

**Series: God Saves #1421**

**Title: Romans 8.29b**

**God's Free Will, Our Free Will**

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. It is really great to have you with us at the beginning of this new week. And I want to remind you that here, because God is, we seek to know Him as we meet Him in His Word to us, this is the Bible. Specifically, we have asked this question: *how* are Christians saved from our sin? Our sin has so enslaved us, that if ever we are going to be set free from it we require a deliverer, a rescuer, a Savior and this is who Jesus Christ is. Who sets us free from the addictive power of sin? *Only Jesus* does because *only Jesus* can.

Having experienced His forgiveness for all that we have said, done, and even thought about that offends holy God, we are very interested, curious to know *how* does God do this saving ministry in our lives? So, as the people of God we have come together to talk about this. The name of this doctrine (or teaching, if you prefer) is soteriology. And in Romans 8, verses 28-30 we have an outstanding text that sets before us the answer to our question. And so we have talked about the saving act of God that begins in eternity past. Long before the very foundation of this world was set in place by Creator God, He already foreknew and predestined all people who will ever be saved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

On this broadcast and podcast we have talked about the foreknowledge of God. That is because Romans 8, verse 29 begins, **“For those whom He foreknew...”** The “He” there is God and so the Apostle Paul says the first move God makes is to foreknow those whom He will save. And then, we have taken up a second key word in Romans 8.29 and that is the word predestined or predestination. That is because this verse continues, **“For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined...”** And we defined this word by looking at the Greek word *proorizó*.

This word means to put limits or boundaries on beforehand. To determine beforehand. To predetermine. To appoint beforehand. To pre-appoint. So in the Greek language what we see is that God marks out the boundaries or the limits for us, and He does so *before* we are even born. He *predetermines*. He *pre-appoints* us to our destination beforehand. This fits with our definition from the English language that we identified borrowing from our scholar friend RC Sproul. He says, “What predestination means, in its most elementary form, is that our final destination, heaven or hell, is decided by God not only before we get there, but before we were even born. It teaches that our ultimate destiny is in the hands of God.”

Again, by way of review, all of that led us into a discussion on the will. And why the will? Well, because if God has predetermined where each person will spend eternity, before each person is even born, then what role does human free will have? Isn't it *our* choice, *our* decision, whether we go to heaven or to hell when we die? Has God robbed us of our choice? Do we have no free will after all? Even worse, are we just pre-programmed robots who carry out God's will no matter what? You see, it is not possible to talk about predestination without also talking about human free will. The two go together.

Now, I led us to do something that, frankly, I rarely hear Bible teachers do (pastors, etc.) and that is to *start* the conversation on free will by looking *first* to God. God has a will. God has a free will. And God's will is more free than our will. As we will continue to learn God's sovereign will reigns supreme high and above the human (free) will. And last week we borrowed from the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* to unpack a key doctrinal statement concerning the nature of God's free will. Leading us to this day and the beginning of (second) our conversation on the free will of men and women, including of course children. Because boy oh boy, do children have free wills – *strong* willed children. Maybe you have one of those or two or more? Am I right?

We looked at predestination and the will of God first. Now we come to predestination and the will of men and women second. We are working from above to below. We begin with God and only then come down to people. First, we establish God's free will, then second, we establish our free will. What we mean by human free will is best understood in the context of God's free will. Are you with me?

If you remember, we left off last week talking about God's sovereignty, or God's sovereign free will. Well, that leads us to a very important and practical question: how is God's sovereignty related to human free will? Again, how is God's sovereignty related to human free will? Or, perhaps I can put it this way: what does predestination do to our free will? What does predestination do to our free will?

I suppose we have a few options here. One will be to answer these questions without really answering them by saying something like, "Well, this is not something we can resolve in this life so let's just agree that predestination is real because the Bible says it is, let's just accept it and move on." Or, "Well, what a paradox, huh? On the one hand God has predestined us, but on the other hand we still make our choices?" And then of course, there is this line I have heard countless times from Christians, "Predestination and human free will. When I get to heaven I can't wait to ask God *that* question," as if in heaven we will be raising our hands to ask God questions! (We will not. We will be too busy worshiping God for questions and answers.)

Really, in my opinion, the point of these statements is to skirt the issue. We avoid talking about the tension between God's sovereign will and human free will. And, in my experience, most Christians do not even know what to say about this topic, they do not know how to answer the question, or how to engage the tension and so they immediately look for a way out. A kind of ignore it and it will go away, evasive tactic.

I want to propose a better, and definitely more satisfying way forward. Let's take some time together, and yes this will require *time*, but let's you and I lend our time and attention to what the Bible *does say* about the compatibility of God's sovereign, free will and our human free will. Because they *do go together*. There is *not* a contradiction in the Bible between the two. The Bible speaks repeatedly and directly to God's will (as we have seen) and to people's will (as we will see). Both are real. God has a free will *and* we have a free will. The question is how do the two work together in predestination?

Listen again to RC Sproul and how he puts it in his readable book *Chosen By God*. Quoting him now, "If human freedom and divine sovereignty are real contradictions, then one of them, at least, has to go. If sovereignty excludes freedom and freedom excludes sovereignty, then either God is not sovereign or man is not free. Happily, there is an alternative. We can keep both sovereignty and freedom if we can show that they are not contradictory (*Chosen By God*, 181)." I am going to pause reading Dr. Sproul there.

I like that. Obviously, or I would not be quoting it! Here on *God Is* we are not going to avoid the tension between God's sovereignty and our will by just hoping that if we ignore it the tension will dissipate.

Picking up Sproul's book again, I read this: "At a human level we readily see that people can enjoy a real measure of freedom in a land ruled by a sovereign monarch. It is not freedom that is cancelled out by sovereignty; it is *autonomy* that cannot co-exist with sovereignty...The word autonomy means 'self-law.' To be autonomous means to be a law unto oneself. An autonomous creature would be answerable to no one...If God is sovereign, man cannot possibly be autonomous. If man is autonomous, God cannot possibly be sovereign. These would be contradictions."

*Then*, Sproul adds this. Listen: "One does not have to be autonomous to be free. Autonomy implies *absolute* freedom. We are free, but there are limits to our freedom. The ultimate limit is the sovereignty of God (181)." We will come back to this again tomorrow, because God Is.

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