Paul is talking about is this category, this group and they're viewed as a group was foreknown by God. And in this emphasis and in this presentation, he's not pointing out individual foreknowledge.

He's pointing out this category. If we were going to draw on the board and I don't have the board up tonight, but if we're going to draw, and you can do this in your notes if you feel like it, draw a timeline that starts on the left with Adam and goes all the way across till the end of the Millennial Kingdom. That's time as far as the human race is concerned.

From the creation of Adam until the end of the Millennial Kingdom, that's time in the human realm. Now we can divide up that line into different epochs or different dispensations or different eras, whatever you want to call them. There are different groups of people involved, different ways in which God deals.

If you go with the standard Scofield dispensational view, you've got the Age of Innocence, the Age of Conscience, the Age of... I forget what comes after that in Scofield's view, but you've got the nations, and then you get Abraham, and you've got from Abraham to Moses, and then you have from Moses to Christ, and that's the Age of Israel. It gets fuzzier as we get away from our own time. The further back we go in time, the more general and nonspecific the revelation in Scripture is.

By the time we get to Israel, which is next door to us, we have a lot of information in the Old Testament about that and in the New. Then we come to our age, from Christ to the Rapture, and in each of these different eras... Let's take, for example, Adam to Abraham. We'll just combine a few of the standard dispensations there.

From Adam to Abraham, this is what we might call pre-Israel, pre-Abraham covenant. Who do we have living there who are believers, who we feel confident are believers? Well, we've got Adam. We've got Abel, who got killed, and then Adam and Eve's third son, Seth.

He was a believer, and in Genesis chapter 3, we have the... I'm sorry, in Genesis chapter 5. Genesis chapter 5 gives the line of Seth, his descendants, and they go all the way down from Seth to Noah. Many believers, probably hundreds, perhaps thousands of people from Seth to Noah, many of whom were believers. What part of God's plan do they fall under? They don't have... they're certainly not church age with the promises we have in this age.

They're not Israel. They don't have the land promises, the throne of David promises, and so forth, the Palestinian covenant, and so on. God has a particular relationship and a particular set of promises that apply to those people.

Now, God knew in eternity past that there would be believers from Adam through Abraham, right? He knew about Noah. He knew about Shem. He knew about all the Shemites that would come between Shem and Abraham, and He has made provision for them.

They have eternal life. They will have a resurrection. They have eternal promises.

We don't have very much information about the specific nature of God's promises to them because it's far removed from our time, and it wasn't God's purpose to fill us in on all those details, but they have their own economy, their own set of promises, and their own future hope. You start with Abraham and go from Abraham to Moses. You've got the age of the patriarchs there.

God makes some promises that are before the law of Moses, before the Palestinian covenant, before the Davidic covenant. Those people have a particular set of expectations and particular covenant with God that characterizes them as a group, right? So we've got an early group, a little bit later group. We've got the Israelites.

We know a lot about their covenant with God and their promises and their future hope in the land with the son of David on the throne and so forth. There's yet another group distinct and separate from each of those preceding groups to which we belong, and that's the church. That's the body and bride of Christ, and all of the promises and all of the provisions and all of the unique purposes for God for us are distinct and separate from those of Israel and every preceding group.

There will be a group after us, and after the seven-year interval there, which is the last seven years of the age of Israel, and the people who are saved will partake of the same covenants and promises as characterize the rest of the age of Israel, then you have the millennial kingdom. There are going to be believers. There are going to be people who come to faith in God and in Christ in the millennium.

We know that because we know there are children in the millennium, and we know that they grow up. They put their hand in the snake nest. They lead the lions by the chin and so forth, and those children are going to grow up in the millennium, and they're going to reach accountability, and they will express faith or not in God and in Jesus Christ.

They're going to have their own purpose, their own spirituality, their own Christian life, as it were. It's going to be different from the one we have now, their own set of future promises and future role in God's economy in eternity future. So we are one of those groups.

What is it that characterizes us as a group? God in eternity past foresaw each of these groups, each of these different economies, each of the different dispensations, if you will, and made provision and plans and designated specific purposes for each. Israel, among other things, is pictured as the wife of God, as having a relationship with God the Father directly. He is their God.

They are His people and so forth. We in this age are characterized differently. We are the bride of Christ.

We are His body. He is our head. We are in union with Him.

