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Okay, we're ready to resume and we are looking at this idea of being conformed to the image of Christ because that's what God purposed in eternity past for believers in this age. Some of us attain to that purpose, some of us pursue that purpose and move ever closer to it, and others of us as believers do not. Paul communicates this truth to us in several of his letters.

We've seen what he has to say about it here in Romans. We've seen it in Galatians. We've seen it in Philippians.

Let's take a look at 2 Corinthians chapter 3. 2 Corinthians chapter 3, how are we conformed to the image of Christ? Is it a foregone conclusion because God predestinated it or is there some other factor involved? Let's take a look at this idea of being conformed to the image of Christ. 2 Corinthians chapter 3, Paul toward the end of this chapter compares the glory from the previous age to the glory that is attainable in this age and he talks about the glory that faded from Moses' face when he descended from Mount Sinai and he says in verse 17 of 2 Corinthians 3, the Lord is the spirit and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. We've seen that idea of liberty in chapter 8 of Romans.

We have been set free from the law of sin and death. God has given us his spirit that maintains our freedom and gives us the ability to function within that freedom. Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty and we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image, into the same icon the word is in Greek, E-I-K-O-N, comes over in English as I-C-O-N.

We are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory just as by the spirit of the Lord. Upon a casual reading this can be a little bit of a confusing passage but stop and think about what we've talked about in Romans. With an unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, how do we do that? It's through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, isn't it? That's beholding him, looking at the truth that's in the word of God under the ministry of the spirit.

We see Christ, Christ is formed in us. We behold him, we develop love for him, we develop a motivation to please him. All of those things take place as we spend time in the word of God and have God the Holy Spirit make it real to us.

That's the reason Jesus left us the spirit and as we do that what happens? When we see the glory of the Lord we are being transformed into the same image. We are transformed to be like him as we view his glory. From glory to glory, the glory of Jesus Christ, we see it.

It transforms us and our destination is going to be glory. We're going to go from the glory of Jesus Christ that we see in the word of God to the glory of Jesus Christ that we're going to reflect both in our life now and in the eternal future. We go from the glory of Jesus Christ that has already been revealed to the glory of Jesus Christ that is being revealed and will be revealed in us and

through us.

The glory of God in Jesus Christ is at the center of God's purpose. It's what God was thinking about in eternity past when he drew a circle around us and marked us out as a group and said this group, I'm going to conform them to the image of my son so that he will be the firstborn among many brethren. He's going to be in the center of that group of believers and they will reflect his glory.

They'll be transformed by his glory and God's glory will be reflected in that whole process as by the spirit of the Lord. So what a great opportunity it is and this tells us exactly what's going on here. God purposed this in eternity past.

He made provision for it through the spirit and through the word so that we can behold the glory of Jesus Christ and be transformed by it. And look here in chapter 4 verses 5 through 18. Paul says, we're not preaching ourselves, we're preaching Christ Jesus the Lord and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake for it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness.

Now when did that take place? Remember Genesis chapter 1, God said let there be light. This transports us back into the eternal past, into the beginnings of this creation. It is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

That's God's purpose. It's been God's purpose since eternity past. That's what he was doing when he marked us out ahead of time in this age, in this time with this purpose.

And notice as you continue down through chapter 4, this whole chapter is so great. Paul talks about the fact that we have this treasure in earthen vessels in verse 7. So that the excellence of the power may be from God and not from us. It's God's glory that needs to be reflected, not ours.

And it's such an easy trap to fall into when we associate as believers, someone will drop the fact that they shared the gospel or that they engaged in a ministry or they went overseas to some foreign country and it always, we somehow seem to taint the good things that God is doing with some desire for recognition and appreciation of ourselves and our part in what happened. And we have such a hard time just buttoning our lip and let the good that God does in some cases be in secret so that the God who sees in secret can reflect the glory of Christ in rewarding us in the eternal future. We just somehow always seem to let it slip that we did this or we did that or we were somehow engaged in the work of the Lord.

