

Does God know what he is doing?

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Date: 01 July 2018

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] Well, tonight we're going to carry on with our study in Romans and we've reached these verses that you have there on the screen, verses 28 to 30. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose, for those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and those whom he predestined he also called and those whom he called he also justified and those whom he justified he also glorified. As we've said many times, Romans chapter 8 is a wonderful journey through the blessings that are ours if we trust in Jesus. Here we see just the astonishing heights that the Christian gospel bring you to if you are a follower of Jesus. It's all a great reminder that being a Christian is just the most wonderful and brilliant thing that can ever happen to us. And it's vital to remember that because one of the greatest lies that the devil tells is that being a Christian is going to spoil your life. That's a misconception that many, many people have. They think that if I follow Jesus, it's going to make my life worse. It's going to restrict me and it's going to take away from a life that in many ways is good. That is one of the biggest lies that you will ever hear because you only have to go to a chapter like Romans 8 to see that being a Christian is the best thing that can ever happen to anyone and knowing Jesus, being united to him by faith, brings the most wonderful joy and peace and hope and love and satisfaction into your life. Nothing compares to what it means to know Jesus. It brings blessings that go beyond anything we could imagine.

So being a Christian is brilliant but at the same time the Bible never ever hides the fact that sometimes life as a disciple of Jesus can be hard and there are times when we face challenges, struggles and disappointments. That happens to everyone. That's probably happened to you in the past week and it may well happen to you in the week to come. Things happen and it's difficult. We struggle and we find ourselves asking the question, does God know what he's doing? That's a question that we can often find ourselves asking. Our situation, our circumstances can take a turn that leaves us confused and we think to ourselves what is going on? Does God know what he's doing?

And that's the question I want us to think about tonight. But first of all I want us just to notice an important point regarding these verses, particularly regarding verse 28 because that's a verse that you probably that you tend to have on your fridge. Now that's a good thing. You often we get a fridge magnet with various verses or you can have them on whatever, a coaster or a picture on the wall. It's a well-known verse verse 28 and it's a wonderful verse to have. But the difficulty is that if you've just got that verse on your fridge you don't actually have the context. You don't have the previous verses which lead up to this verse because that verse is like every verse in the Bible is not just there kind of dropped in the middle on its own in isolation from everything else. It's part of a wider chapter, part of a greater context. So to understand these verses we've got to remind ourselves what's just been said. And back in verse 18 Paul is highlighting the fact that although we suffer now which we do that suffering is not worth comparing with the amazing future that God has for us. That's kind of really the main theme that this section is talking about. Yes we suffer now but if you take that suffering and compare it to what God is promising then there's no comparison. The future that God has for you is amazing. And then Paul goes into more detail and he describes three parties who are responding to the present struggles and sufferings of this life and they are doing so by groaning. If you look at these the previous verses you'll see there's three groanings if you like. Verse 19 to 22 Paul first of all speaks about creation groaning. So as we studied a few weeks ago we saw that as a result of sin the universe has been subjected to a curse so it's no longer functioning in the way that it was originally intended to do. You remember creation was made to be a perfect environment for you.

A perfect environment for humanity to live in but that has been ruined because of the implications and effect of our sin. But creation longs for the day when it will be renewed and restored back to everything that it was meant to be. So Paul uses the language of personification making the universe sound like a person and is saying the creation is longing for the future. Then in verse 23 to 25 we groan Paul tells us and here we saw what we call the already not yet balance that is present in our salvation in Jesus. Yes we are already saved and we enjoy many blessings but there's more to come. So in Christianity until the day when Jesus returns there is always an already not yet balance and so we enjoy blessings now our situation has been transformed we have so much to rejoice about but the great consummation of our salvation both spiritually and physically is awaiting us in the future when Jesus returns and there is the resurrection from the dead and the new heavens and the new earth are inaugurated. So creation groans we groan and then in verse 26 to 27 we see that God himself groans God the Holy Spirit groans and that groaning of the Holy Spirit is part of the Holy Spirit's ministry to us in our weakness that's what we saw last night the fact that last week rather the fact that Christians are weak but rather than being forgotten or abandoned the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. He knows that we're needy he knows we're weak he knows that we're not fully restored into the people that God wants us to be and as we struggle forwards along towards that final goal we need God the Holy Spirit himself coming alongside grabbing on with us to help and to give us the support that we need. So you've got these three groanings creation ourselves the Holy Spirit and all of these groanings are highlighting the fact that the ultimate goal of the gospel lies in the future and that's a key emphasis that Paul is making in this chapter that there is a future a wonderful future that we are looking forward to.

