

## A Study in the Book of Romans

# 20

## Romans 8:29

### Key Verse

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

Paul’s has been slowly building his revelation of the Gospel to its massive crescendo, and in **8:29** he finally reveals God’s great goal – the hope that reverberates right through the book of **Romans**. He writes:

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...”

This is “the hope of the glory of God...[that] does not disappoint us” (**5:2,5**). And it is “in this hope we were saved” (**8:24**).

### God’s Foreknowledge

#### Read Romans 8:29

Paul begins his great statement of the goal God has set before us with these words:

“For those God *foreknew* he also predestined...”

God is all-knowing – including all things past, present and future. **Isaiah 46:9-10** says:

“Remember the former things, those of long ago: I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.

*I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.”*

Introduction

The Gospel’s Three Revelations

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Conclusion

The Scripture is full of examples of this great attribute of God. As we look at these biblical examples, we quickly find that they fall into two categories:

### ***Knowledge of events***

#### **Read Isaiah 44:7**

God has perfect knowledge of every event in history, long before it ever takes place. In **Isaiah 42:9**, we find God exercising his foreknowledge of what is to come in this statement:

“...See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.”

#### **Read Isaiah 48:3-6**

#### **Read Daniel 2:28-29**

### ***Personal knowledge***

#### **Read Psalm 139:1-6**

God not only has perfect knowledge of every future event; he also has perfect knowledge of every person – even before they are born! In **Psalm 139:15-16**, we discover:

“My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

*The Message* paraphrases **Psalm 139:2,4,15-16** with these words:

“I’m an open book to you; even from a distance, you know what I’m thinking... You know everything I’m going to say before I start the first sentence... You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; you know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something. Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you, the days of my life all prepared before I’d even lived one day.”

This intimate foreknowledge is a fact of God’s nature. Because he is perfect in knowledge, he knows you perfectly. This was Jeremiah’s discovery. In **Jeremiah 1:5**, God declared to the young prophet:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

#### **Read 1 Peter 1:1-2**

It is this second category – personal foreknowledge – that Paul uses in **8:29** when he writes: “...those God foreknew...”

The Scripture’s usage of the word “to know” is very illuminating. God said of Israel, “I *knew* you in the wilderness” (**Hosea 13:5**, NKJV), and “You only have I

known of all the families of the earth” (**Amos 3:2**, NKJV). Now, obviously, an all-knowing God is aware of all the other nations and peoples on the earth. So what does this mean? It is referring to a special kind of knowledge. In every day life, we can *know* of someone, and we might even *know all about them*, but if we say we *know* them it is a totally different dimension of knowledge altogether. We are now speaking of a personal relationship. It was this kind of knowledge that Jesus spoke of in **John 10:14-15**:

“I am the good shepherd; I *know* my sheep and my sheep *know* me – just as the Father *knows* me and I *know* the Father...”

Likewise, Jesus declared in **Matthew 7:22-23**:

“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘*I never knew you...*’”

God knows everything about everybody – every fact, every figure, every trivial detail (**Luke 12:6-7**). Yet Scripture indicates that there is a difference between God knowing *about* a person (which he does in every minute detail) and God *knowing* a person. We see the difference between these two types of knowledge in **Psalms 138:6**:

“Though the Lord is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud *he knows from afar.*”

God knows the lowly intimately, says the psalmist, but he knows the proud “from afar.” When Paul speaks of God foreknowing those whom he predestined, he is not speaking of God knowing us “from afar.” Paul is referring to the intimate dimension of God’s foreknowledge.

God knew you before you were born, long before human history began, in fact even before the universe was created. But his knowledge is more than just the fact that he foreknew who would choose to believe and who would not; rather, it is that he foreknew – in loving relationship – those who would choose to believe! As **1 Corinthians 8:3** puts it:

“But the man who loves God is known by God”!

God’s foreknowledge is his forelove. God *foreloved* those in Christ. He *foreloved* his sons. And just as a natural father, eagerly awaiting the birth of his child, plans his unborn son’s future with joy because of the love he already has for him, so our heavenly Father, with great love, has pre-planned the eternal destiny of those who will be his sons.

This is expressed beautifully in *The Amplified Bible*’s rendition of **Romans 8:29**:

“For those whom He foreknew – *of whom He was aware and loved beforehand* – He also destined from the beginning (foreordaining them) to be molded into the image of His Son [and share inwardly His likeness], that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

## Predestined for Glory!

But as you look at **Romans 8:29**, you notice that one concept flows immediately into another. Not only has God *foreknown* you; he has also *predestined* you. Out of God's foreknowledge flows a predestination!

