

REMARKS ON ROMANS 8:28-30

By Gordon C. Olson – 1972

“But we know that to those who are loving God, (God) is working together all things unto good, to those who according to purpose are being called (or invited). Because whom (plural) He did before come to know (by acquaintance, in the sense of Mt. 7:23; I Cor. 8:3 (PERF.IND.PASS); Gal. 4:9; Jn. 2:24-25; or did foreknow), He also did before appoint (to be) conformed to the Image of His Son, for to be Himself the first born among many brethren; but whom He did before appoint, those also He did call (or invite); and whom He did call, those also He did justify (or declare righteous); but whom He did justify, those also He did render excellent (or make glorious, a present Christian experience, as I Pet. 1:8, “having come to be made glorious,” rendered excellent, adorned with luster, clothed with splendor; compare II Cor. 3:18; Rom.12:2; Mt. 17:2).” (See also Rom. 11:13; I Cor.12:26).

THIS PASSAGE CAN ONLY REFER TO THOSE RECONCILED TO GOD AT THE TIME THIS EPISTLE WAS WRITTEN - not all-inclusively to all who ever will be saved unto the end of earthly existence:

1. Eight GREEK AORIST TENSES in the indicative mode express punctiliar or climactic action in past time, what had taken place at the time of writing.
2. It would be CONTRARY to the whole New Testament TO SAY THAT GOD KNOWS BY EXPERIENCE, APPOINTS, CALLS, JUSTIFIES, AND SANCTIFIES A REBELLIOS SINNER LIVING IN SELF-GRATIFICATION BEFORE HIS REPENTANCE AND EXPERIENCE OF FAITH.
3. FORGIVENESS IS SET FORTH AS A MOVING CLIMAX IN GOD’S COMPASSION upon man’s appropriate renunciation of his rebellion. “Eternal forgiveness” would eliminate this and represent God as forgiving before the subject was born, had sinned, and repented—an accumulation of grace for sin to draw upon, rather than an accumulation of guilt for grace to act upon.
4. THE 8 AORIST INDICATIVE VERBS ARE A UNIT AND THUS INCLUDE THE SAME INDIVIDUALS. If God cannot appoint to be conformed to Christ’s image, call into intimate illumination of the atonement, justify or forgive sin, and sanctify until a sinner’s response in repentance, neither does God come to know them in the sense spoken of, because ALL WHOM GOD DID SO COME TO KNOW WERE RECONCILED AND TRANSFORMED. The test cannot be made to say that God knows by experience all He will ever reconcile and has completed this gracious manifestation in some and not in others.
5. We are specifically told in the context (vs. 33), by the use of a present tense, that GOD IS NOW JUSTIFYING, which emphatically makes the above past tenses apply to those who had been previously justified. The “chosen ones of God” or “elect” are without condemnation, which means that God does not have any chosen or appointed ones in His mind who are not, in fact, reconciled. God does not have to differentiate between saved elect ones and appoints when men are willing to repent and know Him by personal experience. (John 17:3)
6. We are also told by a present tense that SOME “ARE BEING CALLED” (vs. 28), which certainly makes the words “He did call” refer to those who had already been called and not all-inclusively to all whoever will be called into the intimacies of salvation.

7. To say that GOD IS AN “ETERNAL NOW,” or does not experience time or duration, and thus has performed in consciousness all that He ever will perform, is to remove the New Testament from realism and understanding and involve our consciousness in hopeless confusion.

8. THE KEY THOUGHT in the whole passage appears to be the wonderful proposition: GOD “IS WORKING TOGETHER ALL THINGS UNTO GOOD.” We are not left to meander through our Christian lives without a goal in view, nor to mend the wounds of life’s encounters as best we can. The *Godhead are active in every situation to heal and work out some spiritual benefit toward the great goal of our achieving spiritual maturity and blessedness.* THE WORD “BECAUSE” introduces a summary of what God has done in our lives to build up faith and confidence in God’s loving care. God reminds us of His personal interest and knowledge of us, His appointment to serene spiritual heights, His call to intimate relationship, His compassionate forgiveness, and glorious transformation. IF GOD HAS DONE ALL THIS FOR AND IN US, CERTAINLY HE HAS AN ETERNAL OBJECTIVE. *“I will never leave thee nor forsake thee (Heb. 13:5)*

Romans 8:28-30

Gordon C. Olson 1938

“But we know that to those who are loving God, God is working all things together unto good, to those who according to purpose are being called. Because whom (pl.) He before came to know (and judged worthy of the blessings of the gospel), he also did before appoint (To Be) conformed to the image of his son, for to be himself the firstborn in many brethren; but whom he did before appoint, those also he did call; and whom he did call, those also he did justify (declare righteous); but whom he did justify, those also he did render excellent (or make glorious).”