And it comes out of our inborn instinctive desire for approval from others. And all of us have it and all of us have to be transformed out of it to seek only approval of God. And if God sees in secret and if we have been doing what we're supposed to do, the fact that God sees it and appreciates it should be completely sufficient for us.

And we shouldn't have that urge to advertise our efforts on God's behalf as it were. And so Paul says, the excellence of the power needs to be from God and not from us. And he says, we're hard pressed on every side but not crushed, we're perplexed but not in despair, we're persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.

Remember our previous passages, being conformed to the likeness of his death, carrying about in our body the death of the Lord Jesus. What is the death of Jesus? It's the death that he died to sin. It's the death that he died to the things of this world.

When Christ went to the cross, he forsook everything that this life has to offer, marriage, children, property, entertainment, joy, all the things that people tend to associate with fulfillment and happiness in this life. The acceptance of his peers, he was despised and rejected by men. He had no former comeliness that anyone cared about him.

And he set all of that aside to concentrate on the purpose that God had for him on the cross. And that's his death. And that's what we are called to be conformed to, to not worry about the things that this life has to offer or what people in this life have to offer.

Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus in 2 Corinthians 4.10. So that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. Once again we are back to this death and life contrast that we saw in Romans. And taking nothing away from the wonderful doctrines of resurrection and the eternal future.

This is talking about now. It's talking about this mortal body. However good or bad it may be, the life of Jesus can be manifested in this body right now.

That's the power of the resurrection that Paul was seeking. We who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So that death is working in us, but life in you.

And since we have the same spirit of faith according to what is written, I believed and therefore I spoke, we also believe and therefore speak. Knowing what? In verse 14. Knowing that he who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus and will present us with you.

We touched on this a little bit last time, this idea of being presented. And it's not just that there's going to be an actual resurrection. We are going to be presented before God.

It's a very interesting study that the idea of presentation in the scripture. We don't have time to go into it in detail. I'll just suggest a few thoughts to you that you might want to pursue on your own.

In the Old Testament in Israel, Moses or Joshua would go and present themselves before the Lord at the tabernacle. They presented themselves before God. Israel came and presented

themselves at the foot of Mount Sinai.

In Job chapter 1 and chapter 2, when it talks about the heavenly conclave, the heavenly gathering of the sons of God, which talks about the heavenly beings, the angelic hierarchy that comes and meets with God, they have a grand conference, they present themselves before God. They present themselves. We have the wonderful privilege in this age of not having to present ourselves in that day when we physically stand in the presence of God.

We have Romans 12, 1 and 2, where it talks about presenting yourselves or present your bodies as a living sacrifice. But this is the idea of presentation in the sense of standing before God. And we don't have to present ourselves.

Jesus Christ is going to present us. I don't know if you've ever been in a situation where you had to walk into a room full of people, none of whom you know, and you have to sort of introduce yourself. You have to explain your own presence.

You have to give an account of yourself to the people that you meet. No one there knows you. And it's different than someone who is your sponsor or your host and who says, this is Sam.

He's from here and he does this and so forth. And someone escorts you and presents you and smooths your way socially through the crowd. Well, that's the advantage that we have when we go before God the Father physically speaking.

Jesus Christ is going to present us. And we have this given in a number of places. And I'll just offer you these passages right quick.

We have it here in 2 Corinthians 4.14 that we are going to be presented before God. You also find this in 2 Corinthians 11, verse 2. Paul says, I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy, for I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. And here Paul says, you're this Gentile church.

I am the one that God has sent to bring to you the truth of God, to teach you about the ministry of the Spirit of God, to teach you about Jesus Christ. And it is my desire to present you as a holy group, as a group that understands these things, as someone who responded to the call that I communicated to you from the Word of God. And so he talks about this same idea of being presented before God, in this case presented before Jesus Christ.

This is also in Ephesians 5.27. That previous passage, by the way, is of interest to those who are pastors, and I assume to those who are apostles. What level of responsibility does a pastor or teacher have for the group that he presents to? There's been some close analysis of that passage in that regard. But look at Ephesians chapter 5, starting in verse 25.

