

96-09-20b

Okay, we're back from our break, and as promised, what we're going to do now is take a look at the word that Paul uses here when he talks in Romans 8.28 and 29, and he says, Whom he foreknew, those he pre-designated, is my favorite translation, pre-designated to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, the ones that he pre-designated, he also called. And there's a lot of strange stuff floating around, which if you haven't encountered it yet, you will at some point, about God pre-destinating us to salvation, and God's foreknowledge pretty much made it a certainty that those of us that he foreknew would be saved, and it's all kind of graven in stone in eternity past, and so forth.

And that isn't the way that the Bible presents it at all, and it certainly is not the emphasis of Scripture. And as we talked about when we covered verses 28 and 29, this is God's plan in eternity past, and all of the good commentaries, there's a pretty good commentary on Romans by Douglas Moo, he's reformed theology, but he does a good job with the languages. And the anchor Bible commentary, I believe a Catholic scholar did Romans in it, and so you get a whole different cast on it.

But oddly enough, even though these two commentaries, and several others that I looked at just to see what they had to say about this, have widely different theological stances on Romans, one of the things that nearly all of the good ones agree on is that this pre-destination here is not individual, which it is commonly taught that God predestinated individual believers for salvation in the reformed camp in Calvinism. But Moo and the anchor commentary both make a point of saying this is a corporate destiny. God looked ahead and saw that there would be this group, this category, this particular period of time, and he said this is going to be the destiny for people that fall into that group.

In the same way that God had a destiny for Israel, anyone that's in the nation of Israel and is a part of the faithful, God mapped out a destiny for them, gave them promises and covenants. The same is true for us, and it's not saying anything any more complex than that. God knew ahead of time there would be people in the church age who would respond and have faith in Christ, and he said here's my plan for them.

I want to conform them to the image of my son. And once he marked us out for that, then he summoned us. It's terrible to have a mission or have a purpose and not know what it is.

It might be combat and you're a squad or a platoon and you're supposed to take Hill 473. Well, if nobody calls you on the radio and says, okay, it's your job to take Hill 473, how can you possibly accomplish the mission? However important it may be, it's impossible to do if you don't know about it. So God also made provision to tell us what our purpose is and what his goal for us is in this age, and that's our calling.

Scripture has a lot to say about calling, and you may want to jot down some of these references. We are going to address pretty much all of the New Testament scriptures that talk about God's calling us as believers in this age. There aren't an enormous amount.

We can cover them here in the next few minutes, but all of these have to do with God summoning us to his purpose. So if we look at these passages, we're going to also find out what we are summoned to. What is our calling? A lot of people that study Romans 8 would like us to believe that our calling is the calling to salvation, that God has called us to salvation through faith in Christ, and that that's an effectual call.

He calls, you respond, and it's a done deal. Let's see what Scripture has to say about this calling. Let's look first of all right here in Romans.

Look back at chapter 4, verse 17. Chapter 4, verse 17, it talks about God giving life to the dead and calling those things which do not exist as though they did. That's what God did in eternity past.

We did not exist yet. The church age had not come about yet, but God marked us out as a group. He decided what our function and purpose would be.

He made provision for our conformity to Christ. He made provision for our call to that purpose. He made provision for our being declared righteous through faith, and he made provision for our glorification with Christ.

God set that all in motion and mapped it out in eternity past. He called it as fact even though it didn't exist yet. That's the idea there in Romans 4, verse 17.

We're going to see some of these in the next chapter of Romans, and I'm going to save our discussion until we cover Romans 9. But look at 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 9. God is faithful by whom you were called to something. God is faithful by whom you were called into fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. So guess what? We are called to fellowship.

A lot of us have had a lot of teaching and study on fellowship, the idea of fellowship with God, what the basis of that fellowship is, what can interrupt that fellowship. An equally good word for it is our relationship, our status with God as being in God's favor or out of God's favor, under God's grace and blessing or under God's discipline and wrath. We decide that.