Verse 28 constitutes one sentence, and contains four verbs having the present significance of durative action; while versus 29 and 30 constitute another, having eight aorist tenses, with only the verb “to be” in the present tense, and refers doubtless to Christ. Three of the aorist tenses are repetitions in the series of parallel structures. These two statements should evidently be considered as a unit; the second one beginning with ὅτι, a conjunction, meaning because, since, for that, and which may give “the reason why anything is said to be or to be done.” The second statement may be an explanation of the why of the blessed truth, that “God is working all things together unto good,” which seems to be the central theme.

The word, “foreknowledge” of the A. V. is προγινώσκω, to have knowledge of beforehand; and comes from πρό, a preposition, before, and γινώσκω, to learn to know, come to know, get a knowledge of. Γινώσκω is used “with accusative of persons to recognize as worthy of intimacy and love, to own; so those whom God has judged worthy of the blessings of the gospel are said ὑπό τον θεον γινώσκω¹, in first Corinthians 8:3 and Galatians 4:9; negatively, in the sentence of Christ, “I never knew you,” never had any acquaintance with you, Matthew 7:23 (Thayer) (γινώσκω) then means to know, understand, perceive; to no one, his person, character, mind, plans (John 1:48-49; 2:24; II Timothy 2:19); a discriminating apprehension of external impressions, a knowledge grounded in personal experience.

“Foreordained” (προορίζω) – To appoint beforehand, to predetermine, decide beforehand; with a pred. acc., to foreordain to something.

“Called” (καλέω) – To call, invite; same root as κλητός (vs. 28), and is thought to refer to being “invited by God in the proclamation of the Gospel to obtain salvation.”

“Justified” (δικαιόω) – To make righteous; to render righteous, or such as he ought to be; to declare or pronounce one to be just, righteous, or such as he ought to be.

“Glorified” (δοξάζω) – To praise, extol, magnify, celebrate (Mt. 6:2; 5:16); to honor, do honor to, hold in honor (Rom. 11:13; 1 Cor. 12:26); to make glorious, adorn with lustre, clothe with splendor, render it excellent (1 Pet. 1:8) to cause the dignity and worth of some person or thing to become manifest and acknowledged (used so of God). There is nothing in the word that cannot be applied to the Christian in the life (sanctification), although it may also of course apply to the heavenly state. It is often applied to Christ on earth.

1. The Greek for the writing appeared to be hand written and the end of this statement wasn't discernable for the editor.

COMMENTS: The great benevolence of God has removed all the obstacles to man's salvation except man's repentance. It is the smiting of the breast and the prayer, "God be merciful to me, a sinner" (Lk. 18:13-14), that is the beginning of God's experience with a soul, and the soul's experience with a merciful God. God is pleased to use the word "know" to describe this new acquaintance; and of the lost, Christ shall someday say, "I never knew you." The apostle Paul is writing to living Christians, and in particular to the saints at Rome. When he speaks of those whom God "before came to know," or those with whom God had had a personal experience in their penitence, judging their repentance to be genuine and declaring them to be proper subjects of the blessings of the Gospel, it is obvious that only those can be referred to who had had such an experience, whether they be then living or passed on to be with the Lord. It is these over which "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God," and which God then appoints to be conformed to the image and likeness of His blessed Son, to dwell with the elder Brother and His brethren. The sinners, who cursing God and walking proudly in their own way, are they appointed to the likeness of Jesus! The Calvinist may say "yes" on his own responsibility, but I would only dare to say "no."