In other words in terms of the gospel everything is working together towards something good. So the destiny of creation is that it'll be renewed and restored and transformed into a new creation the destiny of believers is that we will be brought into that new creation as God's very own beloved children and God himself Father Son and Holy Spirit is drawing all things towards that great good goal everything and this is the bit I want you to really see really understand everything is working towards something good and that's why the very next thing that Paul says is we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose and the first thing that I want to highlight is the really important point that that statement by Paul is not some vague statement of optimism there's always a danger that we can pull that verse out of its context and we can think that that well yeah that's great that's great things sound good God's going to make things good God's going to help us we can pull that version and think well yeah that's just a very nice positive statement it's actually far more than that when we look at the context of what's running up to verse 28 we see that Paul's statement in verse 28 is based entirely on an argument that he is building up on doctrinal teaching that he's setting before us in the previous verses he's not making a vague general statement of positive thinking he is saying far more than that that statement verse 28 is grounded on logical coherent argument Paul is saying Christianity involves an orderly sequential process that is heading towards something good and then he tells us how that works he says for those who we foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the first born among many brothers and those who he predestined he also called those who he called he also justified those who he justified he also glorified here Paul is teaching us that salvation in Jesus Christ is involving a big process and that's a really really important thing to remember when you think of the Christian gospel always always think of something big because it's really big we tend to fall into the trap of thinking that it's quite small and in our own context we can often think that being a Christian is just about having your sins forgiven we can often think that so you could say to somebody what's the goal of Christianity and they would say well the goal of Christianity is that you can have your sins forgiven because of what Jesus has done on the cross now that of course is a wonderful thing and it's great to think about that we tend to be drawn to that particularly in our own culture and we focus a lot on forgiveness of sins and therefore on the doctrine of justification by faith that's a great thing to think about but if somebody says to you if somebody asks the question what is the goal of salvation and you said to them the goal of salvation is to have your sins forgiven you will be wrong because the goal of salvation is far far bigger than that yes having your sins forgiven is part of it a key part of it but it's part of something way bigger it's part of a glorious process that leads to something absolutely amazing at the destination and what Paul is showing us here is he's showing us parts of what we call an important theological concept known as the order of salvation and so

you can see that aspects of that in verse 30 you've got four things mentioned those who be predestined he also called those we called he also justified those we justified he also glorified there's four steps in terms of the process of salvation and you can go to the rest of the New Testament and see that there are actually further steps involved in in that process there's a great chain of steps from eternity past right forward to the new creation where God is placing together this massive massive work of salvation for sinners and some of you will remember this because we looked at it together in the prayer meeting about two years ago two and a half years ago you've got a great order of salvation and we made a diagram you might not be able to read that it's a wee bit small but i'll read it out for you it starts with God's election where we are predestined to salvation the next step is that we are effectually called God calls us to himself and he works in their heart so that call has an effect then at conversion many wonderful things happen which all happen at the same time but they're distinct so we are regenerated you go from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive because you are spiritually alive you are able to recognize that you're on the path to a lost eternity you're able to turn which is what we call repentance and set your faith on Jesus Christ because you've done that you can be justified your sins are forgiven you're declared righteous you are justified by faith that brings a transformation in your status you go from being a condemned sinner to being a regenerated justified believer and you are adopted into the family of God so you go from down here as a lost sinner all the way up into a God's family and there in God's family you are set apart as one who is now holy one who has been definitively sanctified and brought from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light that's your conversion but then after that a wonderful process begins there's the process whereby God works on you and makes you more and more like Jesus that's what we call progressive sanctification it's a process bit by bit by bit you are made more like Jesus and alongside that is the fact that as believers we persevere and so although trials come although difficulties come although we face opposition we are kept and we persevere to the end and the end point the goal of salvation is when God will bring us into his very own house into the new creation and we are glorified with Jesus Christ and all of that is bound up in the key New Testament doctrine which summarizes Christianity and that is union with Christ it is through our union with Jesus

Christ that we are saved that's the order of salvation forgiveness of sins is just a wee bit in the middle it's a wonderful bit but it's just a wee bit what God is doing is way way bigger God is doing an amazing work in order to save you and so it's good to remember how big salvation is and Paul is getting us to think about this a little bit in the verses that we've been studying and he highlights as we said four key aspects of this order of salvation and we'll look at these four in a little bit more detail because that's the ones that Paul highlights first of all he tells us that we are predestined and that immediately points us backwards you can see from the diagram at the bottom that's step one of the order of salvation and it's a great reminder that the starting point for our salvation is with God not with us that's a crucial point to remember our sin has left us totally incapable of saving ourselves the only reason we can be saved is because God takes the initiative and God implements a plan to save us now when we read that word predestined we can easily get a wee bit uncomfortable and sometimes people are finding that we bit difficult to understand how this doctrine works and as with every doctrine and perhaps especially with this one that is an element of mystery that we can't fully understand but sometimes people look at that word and they think well that makes Christians think that they're better so Christians will say that well these Christians they think we are the chosen ones we are the elect we are kind of superior to everybody else other people complain about it and say well well that's an excuse to be lazy and passive because it's like well if God's predestined you for salvation then what else can we do what can