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word, that he might present her

to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. There is the idea of presentation. It's not just that we're raised and we're sort of hanging out in the eternal future.

There's going to be a presentation where we are brought before the presence of Jesus Christ at the judgment seat, where we are brought before God the Father. Another passage you can look at is in Jude 24. This is one of the great benedictory passages in the Word of God.

Jude 24. He says, And of course, this is a reference to God the Father. He says, Be glory and majesty, dominion and power both now and forever.

He is the one that is able to keep us from stumbling. He is able to present us faultless. We all sin and we all fail.

How can we be presented faultless? If we pursue the goal, if we press toward the mark of that high calling to which we have been called that we've talked about last time and this time, if we pursue that goal that Paul has talked about in these passages of conformity to the image of Christ, if we pursue that and make that our priority, we will be presented faultless because that's the goal. The only fault that can attach to us in the eternal future, our sins have been forgiven. Our daily sins are covered through coming before God and acknowledging those and being cleansed on a daily basis in terms of relationship with God and ongoing momentum and walking in the light and so forth.

But what fault can attach to us at the judgment seat of Christ? We studied it in Romans chapter 2. Those who by faith and patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, God will grant eternal life. But there will be tribulation and wrath and anguish for those who don't pursue that goal. That's what Romans chapter 2 teaches.

That's what the Word of God teaches. And we've seen in our study on the inheritance that inheritance depends, reward depends, on whether or not we wake up to this calling and decide and prioritize accordingly. This life and the things that are important to us in this life are going to seem so small and so insignificant when we get to the eternal future and we are presented before Jesus Christ and we are presented.

The picture we get from these passages is that, for example, Paul the apostle presents the people that he's ministered to, to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ presents them to himself and then Jesus Christ takes his bride and presents her before God the Father. There are a series of presentations where, it's just like any other introduction, you look someone up and down when they're presented.

What are they like? Are they worthy? What are they like? Who are they? These presentations are going to take place. And so we have that idea here in these passages of being presented and the idea here is that God, in Romans 8-29, wants Jesus Christ to be surrounded with this collection of

brethren who reflect his glory and share his image. And that was God's purpose in eternity past.

For this particular group, it's true that God knew us and had a plan for our lives individually in eternity past, but the emphasis in this passage is the group. Those who love God, those who are called according to his purpose. Notice it says that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

If this was talking about individual predestination, he might say something like that each might be conformed to the image of his son and might be one of the brethren that surrounds the Lord Jesus or something like that. But the focus is on Jesus Christ at the center of this group. So this passage is talking about that subset of believers that love God who are called according to his purpose.

And God marked them out, circled them ahead of time and said, these, out of all the believers in human history, not Adam, not Noah, not Moses, not David, not Isaiah, not John the Baptist, none of those people are going to be in this group the firstborn among many brethren. That many brethren is church age and it's believers that have heard the call and have heeded the call. That's who's in this group.

That's the Romans 8.28 and 29 crowd. Now, what else did God do? The ones that he marked out, he made some provision for that. How are they going to arrive at the place where Jesus is standing as the firstborn among many brethren? How are they going to get there? There's going to need to be some things take place for them so that that group will form and arrive qualified and functional in terms of reflecting the glory of Christ.

So God in eternity past not only knew that group and decided their purpose, he also made provision for how that purpose would be accomplished and we have that in verse 30. Moreover, the ones that he marked out ahead of time, pre-designated, is a good translation of pro-orizo, pre-designated, these he also called. You've got to let people know that this is the purpose, this is the mission.

Now, God in eternity past, if he had called and said, come to conformity to Christ, who would have heard him? Nobody. We weren't created yet. We weren't born yet.

So what does it mean when it says in eternity past, he called us? One of the great things about Greek is it's got much more expressiveness in its structure than English does. These words here are all in the aorist tense. Now, aorist is a name, sounds like, boy, that's some heavy Greek, but it's formed from two words.

The letter a, when you put it at the beginning of a word, makes a negative in Greek and the a in aorist is a negative. The rest of the word is our old friend horizo, the same root from which pro-orizo comes from. Horizo means to draw a circle around something, right? Like the horizon, that's how it comes into English.