But to only half-read **8:29** might give the wrong impression altogether. Paul does not say just "those whom he foreknew he also predestined," leaving the actual predestination for open to interpretation. Nor does he specify that "those whom God foreknew he also predestined *for salvation*." No, he says, "those God foreknew he also predestined *to be conformed to the likeness of his Son*"!

Paul is speaking of what those who are already in Christ – those who have already received salvation – are predestined to be! In other words, God's love for those he saw ahead of time (who, through their response of faith, would be born of God's Spirit as his children) caused him to set in motion a great plan for their eternal future.

This is why Paul writes in **Ephesians 1:4-5**:

*"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."*

## The Love of God Revealed

As we look back over all that Paul has been sharing in his letter to this point we can grasp hold of the wonder of God's love as it is revealed in salvation and expressed through his pre-determined plan. This love revealed in the Gospel unfolds in three stages:

### ***God's love for the sinner***

#### **Read Romans 5:8**

God's absolute love for mankind is expressed in his pre-determined plan for the death of the Savior upon the Cross. As **John 3:16** tells us, the Savior came to our rescue because "God so loved the world..." It was because of God's great love for every man and woman that he *predestined* the coming of Jesus. **Revelation 13:8** tells us that Christ is "the Lamb that was *slain from the creation of the world*." Peter echoes this same thought in **1 Peter 1:20**:

*"[Christ] was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake."*

#### **Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13**

From the very beginning, God chose the method of salvation:

- ➡ On God's part, grace
- ➡ On our part, faith

## ***Our love for the Savior***

Just as God's love was expressed in grace that came in the form of Jesus Christ, so our love for God is expressed in our response of faith to him (remember **Romans 8:28?**). In **John 4:19** (KJV), John writes:

“We love him, because he first loved us.”

It is the greatness of his love revealed in the laying down of his life for us (**John 10:11**) that draws out our love for him. Jesus said in **Matthew 22:14** (KJV):

“For many are called, but few are chosen.”

The *New International Version* translates this as:

“For many are *invited*, but few are chosen.”

God's invitation for salvation has gone out into the whole world, but only those who respond in faith are chosen to be part of his great plan for “many sons.”

### **Read Hebrews 2:10-12**

## ***God's love for his sons***

Now God expresses his love for those in Christ in a pre-determined plan for their ultimate destiny. This is the predestination that Paul is talking about in **Romans 8:29**. The Father's special love is poured out upon those who respond in faith to his invitation. For them he has predestined the goal of the likeness of his Son!

## **Romans 8:29 in Context**

To understand what Paul is saying when he writes in **8:29** – “those he foreknew he also predestined...” – it is essential to first of all see it in the context of all that he has been saying to this point. He has progressively shown that:

- *We are responsible for what we do with the truth of God revealed to us (1:18-2:16).*
- *We have no ability to be saved or to be made righteous through our own efforts (3:9-20).*
- *God has no favorites – his way of salvation is open to all mankind (2:6-11; 3:21-31).*
- *We are saved and made righteous by our faith in the work of Christ (chapters 4-7).*
- *This faith, through the Spirit now indwelling us, brings us into all the glories of relationship with God as our loving Father, both now and in eternity (chapter 8).*

In summary, Paul has established two things in the first eight chapters of **Romans**:

- Man's total and universal responsibility before God for sin
- Man's utter dependency upon God for any salvation from judgment.

Now with that understanding as our foundation, we can take a closer look at the concept of predestination as Paul uses it in **8:29**.

## Predestined in Christ!

Paul says it was for those whom God foreknew (the sons he loved ahead of time) that he planned a destiny – “to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” Thus the “predestiny” Paul is referring to here applies only to those who are in Christ. As he explains in **Ephesians 1:4**, those who are “in Christ” were chosen before the creation of the world to be “holy and blameless in his sight.” In the next verse, he amplifies his meaning:

“...he *predestined* us to be adopted as his sons *through Jesus Christ*, in accordance with his pleasure and will.”

This provides us with a valuable clue to the biblical concept of predestination. It is not, as some think, that a few privileged people were predestined for heaven and the rest for hell – that our predestination means that God *preselects* who is saved and who is not. No, God’s predestination is not “in me.” It is “in Christ”!