I do if I'm not predestined what can I do it can kind of make us just sit back and be fatalistic about our situation and it can even be regarded as an excuse for sinning because we think well if we're elected doesn't matter what we do because ultimately we are safe and secure but all of these sentiments are gross perversions of what the Bible actually teaches because rather than making us proud and think that we are better the fact that God chooses to save people should humble us like nothing else because it reminds us that we are totally dependent on God there's a famous statement made I think I forgot the name of the person who said it Archbishop something I can't remember where should I remember that but one of the elders reminded me of it last week that the only thing that we contribute to our salvation is the sin that makes it necessary in the first place so it should humble us and rather than making us passive this whole doctrine of predestination should motivate us to evangelize it should motivate us to go out with the gospel for two reasons one

because predestination tells us that the spiritually dead can in fact be saved so you look at our village you look at your work colleagues you look at our nation we see many people who seem to have no interest in the gospel but that should never ever ever lead us to despair because God still has people predestined for salvation he still has people whom he is calling still has people who need to hear the gospel and who will respond because without that without God's initiative no one can be saved but the second key thing that that should motivate should that about this that should make us motivated to evangelism is that one of the key reasons that God chooses people is so that they will be a witness to others that's a key theme running through the bible so Abraham was chosen by God predestined in order to be a blessing to all the other nations

[20 : 27] Israel was chosen as a nation to be a light to the other peoples around her the disciples were chosen in order to go out and bear witness to the resurrection of the of Jesus and you are chosen so that God can use you to bring the good news of Jesus to others predestination is a glorious wonderful doctrine because it tells you that God does not love you because he's been forced to do he loves you because he chooses to it's all his initiative Paul's telling us that we're predestined he then tells us that we are called that's the second thing he says God works out his purpose of salvation by calling sinners to himself now there's two important points I want to highlight here and the first I suppose is very simple but really important to be called by God is the most astonishing privilege and just think about it our sin has left us in a condition whereby the most obvious course of events would surely be for us to be shunned by God our sin has ruined our condition and it's made us completely incompatible with God so you see God and you see perfect purity you see absolute righteousness you see holiness like nothing else and we are absolutely nowhere near that level because of our sin we are nowhere near the appropriate condition in order to have a relationship with God that's something that we forget so easily it's something that the world completely fails to recognize the fact that there is a massive gulf between us and God massive bigger than any of us will ever realize and for that reason God would be perfectly justified in shunning us but the astonishing truth is that God does not shun us he actually calls us first thing God said after Adam and Eve sinned was what where are you

God calls sinners to repentance God calls the broken to be healed God calls the lost into his family God calls the dead to come to life it's absolutely astonishing that God would call people like us but he does to be called as the most extraordinary privilege but secondly and this is a very important point because it links back to what we're saying about predestination the fact that God calls us makes us responsible the fact that God calls us makes us responsible so yes we firmly believe that God is sovereign in salvation but alongside that the Bible makes it absolutely clear that we are responsible that's part of bearing the image of God that's part of being a human that we have been endowed with a certain level of responsibility so if God calls us we must respond we must listen to that call we must repent we must believe we must turn from sin and turn to Jesus and follow him now we can only do that by the grace of God but by the grace of

God we can do it and we must do it and that's why we must never ever ever think to ourselves what if I am not predestined people think that they say what if I'm not part of the elect what if I am not predestined and people see this as a massive stumbling block that they can't get over but that is not a question that the Bible ever discusses and it's not a question that the Bible ever suggests that we should discuss and the answer to that question lies entirely in God's prerogative it's an area that we have no right to demand entry to it is part of God's secret council that that we do not rightly rightly so we do not fully understand the key question we we ask is not am I predestined the question you need to ask is am I being called that's the question you need to ask yourself and the very fact that you are sitting here tonight under the gospel the very fact that you have a concern for your salvation the very fact that you are here in the gospel again is telling you that you are because God doesn't bring people under the gospel unless he's calling them you cannot say to God you didn't call me and that's why you must respond God's call makes us responsible so it's an amazing thing to be called by God amazing but it's also a very solemn thing because it's making us responsible and we must respond third thing Paul says is that we are justified so he said we predestined called justified we see we're right in the middle of the order of salvation as as I said you go to other parts of the New Testament to fill in all the other other sections and we've looked in detail at justification already in our study because in many ways the first four chapters of Romans are all about justification and then from that point