No one in the Old Testament talked about Israelites being in union with God. It's a different relationship with a different purpose. Now, here in Romans 8.29, this whom is the group of believers in this age, and specifically within that group, it's those who love God and who are called according to His purpose.

God foresaw that there would be those who would respond to the call in the church age, in the body of Christ, way back in eternity past, and so He made provision for them just like He did all of the other groups. What is it that He did? Well, for this particular group, those of us who respond to the call, who develop a love for God, fulfill His commands, and live by faith, what did He do? He marked us out, and we saw that word last time, proorizo. Orizo means to put a boundary around, to draw a circle around something.

God, looking at this great chart that we've made of history, He said, right here between the cross and the rapture, there are going to be these faithful believers. And He circled them on His notepad, as it were. And He said, these people right here, I'm going to do something with them.

This is my purpose for them. I'm going to conform them. They're going to be in the image and likeness of my Son, Jesus Christ.

God didn't say that about any other group in history. Not Adam, not Noah, not Moses, not even John the Baptist. That's why Jesus said, of those who up to date, there's none greater than John the Baptist, yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John, because there's a new economy coming.

There's a different set of circumstances. So God drew a circle around these faithful believers, and He said, I'm going to conform this group to the image of my Son. That's their role in my plan.

They're going to be in His likeness. They're going to think like Him and reflect His glory and be associated with Him as closely as someone can be associated with my Son, Jesus Christ. Of all the people in history who are saved by the blood of Christ, these people are going to be the Christians.

They're going to be Christ-like. That's what this means in verse 29. He pro or rezo, ahead of time He drew a circle around them to be conformed to the image of His Son with a purpose.

What's the purpose of this? So that they might receive many blessings. So that they might be delivered from the lake of fire. So that they might, it doesn't say anything about them, does it? It says, so that He, God's purpose centers around Jesus Christ.

So that Christ might be the firstborn among many brethren. God wanted to develop a retinue, a ceremonial guard is one way of looking at it, around Jesus Christ to celebrate and reflect His glory, to mark Him out as the greatest being in the universe and the object of God's great love. And so God wanted to honor Jesus Christ and He said, I'm going to surround you with brethren who reflect your glory, who sing your praise, who honor you.

And that's our purpose. That's our goal as believers who are pursuing the plan of God, is to be a part of that group. We're going to see that here in some additional passages.

For example, take a look at Romans 8.17, right here in this same passage, just up the page a little bit. Remember when he, Paul was talking and he said, the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

We share something with Christ that nobody else in history shares. The Israelites are never called joint heirs with Christ. They're never said to be the brethren of Christ.

They're never even said to be the children of God. They're the children of Israel. They're the people of God.

But we have this unique purpose in God's plan as church age believers who are pursuing the plan of God. And this is one of the references to it. But notice this isn't true of all believers because there's a qualifier in verse 17, just like there's a qualifier in verse 28.

We are children of God. And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. There is an association with Christ.

And this is what Jesus Christ himself said when he was on the earth. And we saw this in our Mark study. If you want to arrive where I am going to arrive, then follow after me where I'm going, Christ said.

The King James, I believe, says, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. And when we studied that in the Greek, we saw that in the first instance, Christ is talking about destination. And he says, if any man would follow me, and that's the word that is talking about arriving at a destination.

If anyone's going to arrive with me where I'm going to arrive, which is glory, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow after me. And that follow after word means to walk along right behind someone. Christ takes a path in God's plan that involves suffering.

It involves obedience under pressure. It involves self-sacrifice, which demonstrates and brings out faith in God. It gives occasion to show forth faith in God and reliance on God's provision.

And at the end of that road is this great glory. But you don't get to the destination of glory with Jesus Christ without walking, as the gospel song says, that long, lonesome road between here and there. And if we share the sufferings of Christ, we will share the glory of Christ.

And it doesn't mean that we have to wear a hair shirt or to have a lot of pain and agony and dismal times. It means that we have to be willing to accept with joy whatever it is that this life offers. And we can do that if we recognize that it's all for a purpose and that our happiness doesn't depend on our circumstances.

So we have that reference right here in chapter eight. But here's an interesting passage in this regard. And if your mind is kind of on the borderline here, on the middle of the fence saying, well, that sounds somewhat reasonable, but I'm not quite sure, turn over with me to Galatians chapter four, verse four.

Galatians 4.4. This is Paul talking again. And he says, but when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Now, here we go.