Well, a in front of it means no horizon, no circle, no boundary. And aorist, as a tense, means we're looking at the fact of an action, but we're not looking at the time boundary. We're not looking at when it took place.

And any grammarian you want to consult, A.T. Robertson, Kenneth Wiest, any good grammar, Dana and Mante or anyone else, if you study the aorist tense, they will tell you that its primary emphasis is not time of the action, but the fact of the action. This is looking at the fact of God's thinking in eternity past, not necessarily with reference to when he accomplished that action, but it's just looking at the fact of it. God planned this in eternity past.

He's executing it in time. He's going to bring it to completion in the future. But this is an aorist.

It's not trying to tell us that this all happened back before, even though it did. That's not the emphasis. The emphasis is on the fact of the action.

And many places in Scripture, we have Scripture talking about something that is yet future, as though it had already taken place, because in the mind of God, it's the fact that counts. The time in which it takes place isn't as important to God as the fact that it is going to take place because it's a part of his plan. And we have some examples of that, such as Jesus used this in the upper room in John 14.

Remember, let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions.

If it were not so, I would have told you. And then verse 3, I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go, I come again to receive you unto myself.

All of those are present tenses. And some of them are present and some of them are future. Jesus says, I go.

He doesn't say, I will go to prepare a place for you. He says, I'm going. Well, he's sitting in the upper room.

He's got several more days. He's got at least one more full day of physical life. He's going to be resurrected and spend several more days in post-resurrection before he goes to prepare a place for us.

But he says, I'm going. He uses the present. I am going to prepare a place for you.

Well, that's a future event that he's talking about in the present. But he speaks of it as a certainty. And then he says, and if I go, I come again.

And it's another present tense. He says, I come again. I am coming again to receive you.

Well, is he actually in the act of coming right now? No, not at the point that he's speaking, and apparently not right now yet either. And so if you start getting into a woodenly, literal interpretation of the tenses, you wind up in chaos. We have to understand what it is that God is about.

And God expresses his purposes. And sometimes he'll use an eras, sometimes he'll use a present, sometimes he'll use a future. Many other examples of this.

You can study Mary's Song of Praise, what they call the Magnificat, that she gave after the announcement that Jesus was going to be born and she was going to be his mother in Luke 1, 53 and following. If you study that, she talks about the things that God has done. And she uses the eras tense.

There are seven eras in a row there in Luke 1, 53 and following. And yet, many of those things are things that God is still doing and is going to do through the birth of Jesus Christ. But she uses the eras for all of them, because in God's mind, it's an accomplished fact.

And it's the fact of the action rather than the time that is in view. And you can see this in Colossians 1, 12. Paul talks about the fact that God has qualified us to share the inheritance of the saints in light.

Well, he uses the eras tense. Well, at the point that Paul wrote, most of us hadn't even come into being yet, and yet we're already qualified. Well, what is he talking about? How could I have been qualified back in the first century when Paul was writing? Well, because God has done an action through the death of Christ and his resurrection and in God's plan.

God has made provision so that any of us, when we're born and come into human history, have the opportunity to qualify for the inheritance of the saints in light. So even though it's given in the eras tense as a past and completed action, it comes true for us as we come into history and are born and accomplish God's purpose. That's exactly what's happening here in Romans.

God made provision in the past for us to be conformed to the image of his Son so that Christ could be the firstborn among many brethren. As we come into this world and come to faith in Christ and hear the call to holiness and the call to glory, we have the opportunity to have that become real for us. But God, it's an accomplished fact that God put into place back in eternity past.

And so that's why these are all in the eras tense. And that's why Paul tells us in verse 29 that those whom he foreknew, he marked out ahead of time to be conformed to the image of his Son. In verse 30, the ones that he marked out, these he also called.

God made provision for our call. How are we called today? We're called through the Word of God, through these very words that we're studying. This is a call to holiness, a call to pursue

God's plan.