But here it says we have been called into the fellowship of his Son. That is a part of our Christian life, isn't it? Whether or not we have an active, healthy relationship with God or whether we are distant and in line for discipline from God because we're being disobedient. And if you turn a few pages over in 1 Corinthians to chapter 7, Paul tells us something else about our calling.

In verse 15 where he's talking about the relationship between believers and unbelievers in

marriage, he says if the unbeliever departs, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. For God has called us to peace.

Part of our calling is peace. We are called, we are summoned, we are required by God to live in peace. And this is specifically peace with other people, peace with believers, peace with unbelievers.

We're not called to strife. We're not called to battle. We're not called to confrontation and argument.

We're not called to interference in one another's lives. We're called to peace. That's a part of our calling.

And the thing I would like you to watch for as we go to these passages is ask yourself this particular passage, when it talks about God's calling, is it talking about salvation or my life after salvation? What would you put this passage in if we've been called to peace? Is that what God calls us to as unbelievers when we're saved? Of course we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ at the point of salvation, but this particular verse is talking about peace with other people, isn't it? And that's a part of our summons from God. Look in this same chapter just a few verses down. Verse 17, as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk.

And if you look at the context here in chapter 7, he's talking about the circumstances of life. He says God has distributed out the circumstances. God has decided that you would have the body that you have and the family that you have and the time in history in which you're born, the co-workers that you have, the friends that you have, the place that you live and so forth.

These things are distributed by God. And he says God has distributed to each one, and as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. So I ordain in all the churches, was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised.

Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, uncircumcision is nothing but keeping the commandments of God. That's what matters.

Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. What does that mean? God has summoned us right where we are. God hasn't summoned us to change.

God hasn't necessarily called us and said, well, you're living in Hoboken, Wisconsin and working in the dairy, but I want you to go to Botswana and be a missionary. You know, that if we receive a calling from God, it requires a huge change in circumstances. The calling that the New Testament talks about is a calling to pursue the purpose of God right where we are.

What does that tell us? It reminds us that this calling is in the heart and in the soul and in the mind. It's not in the circumstances of life. People say, well, I was called to preach.

When I went to seminary, they had me write out a thing. Tell us how you recognized your calling to the ministry. Well, it's not biblical.

The Bible says your calling is right where you are. Your calling doesn't have to do with a change of circumstances, it has to do with a change of heart. It has to do with a change of mind and a change of spiritual status.

That's our calling. And it is playing pretty fast and loose to say, well, I received the call to preach or I received the call to ministry or I have a calling to the mission field. That may be a part of the plan of God for one's life, but it doesn't, according to the New Testament, it doesn't involve a call from God.

None of the passages we're going to look at have that connotation. So it's something to keep in mind. You can look here and see that what he's talking about is keeping the commandments of God, having the Word of God and living in that light.

That's fulfilling our calling. This goes all the way down through verse 24. He says in verse 20, let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.

Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it. Sometimes we feel enslaved in our employment or we feel enslaved in our circumstances. We feel like we're in a rut that we can't escape.

Some part of our life, whether it's financial or material or social or whatever it might be, we say, well, this has to change. This has to be different. I can't go on with this the way it is.

But if you read this section, Paul says, look, your calling is right there in that circumstance. Your calling is to pursue the purpose of God without anything in the material world changing. Same people, same house, same clothes, same body, same job.

If you're a slave, stay a slave. Wherever you are, that's your calling. And what a great thing it is because as we talked about in the first session, this is such a tremendous opportunity for us.

Think about the highest achievement that you could possibly imagine in any field, in any realm, and realize that in the plan of God and in the purpose of God, we can achieve that much and more without ever leaving our seat. It's like they used to say in that old song, that guy is sitting on a sack of marijuana seeds or whatever and he wrote that song and he said you could take a trip and never leave the farm. It was an old Jim Stafford song way back when called Wildwood Weed, I think, where they didn't know what they were growing there, but the government came and confiscated all their plants and they were just grinning sitting on that sack of seeds.