Adoption is sons. That's our subject back over here in Romans eight. And look at verse six, because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his son, that's the Holy Spirit, into your hearts, crying out, Abba, Father.

Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. Then indeed, when you did not know God, you serve those gods, those which by nature are not gods.

But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. This is the whole problem in Romans, isn't it? People are going back under the law and abandoning righteousness by faith. And he says, I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

Now, if this is all a foregone conclusion, if we are going to share Christ's glory, if we're going to all be heirs, then how could Paul labor in vain? If all of these things come just by virtue of salvation, then there's no labor involved. It's a done deal. It was all predestinated in eternity past.

But look what Paul says. He says, I've been laboring over you, and I'm afraid it's been a waste of time, that you're not going to fulfill this destiny. He says, brethren, in verse 12, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you.

You have not injured me at all. You know that because of physical infirmity, I preached the gospel to you at the first at my trial, which was in my flesh. You did not despise or reject.

You received me as an angel of God. That's a messenger of God, even as Christ Jesus. And look at verse 19.

My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you. This gets back to Romans 8, 29. He marked us out to be conformed to the image of his Son.

We want to be conformed to the image of Christ. How does that take place? Christ is formed in us. We become Christ-like as Christ is formed in us.

That's what conforms us to his image. You can lay a sheet on the ground, and it's just a crumpled up piece of cloth. If you get underneath it and stand up, it starts to conform to the image of the person underneath.

Why? Because the person is inside it. It's going to look like what's inside it. We are going to look like what's inside us.

And we are going to conform to whatever it is that motivates us, to whatever it is that consumes our thinking. And if our thinking is consumed with Jesus Christ, if it's consumed with the plan of God and the hope that we have, the purpose that we have in the plan of God, that's what's going to reflect itself in our life. If we direct our attention to something else, if we dwell on something else, that's what we're going to be conformed to.

We're going to see this in Romans 12. Be not conformed to this world. Do not set your mind on earthly things.

Be transformed, how? By the renewing of your mind. The renewing of our mind is what forms Christ in us. So we have this in Galatians 4 through 11.

We have it here in 4:19. And Paul says, I'm laboring until Christ is formed in you. He says, I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone.

And then he goes on to give an illustration of these things. But look in the next chapter in Galatians 5, verse 4. He's talking to these people that are going back under the law, people that have not heard the argument in Romans and are still seeking righteousness by the works that people can see, by good deeds and so forth, by keeping the law. And he says, you who are trying to be righteous by keeping the law, you're a debtor to keep the whole law.

You have become estranged from Christ. Now, let me ask you something. Can you be conformed to the image of Christ and estranged from Christ at the same time? You can't.

It's an either-or type of thing. Not all believers are conformed to the image of Christ. Some of us are conformed.

We are transformed by the renewing of our minds. Christ is formed in us. Others of us, because

we pursue false objectives, because we pursue righteousness in the wrong way or we pursue the things of the world, we are estranged from Christ.

The old King James says you are cut off from Christ. You who attempt to be justified, who attempt to be declared righteous by law, you have fallen from grace. The grace that makes all of these things possible is of no effect in us as believers if we're not conformed to Christ, if we're estranged from Christ because we don't pursue the plan of God.

And look what he says in verse 5. We, through the Spirit, think of all those things in Romans 8, the ministry of the Spirit, everything that he does, through the Spirit we eagerly wait for what? We wait for the hope of righteousness by faith, not the hope of righteousness by what we do, not ministry, not impact on people's lives, not scalps on our belt from evangelism, the hope of righteousness by faith. In Christ Jesus, circumcision, uncircumcision avails nothing. It's faith working through love.

Now, people immediately say, well, you're throwing rocks at evangelism, you're throwing rocks at ministry. Not at all. What Scripture is doing here is centering us on the things that are going to make all of those other things productive and make them meaningful in an eternal way.

If we forget about evangelism, if we forget about ministry, if we forget about everything except pursuing Christ and becoming Christ-like, guess what's going to happen? As soon as we start being conformed to the image of Christ, what did Christ do? He evangelized. He expressed love. He ministered.

He did all of the things that people harp and cry and preach on and say, you're spending too much time, you're sitting soaking and souring, you're studying the Word of God. Where's your ministry? Where's your outreach? Where's your impact? If you focus on these things, it's a classic illustration of what Liddell Hart wrote in his military book on strategy called The Strategy of the Indirect Approach. The greatest battles, the greatest wars are often won by not attacking the enemy in his area of strength, but by taking the indirect approach, by seeming to do the opposite of what you intend.