Let’s illustrate this. The moment you step on board a train destined for a certain town, that town becomes your destination. It is your destiny simply because you are on that train. You are heading for that town not because of anything special about you or because of your own strength or ability. No, it is only because you are “in the train” that you will reach your destination.

In the same way, the moment you responded by faith to the message of the Gospel, you stepped into Christ, and God just happens to have a pre-determined plan for all those in Christ! The Greek word translated “predestined” literally means “to mark off beforehand.” It is used only three times in Scripture – once here in **Romans 8:29** and twice in **Ephesians 1:5,11**:

“In love he *predestined* us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...In him we were also chosen, having been *predestined* according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”

Both times Paul is referring to those who have *already* responded to the Gospel message and so are “in Christ.” In **Ephesians 1:1-14**, Paul gives the “boundary marks” of being “in Christ” – the benefits that are predestined for *anyone* who steps into Christ:

- Every spiritual blessing (**verse 3**)
- A walk of holiness (**verse 4**)
- Adoption as God’s sons (**verse 5**)
- His glorious grace (**verse 6**)
- Redemption through his blood (**verse 7**)
- Forgiveness of sins (**verse 7**)
- All wisdom and understanding (**verse 8**)



- ☞ The knowledge of his will (**verse 9**)
- ☞ A life for the praise of his glory (**verse 12**)
- ☞ The seal of the Spirit (**verse 13**)
- ☞ A guaranteed inheritance (**verse 14**)
- ☞ The promise of a Day when God will redeem his possession (**verse 14**)

What it is important to realize is that the list of blessings for which the Christian is predestined is, in fact, the predestination of Christ himself. Christ is predestined for glory and honor. Christ is predestined for “every spiritual blessing” in the heavenly realms. Christ is predestined for “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade” (**1 Peter 1:4**). But now you too are predestined for these things – not because you are anything special in yourself, but because you are in Christ!

## Two Predestinations

In order to gain a truly biblical understanding of predestination, we need to realize that there is not one predestination but two! These two predestinations are:

### ***A predestination of judgment***

#### **Read Romans 6:23**

This was our predestination outside of Christ. Because of Adam’s sin, our pre-determined destiny was death, judgment and hell. But the marvel of the Gospel is that Christ took on this predestination! He was judged for us! He died in our place, taking the full penalty of our predestination in Adam!

As we have already seen in **Revelation 13:8** and **1 Peter 1:20**, Christ was predestined to die from the moment of man’s fall. In other words, from the very moment that Adam rebelled, the identification of the Cross had already begun. Because of his identification with us, Christ was predestined to judgment and death.

### ***A predestination of glory***

But the Bible also reveals another predestination – the predestination of **Romans 8:29**. Because of our identification with Christ through faith, we have now taken on Christ’s original predestination! As the matchless Son of God, Christ was predestined for eternal glory. This has now become our predestination “in Christ”! What wonder! We have had a swap of predestination – all because of Christ!

Picture it this way. As we have already seen, when you step on a train, you take on that train’s predestination. The railway tracks are “set beforehand.” As long as you stay on that train, the train’s destination is your destination. It is all preset.

When you were born into this world, you were born onto the Adam Train. This train had a predestination – judgment and hell. As long as you stayed on the Adam Train, your destination was certain. There was no escaping it. It was a train quite literally “hell-bent.”

But there is another train with a whole different predestination – the Christ Train.

This train is pre-destined for life, blessing and eternal glory. And guess what! There is only one stop for both trains – at a station called Calvary. This is the only place where you can step out of one predestination into another – off the Adam Train and onto the Christ Train. Our predestination is either in Adam or it is in Christ. One is destined for judgment; the other for glory.

And so we see that predestination is not so much a matter of God pre-selecting *who* will be saved, but rather pre-selecting the *method* of salvation. It is “in Christ” that we are predestined for the glory of God. We have taken on Christ’s predestination. This is what being “conformed to the likeness” of Christ is all about.

## **Chosen for a Purpose**

There are two other words closely related to this concept of predestination and they are both used frequently in the Bible. These two words – “chosen” and “elect” – both come from the same Greek root word, meaning “to lay out.” And in Scripture, predestination – this “laying out” – is *always* related to purpose.