But that's the idea. We can achieve tremendous things in God's plan and be productive and reflect the glory of God and completely satisfy God the Father and never change a circumstance,

not change jobs, not change locations, not change anything physical or material around us. It's such a terrific system because it all depends on the power of God.

And so that's what he's talking about here in 1 Corinthians 7. Wherever you are when you're called, just remain in that same calling. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it. If you can be made free, then take advantage of it.

He who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freed man. He who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought with a price.

Do not become slaves of men. If you wanted to sum up Romans, that's a good summary right there. You were bought at a price.

Don't become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called. And why is it? Because we'll find out that God can make our life different without changing any of our material circumstances.

That's how powerful God is. You can turn over a few pages to Galatians chapter 1 verse 6. Galatians chapter 1 verse 6. This is another case where the scripture has God as the subject and the scripture has God doing. I marvel that you are so soon turning away from him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel.

What do we know about the letter to the Galatians? What was the problem in Galatia? Same problem as in Rome. Spirituality by works. Righteousness by works.

People judging each other by what they do. And he says, I marvel that you're turning away from the gospel. The gospel is that our purpose is to be transformed on the inside.

It doesn't mean that we'll never do any exterior works or any evangelism or ministry. It means that those things are going to be automatic. If the power of God gets inside us, you can't contain it.

The light of God can't be held under a bushel. And if the transforming power of God gets inside us and changes us, you're not going to have to worry about looking for opportunities to witness or to minister or to perform whatever works of service God may have in mind in the material world, because they are going to be a must-do kind of thing. You won't be able to help yourself.

It will be a compulsion, but it has to come from that motivation. It can't come from a desire for approval. It can't come from guilt.

It can't come from all of the things that the world uses to motivate people in the world. If it comes from that, it becomes worthless. So Paul says, I marvel that you're turning away from that and falling for this worldly distraction that makes you ineffectual.

And he continues this in verse 15 of this same chapter. He says, It pleased God who separated

me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace to reveal His Son in me. To reveal His Son in me.

That's what God is up to, is to get His Son inside of us and reveal Christ inside us. We're going to see that in some of these other passages. You can look at Galatians chapter 5, verse 8. He says, You ran well.

He's still talking to the Galatians. You started out well. You understood grace.

You understood God's purpose. You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from him who calls you.

Notice it doesn't say called in the past tense. It says calls. Our call is an ongoing call.

It's a continual call because it's not just the call to salvation. It's the call to fulfill God's purpose. We also have this in verse 13.

You, brethren, have been called to liberty. You've been called to freedom. Freedom from what? Freedom from human opinion.

Freedom from human pressure. Freedom from the misery that comes from people and circumstances and looking around and deciding that the only hope there is, is a hope in this life, a hope for better circumstances, a hope for a change, a hope for something better. We've been freed from that.

We've been called to the freedom of the eternal realms. The freedom of the eternal future can be ours now if we start living like citizens of an eternal kingdom instead of living like people who are trapped in this world. You, brethren, have been called to liberty.

Just don't use this liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Ephesians chapter 4. This is a great passage in Ephesians 4. Verse 1, I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with lowliness, gentleness, long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. Notice none of those things is an activity.

None of them are an action. He doesn't say endeavoring to win the lost, endeavoring to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick. He says, I beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with these patterns of thought, this kind of soul, lowliness, gentleness, long-suffering, patience, bearing with one another, keeping unity in the Spirit with a bond of peace.

One of the things we see over and over again is a part of our calling is peace. If we don't have peace, we're not fulfilling our calling. If we're unhappy at the end of the day, if we're unhappy at the beginning of the day, if we're unhappy during the day, if we don't have peace in our soul, we don't have the fruit of the Spirit.

Love, joy, peace. If you lack joy, if you lack peace, there's no excuse because God has provided it and it's because we have chosen the wrong things. We're marching in the wrong direction.

We're not thinking about that upward call of God in Christ. What is it that our calling is? He says, I beseech you to walk worthy of this calling in chapter 4. Well, he gives that calling at the end of chapter 3 in Ephesians. He says, my prayer for you is that God would grant to you, in verse 16, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.

