

Answers To The Two Big Questions Of Life

Introduction

1. In our Sunday Bible class we have recently commenced a study entitled "God's Plan Of Redemption". One of the goals of the study is to examine how God intends to restore the relationship between the creator and the created that was ruptured in the garden of Eden, a plan which formed part of His eternal purpose.
2. To grasp a more complete picture of God's purpose, we need to step back in time and ask the question, "what was His motivation for forging this purpose?"
3. Today I plan to examine two passages which shed some light upon why God so acted – He wanted many sons which were conformed "to the image of His son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom 8:29).
4. First though, I want to address and hopefully dismiss a thought that might spring to your mind – "it was God's loving character which motivated His actions".
 - Two Biblical statements might appear to suggest this idea: "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8) and "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16).
 - "Agape" writes Thayer, "involves a deliberate choice, reflecting a commitment to seek the highest good of others". This cannot be true of something that does not exist, though one can "love" the prospect of that which is to come to pass!
 - Such a view is speculative unless substantiated by the Scriptures.

I. An Overview

A. The context of Rom 8:29.

1. The "what" and "why" of the verse.
 - a. First, note that the paragraph begins with the word "for" and so it therefore provides an explanation of what had previously been written. But we will return to this point later.
 - b. The "what". A group of people, those who would "be conformed to the image of His Son", would be foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified. It is this process or series of six steps which we must look at carefully.
2. Note that the passage is written in the past tense as if it had been completed and yet we know it had not. We sometimes speak in this way.
3. Illustration.
 - a. My father spoke in this manner in respect of a garden which had not yet been brought into existence. Looking ahead, he envisaged the steps which would be necessary and having designed it drew a plan. When explaining the plan he said: "The focal point is here etc.". However, looking out through the back window all I could see was rubble earth and weeds.
 - b. Similarly God, having His objective firmly in mind, set out through the words of Paul the needed steps for its accomplishment. The end was so secure that God could speak of it as if it had already been done.
 - c. While the Bible doesn't present a single, definitive statement explaining *why* the world was created, it follows that the creation provides a setting for His relationship with humanity and so was a necessary precursor to what is outlined here in Romans.

B. A closer look at God's plan.

1. First an everyday approximation of God's actions. Imagine a father has a son and he is so thrilled by the experience that he determines to have many more sons just like him. He anticipates that this will require him to:

- a. Find a better paying job.
- b. Move to more spacious accommodation.
- c. Set aside time on a daily basis in which he will be able to teach, train and discipline them so as to gradually make them more like his first son.

II. The Six Steps Examined

A. First staying with Romans - Foreknown.

1. "For whom He foreknew (*proginosko*)" (8:29).
2. Proginosko: "To know before". Comprises two words, pro, "before," and ginosko, "to know" (Vine).
3. Thus, with regard to this group of people, God knew beforehand or was acquainted with certain future events which would befall them (Barnes).

B. Chosen - Our second passage introduced (Eph 1:3-14).

1. Before continuing we must note the different contexts.
 - a. In Romans the concept of sonship is introduced as a reason to believe that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to [His] purpose" (Rom 8:28).
 - b. In Ephesians it is cited as one of the many blessings received in Christ (1:3).
2. God's method of choosing.
 - a. Some have supposed that God, before the foundation of the world, looked down through history and picked out some individuals who would be chosen (4), regardless of whether they had any inclination to be chosen or not and that God caused some to be lost and some to be saved in accordance with His sovereign will.
 - b. This is not how it was done. Rather, He viewed the future knowing that He would send Jesus Christ into the world. He chose those who would become a part of Him, accept Him by faith (Jn 1:12), putting Him on as a garment (Gal 3:27). These would be His chosen ones.
 - c. Paul did not say that believing alone makes one a son of God but when one believes, that person has the power to become God's son by virtue of the arrangements God has put into place.
3. These He determined in advance would be, or destined them "to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (5). This brings us back to Romans.

C. Predestined (8:29-30).

1. This group of people which Ephesians informs had been chosen before the foundation of the world and predestined or determined in advance that they would be adopted as sons, He also "predestined [to be] conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom 8:29).

D. Called (8:30).

1. How did God separate those who He had predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, from the rest of mankind?
2. They were "called (*kaleō*)"
 - a. This is not to suggest that the world is like a big boating lake in which the one controlling the boats issues a summons for the specifically named boats to return to base i.e. "come in boat x and you will be saved".
 - b. No, this call is issued via the gospel "for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" and is available to all (2 Thes 2:14).

3. "Kaleō has a broad meaning, but in the context of Rom 8:30 and 2 Thess 2:14, it refers to God's divine invitation. It means "to call anyone, invite, summon..." (Vine).
4. The gospel acts as a sieve, separating those who are genuinely committed to following Christ from those who are either indifferent or only superficially engaged. (Note that preaching the word and preaching the gospel were synonymous terms [Heb 4:2; 1 Pet 1:25]).

E. Justified (8:30).

1. How though was a sin-stained individual to be "conformed to the image, of His Son "who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth" (1Pe 2:22).
2. The answer is found in the gracious character of the Father who by His grace "justified (dikaioo)" those sinners who He had, foreseen, chosen, predestined, and called - a calling which was not by name but in accordance with a divinely appointed character.
3. Time does not permit a detailed examination of these terms but:
 - a. Dikaioo is a legal term which means primarily "to deem to be right..." Justification" being the legal and formal acquittal from guilt by God as Judge, the pronouncement of the sinner as righteous, who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Vine).

F. Glorified (8:30).

1. The Bible presents the glory given to those who are called as a transformative, eternal inheritance that involves unity with Christ, sharing in His resurrection, and being co-heirs of God's kingdom.
2. The process begins on earth (2 Cor 3:18) culminating at Christ's return when their physical bodies will be changed and conformed to His glorious body (Phi 3:20-21). At this point they will "receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1Pe 5:4).

Concluding Remarks

1. As God's people we are in a wonderfully privileged position. We can look at everything we see and know why it is here - to provide a setting in which God's chosen ones could develop and show themselves to be of that character which suited them to be adopted and conformed to the image of the Father's firstborn Son.
2. The chosen ones were foreseen by character and not by name. Any individual who has lived or will live on this planet has the potential to exhibit this character.
3. Why are we here? So that potentially each and everyone of us might be conformed to the image of the Father's first-born. It is summed up by the writer of Ecclesiastes who wrote: Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man 12:13