### ***Israel, the Elect Nation***

#### **Read Deuteronomy 7:6-11**

Israel was chosen as a nation to fulfill a specific purpose. The people of Israel were chosen simply *because of who they were* – as the natural descendants of Abraham, they were “in Abraham.” A person only had to be born a citizen of that nation to qualify for God’s pre-determined plan (read **Deuteronomy 4:37-38; 1 Chronicles 16:13; Isaiah 45:4; 65:9**). God’s specific purpose for Israel was to usher in God’s promises and God’s Messiah – the Savior of the world. Of the Jews, Paul writes in **Romans 11:28**:\*

“As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; *but as far as election* is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs.”

### ***Jesus, the Elect One***

#### **Read 1 Peter 1:20**

Jesus was chosen by the Father *because of who he is*. The pre-determined purpose for him as God’s Son was that he would be the Savior of the world and “chief-cornerstone” of the Church. He is “the Chosen One” (**Luke 23:35**).

### ***The Church, the Elect Ones***

As God’s redeemed sons, we are chosen because of who we are “in Christ” – and for a specific purpose. In the same way that a person became part of God’s plan for Israel simply by being born into that nation, so we become part of God’s great plan for the Church when we are born by his Spirit into his spiritual “nation” as citizens of heaven. We are now called a “chosen people” (**1 Peter 2:9; Colossians 3:12**) and “the elect” (**Matthew 24:22,24,31; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1**).

\* Paul deals with the subject of Israel’s election in detail in **Romans 9-11**.



## Individual Responsibility

In God's eternal purposes, two truths go hand in hand:

- Divine sovereignty
- Human responsibility

Divine sovereignty means that God acts in human history totally according to his own will and decision. Human responsibility means that each person is accountable before God for his or her own actions.

Down through Church history, Christians have tended to emphasize one to the exclusion of the other. But *both* truths are scriptural. God *is* sovereign and man *is* responsible. The Gospel is based on both:

- **Divine sovereignty** – it is *by grace* that we are saved. God has intervened in human history by his own will and decision.
- **Human responsibility** – it is *by faith* that we are saved. We respond to God's sovereign action at Calvary by placing our trust in his salvation.

The success of God's pre-determined plans is never in question. But in each of the three plans of God mentioned on the previous page, personal responsibility is very much involved in the fulfillment of God's purpose in the individual life.

- **Israel, the Elect Nation** – Israel fulfilled God's major plan for her – but only through the individuals within that nation who responded to it (**Romans 9:7-8; Joshua 24:15**).
- **Jesus, the Elect One** – The Lord Jesus also expressed his own love and willingness to obey the Father when he came and died (**Romans 5:19; Hebrews 5:8; Philippians 2:5-8**). He fulfilled God's plan and became the Savior of the world by submitting to the purpose of his Father (**Luke 22:42**).
- **The Church, the Elect Ones** – We too are now “called according to his purpose” (**Romans 8:28**), but our involvement in that purpose is a matter of individual responsibility. It is by our response of faith that the purpose Christ completed is fulfilled in our individual lives.

## Predestined to be Conformed!

Let's take another look at **Romans 8:28-29**, this time through the lens of different Bible translations and paraphrases:

- **King James Version** – “And we know that *all things* work together for good to them that love God, *to them who are the called according to his purpose*. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be conformed to the image of his Son*, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”
- **New International Version** – “And we know that *in all things* God works for the good of those who love him, *who have been called according to his*

*purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”*

- **American Standard Version** – “And we know that to them that love God *all things* work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose. For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”
- **New Century Version** – “We know that *in everything* God works for the good of those who love him. *They are the people he called, because that was his plan.* God knew them before he made the world, and *he decided that they would be like his Son* so that Jesus would be the firstborn<sup>£</sup> of many brothers.”
- **New Living Translation** – “And we know that God causes *everything* to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and *he chose them to become like his Son*, so that his Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters.”
- **The New Testament in Modern English** – “Moreover we know that to those who love God, *who are called according to his plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good.* God, in his foreknowledge, *chose them to bear the family likeness of his Son*, that he might be the eldest of a family of many brothers.”
- **The Message** – “...we can be...sure that *every detail* in our lives of love for God is *worked into something good.* God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. *He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son.* The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him.”
- **The Amplified Bible** – “We are assured and know that [God being a partner in their labor], *all things* work together and are [fitting into a plan] for good to those who love God and are called according to [His] design and purpose. For those whom He foreknew – of whom He was aware and loved beforehand – He also *destined from the beginning (foreordaining them) to be molded into the image of His Son [and share inwardly His likeness]*, that He might become the firstborn among many brethren.”

This is the Gospel that Paul preached – a Gospel of a new relationship with God and a new predestination in Christ!

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