Paul talks about what follows on from justification God calls lust broken spiritually dead sinners those who are on a path to physical death and those who are already faced and confronted by spiritual death and God transforms their status so instead of being condemned as guilty we are justified we are declared righteous in the sight of God and we are set free that's why Paul can begin Romans 8 by saying there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus we are declared righteous by God and then the fourth thing we have is that we are glorified so if you like Paul's gone to the very start he's touched on one or two things in the middle and then he goes to the very end of the order of salvation this is the final goal that God is working towards that day when at the end of the history of current history Jesus Christ will return there will be a new heaven and a new earth and all the effects of the curse will be gone and we will share in the glory of Jesus Christ himself that is God's goal and Paul describes it in verse 29 in terms of being conformed to the image of God's very own son that's how we are going to be glorified we're going to be made fully like Jesus so just as Jesus knows his father so too will you that knowledge of God as the perfect father that Jesus knows you are going to know just as Jesus now this is this is the most astounding truth just as Jesus is the precious beloved treasured child of God so too will you be the same because he's the firstborn among many brothers so you will arrive in glory as a brother or sister of Jesus right at the heart of God's family just as Jesus is righteous and holy so too will we be the same we will be conformed to his likeness and just as he perfectly bears the image of God so too will we and it's interesting to note that that the word there glorified in English is in the past tense which can be a wee bit confusing because you can think yourself what does that mean that it's already happened well I think the answer to that question is no the fact that it's past tense is not telling us that it is already happened rather it is telling us that there is absolute certainty that this will take place that's the really important point been emphasised and the tense that's used in Greek is a tense that's not so concerned with time when we think of tense we very often think just purely in terms of time in Greek it's not really so much like that the the real concern about the the real emphasis behind the the tense used in Greek is the fact that this action should be viewed as a whole it should be used as viewed as a complete unit so we are being told here that our glorification is holy and fully and perfectly guaranteed through our union with Jesus Christ and all of this is reminding us how perfectly God's plan of salvation fits together past present and future it is all covered in God's great order of salvation and that means something wonderful it means that if you trust in Jesus you can never find a moment in all of history past or in all that lies in the future you can never find a moment when God is not working to save you you will never find a moment when God is not concerned for your salvation and that is where you find assurance and that is where you find security God is working all of these things together for that glorious day when your salvation will be fully consummated and that means for all who love God all things work together for good because all things are leading towards that point that great goal is the end point to which God is working everything out so when it comes to your salvation God knows exactly what he's doing it all fits together in a glorious order it's a wonderful work of salvation now there's three [32 : 15] implications that arise from this and we'll see if we can get through them before seven together number one what you are now is not what you will be what we are now is not what we will be this is what we were talking about earlier the not yet aspect of our salvation as Christians right now we have many wonderful blessings but we are not yet in the condition or in the location or in the circumstances that God ultimately wants to bring you to God is bringing you to a higher greater better level so that means that right now we are not fully conformed to the image of Jesus we are on a path towards that goal and that means that right now there is a fixing process going on so what we are now is not what we are going to be God is working on us he's in a process of transforming us into the people that he wants us to be and as part of that God needs to work on us he needs to teach us he needs to correct us he needs to guide us he needs to challenge us sometimes he even needs to rebuke us all because he loves us and he wants to lead us forwards towards his great plan of salvation and that means that sometimes now things will be hard sometimes now things won't be the way that we want them to be sometimes now we will think that God is getting things wrong sometimes we'll even think that God is the one with the problem all of that is because whether we realize it or not right now we are not what we are meant to be there's a fixing process going on and that fixing process will not be complete until we are brought into the new creation and so right now there are still things wrong with us and that inevitably brings frustration disappointment and difficulty into your lives and you'll probably experience the reality of that in the week ahead but in all of these things God is patient and as Paul says in Philippians 1