Wouldn't it be great? Isn't this what people look for when they go to Dianetics and they go to all of these power of great thinking and memory courses and everything else? People want to have inner strength, don't they? You can watch this guy on PBS on the weekends. It goes through all of this toxic shame and codependency and here's what happened when you were a child and you're dragging forward all this stuff from your past and it's leeching on your present and destroying your future and all this. And he goes through all of these psychological hoops.

Why do people listen to that? Because, A, they're dissatisfied with the way things are at present and, B, they recognize that they need some strength inside that they don't have. I wish my thinking, I wish my inner man was different. Well, what does Paul say here? Here's where the divine change for inner strength comes from.

God would grant you to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Remember this over in Galatians and in Colossians, Christ in you, the hope of glory in Colossians. Paul says, I'm in travail with you like a woman in labor until Christ be formed in you.

This is the goal. This is the calling. Christ in you.

If Christ is in us, we're going to have love, we'll have joy, we'll have peace. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith that you being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all the saints the width and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. This is that life in the eternal realms that we can partake of now.

That's our calling. And God is glorified in it as you see in those last two verses of chapter three of Ephesians. That's how God is glorified and that fulfills His purpose.

We could go to Colossians 3.15 and see that our calling is a part of the fruit of the Spirit, producing the fruit of the Spirit. Colossians 3.15 says, Let the peace of God rule in your hearts to which also you were called in one body and be thankful. We've been called to have peace.

If we lack peace, we're not fulfilling our calling. That's a part of our life. In Thessalonians, I'll just tell you what these say.

You can look them up later. First Thessalonians 2.12, we are called to Christ's kingdom and His glory. We're supposed to be looking ahead to the fruition and the fulfillment of all these things.

In First Thessalonians 4.7, we are called to have a sanctified lifestyle, to have a life that reflects the fact that we love God and we are called according to His purpose. We don't get into immorality. We don't let ourselves be sidetracked by the flesh or by the opportunities for sin.

In First Thessalonians 5.24, we are called to be blameless at His coming. How can we be blameless? We know that we sin, but we take advantage of the cleansing and the purging that God does on our behalf. We find this in the Psalms, for example, in Psalm 51, 7-10, that famous passage where David is praying and he says, Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean.

Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow, in verse 7. Then on down, I think in verse 10, he says, Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. David goes before the Lord, acknowledges his sin, and claims God's promise for forgiveness and cleansing. If we take advantage of that promise from God, that function that God performs, we can stand blameless.

But we have to claim it. We have to seize it. We have to say, I want that.

I want to be purged. I want to be cleansed. I want to have a clean heart and a right spirit.

I acknowledge that these are the things that have garbaged up my soul. There are so many passages we will probably see these again when we get to chapter 9 and we talk some more about the calling. But the point I want to leave with you this evening is that it's a tremendous opportunity.

It's unlike anything in human history and it's going to be so sad if we get caught up in the details of this life and miss the calling, miss fulfilling the purpose that God has called us to. Nothing in this life is worth missing that. That's why Paul said in chapter 8 that the sufferings of this present age, the details of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in the sons of God.

And we need to be shooting for the glory. We only go around once. We only get to live each day one time.

What are we going to accomplish in it? We don't have to worry about trying to go out and do great things for God. What we need to think about is thinking great thoughts, meditating on great truths in God's character, in God's word, in God's plan. That's what transforms us.

That's when Christ is at home in our hearts. That's when Christ is formed in us. That's when the glory of God is revealed in us and through us.

And that's when God's purpose is fulfilled. Let's close in prayer. Father, we thank you again for the wonderful privilege and opportunity that we have in this age to be conformed to the image of

our Savior Jesus Christ.

We pray that the things we have looked at tonight will become a part of the resources in our soul, that they will motivate us, rebuke us, correct us, instruct us in righteousness so that we will be complete and thoroughly furnished for every good work. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.