There are all kinds of examples of this. In World War II, the great demonstration where they made cardboard tanks and they sent all of this false radio traffic and they made this big buildup on one shore across from France, and then they wound up attacking in a completely different way on invasion day. Many times, women succeed in attracting and snaring a mate by, as they say, playing hard to get, by not appearing eager, by not appearing interested, and by seeming to do the opposite, this comes about.

Now, these are very crude examples in the human realm, but this is an example of what God says when he says that he has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. Any earthly person would say, if you want to achieve an objective, well, get busy and get after it. Put it right out there on your map, and if you want to win the world of Christ, well, then get out there and

start beating the streets, knocking on doors, dialing the phone, put pressure on people, bait and switch, drag them in for an interesting lecture, and then give them the gospel while they're trapped, and that sort of thing.

Lots of different means. Give them a tract, inundate them with media, do whatever it takes to literally scare the hell out of them, or scare them out of hell. Give them the blood and thunder, fire and brimstone stuff, and scare them within an inch.

This was a very seemingly effective technique about 100 to 130 years ago, where these guys were so eloquent, talking about the flames of hell, licking at those that were on the point of death and so forth, that people got scared stiff and appeared to accept Christ just out of sheer terror. That's not God's plan, and it's not God's way. That's the wisdom of the world.

Any human product, any soap, any perfume, any lipstick can be sold with that technique, but that's not God's way. God says, look, if you want to be effective as a witness, if you want to be used in God's plan and God's purpose, then set aside your bull-in-the-china-shop approach to ministry and to evangelism and concentrate on becoming like Christ. It's so fascinating to study the Gospels and see the wisdom and the eloquence and the timing of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes He was surrounded by a great crowd, which, in a human point of view, this is evangelism time. Break out the fire and brimstone speech. We've got a crowd here.

We'll evangelize them. Many times Jesus would leave and collect His disciples and go to another village. Why did He do that? Because He had the leading of God, the Holy Spirit.

He had the wisdom from the Word of God. He knew when to speak and when not to, when to pursue evangelism and when it was a waste of time, regardless of whether there was a crowd or not, regardless of whether it felt awkward or not. There were other times when He would travel through Samaria, and He met the woman at the well, and His disciples thought He was nuts.

And an entire village was evangelized because Jesus did the unorthodox thing, the unusual thing. How did He have that insight? How did He have that wisdom? When we become Christ-like, when we're conformed to His image, that's the wisdom that we'll have. That's the leading from the Holy Spirit that we'll have.

And we will be so effective. They talked about in Vietnam that the average of kills of the enemy per bullets expended was on the order of one kill for every 100,000 bullets that was fired. That's when we first started really using the fully automatic setting on the M-16 and the M-14 and so forth, and 100,000 bullets to kill one single enemy person.

And yet, the sniper corps, the Marine Corps snipers, the Army snipers, they had a kill ratio of one to one, one bullet, one kill. I get these statistics from what they taught me at the basic school, and we saw the snipers come out and do their thing. And these guys are incredibly accurate,

incredibly deadly.

You've seen maybe in a movie where they show these guys standing around and they're all looking with binoculars, trying to spot the sniper, and he comes right up and dings the metal targets. They did that at the basic school. We saw that.

Those guys are invisible, they're deadly, one for one, one shot, one kill. Now, wouldn't it be great to have an entire army of guys with that effectiveness? That's what God is looking for. If you want to talk about witnessing and you want to talk about ministry, God is looking for people who are so well-equipped and so conformed to the image of Christ that every effort they make is effective.

Everything they do bears eternal fruit. It's not misdirected, it's not misguided, it's not awkward, it's not weird, it's not strange, it isn't human energy, it isn't wood, hay and stubble. How do we get to that place? By forgetting for the moment about evangelism as a task or ministry as a task and focusing on becoming conformed to the image of Christ.

That's how we arrive at this Romans 8, 28 and 29 place. That's when we become a part of that honor brigade that surrounds Jesus Christ. That's what he's talking about here in Galatians 5. We wait for the hope of righteousness by faith, not by works.

But there's an even greater passage on this in Philippians 3, verse 8. Flip over a few pages. Philippians 3, verse 8. Paul is talking about himself. He's talking about all of the accouterments that he had.