I am sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ that's that's the outworking of God leading us through this great order of salvation so what we are now is not what we will be God is working on us secondly Paul says we know that all things work together for those who love God all things work together for good the point is this for good is not necessarily the same as is good that's a very very important point in Romans verse chapter 8 verse 28 Paul is not saying that if you love God then everything is good he's just said in this chapter that we suffer and that we groan and he his own life experience that in so many different ways the Bible never ever pretends that being a Christian is plain sailing that is dead easy and everything is always fine the Bible makes it abundantly clear that sometimes things will happen in our lives that are not good that again is part of the already not yet balance so sometimes we're going to be confronted by circumstances that are awful and we're going to face experiences that will break our hearts and we would never want it to be the case that that that we looked at suffering in the world and and just didn't think anything of it we should always be grieved always recognizing the fact that that that the hardship in people's lives or the disasters in places like Venezuela these things are not good and these things should grieve our hearts sometimes we're confronted by circumstances that are awful but sometimes we will even cause circumstances that are awful and that's often the case our own words our own actions can be a source of sorrow and trouble and hurt for other people in the Christian life there will be times when things are not good but not good is good is not the same as for good because there is never ever a moment when God is not working things together for good it's reminding us that God's priority is not actually now God's priority is then God's priority is glorification and the circumstances of today whether they are great or whether they are difficult are all being worked together under God's sovereign plan to bring them towards a destination that is so so good God is working everything towards that goal and that raises a crucial question when should we judge God's plan that's something we often do isn't it we're faced with something we why is this happening why is God doing this why now why is God allowing this why isn't God taking action what is going on why God why are you doing this and we can easily become suspicious and we can even become bitter towards God because we look at God's actions we look at how things have been worked out we judge him and we think that things are not the way they should be but we have to ask ourselves when should we judge God's plan and the only answer to that question is at the very end of the order of salvation in the new creation when the not when the not yet finally comes to be a reality right now we are not to judge God's plan we are to trust God's plan don't judge God's plan until the new creation right now trust God's plan and the reason we can trust God's plan is set before us in this verse because God is working all things together for good and I can guarantee you this when you're in the new creation you will not find anything you will not find anything for which you can criticize God because everything will be brilliant God is working together for good so if you have had a rubbish week or if you've had a hard year or if you're looking at the future with fear or uncertainty about what happened or if you feel as if things have not worked out in your life the way that you want them to then do not despair and do not think for one second that God has finished because God's work in your life is not yet done and when you are in glory gazing on the radiant splendor of Jesus Christ when you are enjoying the brilliant fellowship of all your brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ with greater closeness greater joy greater fun greater laughter greater peace than you have ever known in this earth when you are marveling at the spectacular astounding beauty of the new creation where there is no kersh and where everything has been gloriously restored and where God brings you into an eternal home where you can be with him forever that's the moment when you can decide if God knows what he's doing right now do not judge God's plan right now trust his plan that's something we all need to do so we need to remember that what we are now is not what we're going to do we need to remember that is good it's not the same as for good and last of all that clock's not a seven yet don't look at that one we need last of all we need to make sure that Romans 8 28 shapes our understanding and our perspective now notice at the beginning there's two really important words we know and all too often we exchange the word know for the word forget so we forget that for those who love God all things work together for good so we worry we doubt we wonder we despair and we go looking for comfort and assurance in all sorts of foolish places instead of holding on to the truth of God's word and we are being reminded here by these two words we know that our knowledge our understanding our perspective our worldview must be shaped by what the Bible says and this is one of the hardest things for us to do because at the heart of our sinful nature is the fact that we think that we know best and we tend to listen to

ourselves before we listen to God but again and again and again God shows us that he is the one that knows best so whatever is going to happen in your life this week do you really think that God can't handle it do you really think that God will be surprised by it do you really think that it's going to be too hard or too frustrating or too disappointing for God to work together towards good is God really too small to handle the problems that you have of course he's not God can cope with all of these things because if you love God then nothing absolutely nothing is going to happen in your life that is not working together towards God's ultimate goal where he will bring you into his perfect home as in you will be his precious beloved child so sometimes we look at the past with huge regret sometimes we look at the present with confusion sometimes we look at the future with fear sometimes we look at the world with despair and yet here in these verses we are being reminded that in all of these things God is at work and he's working to give you a glorious future a future that is so so good and of course again this is where the whole Bible fits together so absolutely perfectly because what was the very thing that God said about creation when he finished he says it is good because God wants you to have good for all eternity and that's what he's working towards so our question was does God know what he's doing and the answer is of course he does and that's why when you look at verse 28 of Romans the key question is not can God work things out for good so when you face a difficult circumstance you say can God work this out for good that's not the question to ask because God can and God will the key question is not can God work things out for good because he can and he will the key question is do you love him let's pray God we can only buy before you and marvel at your work of salvation and we're just amazed that you would do so much for people like us who deserve so little and that's all because you are a great God and we pray that these words that we've been studying tonight will be written on our hearts that we would never doubt you that we would remember that you are working all things together towards something that is so good and we pray oh God that every single one of us would love you and that our love for you would grow and grow we do love you Lord and we thank you for everything amen