Those so appointed are then called or invited into the very heart of God to partake of the blessings and mercies of the Son of God and the Holy Spirit in salvation. The first step is the pardon or forgiveness of sins, or the pronouncing the sinner free from his load of guilt, called justification before God. But glory to God, he is not left pardoned in the heavens but filthy on earth, he has not a standing independent from state, he is purified or sanctified by the Holy Spirit, or rendered excellent and filled with glorified joy unspeakable (1 Pet. 1:8). These are the glories of the text which can only refer to the redeemed, and that while on earth, since the acts described are all past experiences with God.

CALVINIST INTERPRETATION AND ITS ABSURDITIES

It is often affirmed that these verses teach the absolute foreknowledge of God of every individual who shall ever be born and particularly of everyone who shall ever embrace the Gospel. If it be insisted upon that the expression, "whom He foreknew," refers to every individual who shall ever be saved, some very great difficulties follow:

1. All individuals who ever have been saved or ever will be, were appointed or predestinated to such from the beginning; and since it will not be pretended that one's destiny could be different from such appointment, how is the individual will free? How can the will choose between destinies?
2. From the present tense of the word "called" in vs. 28, some are still being called; while if the recurrence of the same word in vs. 30 refers in an all-inclusive manner to all those who ever shall be called (and not to that group who had already been called), then we have the manifest contradiction of God having already called all those who ever shall be saved, and yet that God is still calling the same individuals. The calling cannot refer to a mere Gospel invitation, since those called were first appointed, and then are justified and glorified.
3. We further have the manifest absurdity of some of those who have been called from eternity now living in vileness and sin. See that wicked sinner cursing and blaspheming God? God may have already called him to salvation!
4. But above all, "whom He did call, those also He did justify." It is constantly affirmed in the Bible that the forgiveness of sins is an act of God occurring in time; that is, there was a period in a saved man's

life when his sins were not forgiven, and then there came an instant in which they were forgiven. Now if language means anything, it must be improper and meaningless to say that a man's sins were always forgiven, and yet that they may at some instant be forgiven.

5. In as much as God has already justified all He ever will justify, upon this supposed truth, God is pictured as having justified some who are now living in sin, more or less vile. A wicked sinner may today be gratifying his lusts as much as he dares and still be in a justified state; because God, foreseeing that after a long life of sin, he would repent, forgave him before the foundation of the world! Who can believe this!
6. Sin is an act in time that incurs a penalty. Forgiveness is a setting aside of this penalty for good and wise reasons, the foremost of which is the atonement. Upon this supposition, God is portrayed as forgiving sins that do not exist – they are now, many of them, non-entities, and all were so before the foundation of the world. They have been forgiven before they were committed! This must mean that there is an accumulation of grace for sin to draw upon, rather than an accumulation of guilt for grace to act upon. And what about those who have not been born as yet, and yet who shall be saved, why they are now justified! How perfectly ruinous to any true conception of free will and the actuality of sin.
7. If God has justified all once for all, God is not at this time being moved with compassion, and tenderly extending mercy. This is often freely and coldly admitted; but how completely at war with the general presentation of Scripture, which so often presents God as filled with wrath, then pondering man's repentance, than granting forgiveness through faith.
8. In vs. 33, it is said by the use of the present tense that, God "is justifying." Upon the assumption in question, God must be presumed to have once for all justified all who ever shall be saved, and yet is contradicting Himself by now continuing to justify.
9. Those spoken of have not only been justified, but also glorified, or as per discussion, rendered excellent. Many of the above statements concerning justification might be here repeated in a modified form. The absurdity of affirming that, not only all the now living who shall be saved someday but who are now in their sins, but that those beings who shall have their birth and salvation in future generations, are all now "rendered excellent" must be strikingly apparent. To say that the word "glorify" refers to the future state only makes the absurdity more striking. They are now in their glorified state in heaven! Paul says, "we... groan within ourselves awaiting... the redemption of our body."

But to all these objections, it is replied that God is an "eternal now," and although with us events are occurring at particular instants in time, nevertheless with God all acts are simultaneous and eternal. But on the contrary, God is presented in the Bible as a living Being who walks or dwells with men, performs definite acts at definite times, who rests, observes, thinks and is reasoned with, remembers, is grieved, is jealous, angry, compassionate, who forgives and comforts, delights and rejoices, hearkens unto men, repents, changes His purposes, etc.