He was circumcised the eighth day. He's from the stock of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of the Hebrews in Philippians 3, 5 concerning the law of Pharisee. If you want to talk about keeping the law, there was nobody better at it than the Pharisees.

They were top of the line. They were the elite. Concerning zeal, he was so zealous he persecuted the church.

These people say they have a zeal for the law. Well, you can't get any more zealous than believing that there's nothing but the law and anybody that believes anything different than the law ought to be executed. And that's how Paul was.

If you're not keeping the law, you're out of here. We'll stone you. We'll persecute you.

We'll turn you over to the Romans. Concerning righteousness, which is in the law, blameless, kept the commandments, observed the feasts, did everything the law required. But what things were gained to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

Indeed, I also count all things loss for the excellence of what? The excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have endured the loss of all things and I count them as rubbish so that I may gain Christ. Now, how long do you think Paul has been a believer by the time he's

writing this letter? It's quite a few years. And yet he's talking about gaining Christ.

This is not salvation. This is not a foreordained, predestined goodness and glory and effectiveness in God's plan. This is something that comes through faith.

It comes by a decision. It comes by taking advantage and availing ourselves of the grace of God. And Paul says, I am looking at all of that stuff as rubbish so that I may gain Christ and I may be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, i.e. from deeds, from works, from impressing people, from making a dent, making an impact, being known, but that righteousness which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.

And what is the purpose here in verse 10? That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. What did God do in the past? Marked us out, drew a circle around us for conformity to Christ. Well, we like to think of that in terms of standing in glory before the Father, but that conformity also means sharing the sufferings of Christ, being conformed to the likeness of His death.

What does Paul say about that death? He died that death to sin so that he could live his life to God. That's conformity. That's a part of this predestination that's talked about in Romans 8.29. God marked us out to be conformed to Christ.

Let me ask you something. Is every single believer in this age conformed to the death of Christ? Have any of us, have all of us been fully conformed to the death of Christ? Have we died to sin? Do we live our life entirely to God? Anyone that even comes close to that description is going to be in a vast minority, sad to say, in Christianity. That's what's being talked about, and that's one of the proofs and one of the evidences, thinking about there in Romans chapter 8, is not universal to Christianity.

Conformity to Christ has been predestined by God, but not all of us are conformed. So what does that mean? It's our choice. It's based on whether or not we decide to avail ourselves of the grace of God.

Paul made that choice. He said, I'm setting everything else aside. I treat it like rubbish because I want to gain Christ.

I want to know the power of his resurrection. I want to be conformed to his death. And look at verse 11.

If by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Now this has been a very confusing passage because here's Paul. He's an apostle.

If anybody ought to be sure that they're getting into heaven and be raised from the dead, it ought to be the apostle Paul. And yet he says, I'm striving so that if by any means I might attain to the resurrection from the dead. Was Paul uncertain about his salvation? Not sure he'd be raised at

the rapture? Not at all.

This is one of the passages that our study of Romans sheds light on because what have we seen in Romans about life and death? When you're talking about believers, we're talking about production or non-production. We're talking about fruit or no fruit, eternal impact or no eternal impact, availing ourselves of the grace of God or not, after salvation. Are we in that Romans 8.28 group who love God, who see ourselves as called according to his purpose? Are we pursuing conformity to the image of Christ? That's the question.

If we are, we're going to be pursuing that goal that Paul talks about here. If we continue to pursue that, we're going to begin to perceive the power of the resurrection in this life, in this body, in this age. We're going to see the life of God springing up in us and through us.

And all of these things that everyone touts as being a part of the Christian life are going to be natural parts of our life. We will be natural evangelists. We will be natural ministers because all of those things are going to flow out of the love of God, which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

So far from minimizing the importance of ministry or evangelism or works of service or prayer or any of the other things that people set up as righteous works, what we're trying to do is get at the source and get at the place before God where those things are really going to be true reflections and eternal fruit. And that's what Paul is talking about here when he says, I want to know the power of his resurrection. I want to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

We've seen that here in Romans, that we can begin to experience that resurrection now. He can give life to our mortal bodies now. And that's the power of resurrection.

Before we ever get resurrected, that power can be active in us, creating the things that will stand for all eternity and reflect God's glory. We're going to pause here and take our break. And when we come back, we're going to look at a passage if you want to stop here.