These words were written nearly 2,000 years ago. We're hearing them tonight and responding to them, hopefully, tonight. God made provision for that call in eternity past when he said, I'm going to have an apostle and he's going to write some words that are going to stand for at least 2,000 years.

And down through the centuries, believers are going to be called. God accomplished the fact of that calling and made provision for it. The Holy Spirit and the Word of God in eternity past, and it does its work each and every day, and so it's an ongoing thing.

And in one sense, it's sort of timeless. It's without those boundaries. That's why it's in the aorist, the non-boundaried tense.

He called, and the ones that he called, these he also justified. Now, were we justified in eternity past? At the point that Adam was walking around in the garden, was I already justified? Obviously not. I was born in iniquity.

I was conceived in iniquity and born in sin, and I was an unbeliever for some years before I was saved. All of us were. So in one sense, could we be justified in eternity past? It's the same idea.

God put everything in place for our declaration as righteous. God put in place the mechanism whereby Abraham would be declared righteous by faith in eternity past. God foresaw this and mapped out the plan, made the provision, and every day that we live, we take advantage of that pre-existing grace, the pre-existing provision for these things.

And that's the emphasis here. This isn't trying to tell us that we individually were marked out a little groove in history that we would follow like a record needle with no deviation because it was a part of the decree and the plan of God. This is talking about God's provision and God's foresight.

God didn't wake up one morning and say, My goodness, look at all these people that are believing in my son. What am I going to do with them? God knew ahead of time that we would be there and that there would be those like Paul and like others in history that were responsive, and so He made provision. He made provision for our calling.

He made provision for our justification, our declaration as righteous through faith. And not only did He make provision for that, He has also made provision for glorification, that we will partake of that glory that we saw over in 2 Corinthians 3. Beholding the image of Jesus Christ, we are transformed from glory to glory. As we behold His image, we're changed into His image.

That's how we're glorified, and that was set up by God in the eternal past. So, once again, if we just read through this, we know that everything works together for the accomplishment of God's purpose. All the things that we saw in chapter 8, the fact that condemnation has been done away with, the law of the spirit of life is our new provision, the fact that we can be spiritually minded in

this age rather than carnally minded, the fact that Christ is in us.

Remember back in verse 10, if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness. Same thing He was saying in the passage we looked at earlier tonight, that He was in travail for the Galatians until Christ would be formed in them. Because if Christ is in you, the body is dead and the spirit is alive, and there's fruit being born.

So, what's our conclusion here? What's the thing we should take away from our study of 28 through 30 in Romans 8? This passage fits into the flow of thought, the train of argument that Paul has carefully constructed under the ministry of the Holy Spirit in this letter. This is the heart of the matter. Why should we abandon impressing people by what we do? Why should we throw over seeking the approval of those around us? Why should we stop worrying about what people think of us? Stop pursuing, in their case, it was the works of the law by which all the Jews in the area would be impressed.

People said, well, God will declare you righteous if you do these works. And Paul says, no, you've got to get past that and set that aside and understand that in this age, because of Christ, there's a new purpose. God has mapped out a unique destiny for people inside this circle that He drew in eternity past, and it's to be conformed to the image of Christ.

It's righteousness by faith. It's focusing on the glory of Jesus Christ and producing that fruit. And that's why he gives this argument in 28 through 30.

Everything is going to work together for the accomplishment of God's good plan for those who love God, for those who are called according to His purpose, because He made all of this plan and made the provision for it in eternity past. Now, next time, we're going to pick up in verse 31 and answer the question that Paul asks there. What then shall we say to these things? What is our forward momentum as a result of coming to an understanding of this particular aspect of the glory of God? That's what we'll pick up and look at next time, but let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You again for the wonderful privilege that we have of living in this age, of residing in that circle that You drew in eternity past, and the tremendous opportunity that we have to be conformed to the image of our Savior, Jesus Christ, to share His destiny, to reflect His glory, to function in His service, both now and in the eternal future. We pray that as a result of seeing these things, God the Holy Spirit will motivate us, will purify us through the cleansing power of Your Word, and that as a result, we will fulfill the purpose that You marked out for us so long ago. We ask these things in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.