

**Series: God Saves #1455**

**Title: Romans 8.29b**

***Conformed to the Image of Jesus***

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Yesterday we were doing a word study when our time expired. If you have your Bible there you can open it to Romans chapter 8, and find verse 29. I will read that in a minute. First I want to remind you to look for the purpose for which God foreknew and God predestined these early Christians in Rome. A purpose that, of course, parallels God's purpose for everyone, for all time, whom God saves. We should not assume our salvation is merely a ticket to heaven. God has a purpose for us here and now, this very day in our lives. You will hear it as I read.

Romans 8, verse 29 reads, **“For those whom [God] foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren...”** Did you catch the twin purpose? Christians are those people whom God foreknew and also predestined *“to become conformed to the image of His Son...”* That's the first purpose. And here is the second: *“so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren...”*

Yesterday we defined the word “conformed,” saying the Greek word for conformed means to bring to the same form with some other person or thing; it means to render like. We can say to be like someone else in form; to bring into the same form as someone else. But here's the key: it means an outward expression of an *inward* essence or nature. To be conformed is an outward expression of an inward essence or nature. Our inner heart life is transformed to resemble Jesus. And these changes within result in changes of outward expression that reflects the beauty of Christ.

This is why people, who observe our lives on the outside (what they experience of us), if they are observant and discerning people, can tell whether or not we are undergoing an inward transformation. Admittedly, we can fool some of the people some of the time. For example, many who claim to be Christian will act one way at church on Sunday and act totally different at work on Monday. I once had a man in a church I pastored and this guy never missed a Sunday. He was active in the church. One Lord's Day one of his business associates, a colleague, visited our church. She was not a Christian, but a friend had invited her so she came.

She was very surprised to look across the sanctuary and see this man. But she assumed, “He is also just a visitor. How ironic. We both came to this church on the same day,” she surmised to her astonishment. But after the service was over, she said to her friend, “See that man over there? I work with him. Isn't it amazing he was also visited today?” Oh, but here came the even bigger surprise. The woman from our church said to her, “He is not visiting. He's a member here!” This woman's jaw dropped. And she told her friend, “if you knew what he was like in the office you would never think *he's* a Christian.” True story.

On the other hand, when we are truly being conformed to the image of God's Son, on the inside, then people around us will notice observable change in how we conduct ourselves on the outside. There is no need to fool them, because they see our spiritual maturity on display in how we treat others, react to others, speak to and about others, and the like. A lot of believers think Christianity is all about outward transformation. No, not really. Being Christian is all about *inward* transformation that then demonstrates itself on the outside. I say it all the time, the Holy Spirit makes us more like Christ *from the inside-out*.

The meaning of this word “conformed” directly speaks to this. And then we took up the word “image.” The Romans text reads, *“...predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...”* Image here refers to a “derived likeness.” We had the examples of a King's image on a coin and on a stamp. And the reflection of the sun in the water. What is perhaps the most accurate way to think of image is to remember the child with the exact, derived likeness of his or her parents. This almost never ceases to amaze us. We know the mother and one day we meet the daughter and we step back and exclaim, “She looks exactly like her Mom!” Well, now we are getting at the meaning of this word “image” in its original language.

This is no accidental likeness. There is another Greek word meaning “an image,” but that word describes more of a resemblance not a derived likeness. For example, you could have a son that only resembles his father, or an egg that is like another egg, or two flowers that look very much alike, but these are an

accidental likeness, not a derived likeness. Greek language scholar Kenneth Wuest says (quote), “The image of the Lord Jesus in the saint is not accidental, but derived, as the likeness of a child is derived from its parents. Through the new birth we become children of Jesus Christ and thus inherit His image. This image, indistinct in the new convert, becomes progressively clearer and distinct as that believer grows in the Christian life (*Wuest’s Word Studies Romans*, 145.)” End quote.

This is a good word to those of you who are new Christians. Do not get discouraged if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, but you are struggling to demonstrate that you are a Christian by how you live. To grow into maturity in Christ takes time, a lifetime actually. As long as the overall trajectory or direction of your life is one that desires to please Christ, your Savior, to obey Him, then you will find that you are making progress. There will be many ups and downs. You will some days succeed and on other days fail. Or, you will do both on the same days, even within minutes of each other. None of us are perfect. There are *no* perfect Christians!

But we have a perfect Savior and we can and must meet with Him multiple times a day and a night to confess our sins to Him and to invite His power to be at work in our lives, *on the inside*. You might be a new Christian who is struggling to wash your tongue of foul language. Or a new believer who still finds it hard to control your angry temper. You may be new in Christ and last night was yet another night when you indulged in pornography. The Holy Spirit warned you away from it, but you are addicted and cannot (yet) overcome this very powerful temptation. These are just some examples of what we fight against as Christians.

I say to you, dear friend, do not give up. Press on with Jesus. The Lord is not going to let go of you. Given that He has the power to save you, He therefore has the power to keep you saved. He foreknew you. He predestined you. And He is going to do a great work in you, conforming you to the image of Himself. It is really important to exercise a good deal of patience in the Christian life. Be steadfast in reading the Bible, and talking about what you are learning with other believers. You will see, over and over again, in the Scripture that all of God’s people, the ones whom He has saved, they all struggle in sanctification. You will also.

You have inherited Christ’s image. This is indistinct at first, but becomes progressively clearer and distinct as you grow in the Christian life. I am praying for you! If/when discouraged, reach out to me and I can be a sounding board for you, as well pray more intelligently for you. Hang tight for my email and mailing addresses coming soon.

This is also a good word to those of us who have been Christians a long time. (For the new believer and the, ah, old believer.) These are convicting words. How long have you been walking with Christ? Is it evident to you? Is it evident to others around you that you have the derived likeness of the Lord? As you read through the Gospels and the life of Christ are you encouraged that compared to how you used to live, you rejoice and give thanks to the Holy Spirit for making you more like the Lord? Or, are you living on a plateau now, in which you have slowed in being conformed to the image of God’s Son? Perhaps you have even fallen backwards off the plateau and are now making no progress at all in sanctification?

I have had personal experience with this myself. Let me also encourage you: do not spend another minute lazing around! When this podcast and broadcast ends, get out your Bible, and start reading. I recommend Psalm 51. In Psalm 51 we have the famous confession of King David for his sin. Read through that chapter a couple of times. At first you will be distracted. You might even find it hard to get the Bible open! But just keep reading out those words to Jesus. **“Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin...<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. <sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.”** Read the whole chapter and see how you feel.

Being conformed to the image of God’s Son, what a journey for all of us. Let us pray for one another, and encourage one another in Christ. If you know of a believer who is struggling, reach out and help him or her. We will continue to understand this passage when you join us again on Monday, in Romans 8, as together we continue to discover who God Is.

---END---