

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript.

**Teaching: Carlon Tschetter**  
**Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith**  
**Message: The Golden Chain**

**Transcribed Message**  
**June 20, 2021**  
**Romans 8:29-30**

There is a verse in James chapter 3 and verse 1 that I think of often. It's that verse that is something of a reminder. It's a warning of sorts. It says let not many among you become teachers because, James says, there will be a stricter accountability given to those are. That reminder becomes a little more weighty when we step into passages and chapters that down through the centuries have been understood in different ways. Good and godly people have pressed into these passages and into these truths and have come to some very different conclusions. But then again, I'm also encouraged when I read of what Paul said in Acts chapter 20 when he, as he departed from the elders at Ephesus in reminding them of his ministry and their's that was to come, told them that he did not shrink back in teaching them the whole counsel of God.

So that is what we embark on this morning. We're going to have to step in to the deep end of the pool for a few weeks. Some of you may choose to not get into that end. I hope you will. I hope that as we dive into these truths together that our goal and our hope will be to simply see what it is that God in His Word has said about these amazing truths that He has revealed to us. Whatever position you adopt with regard to these I want you to know that you're welcome at Covenant. These in my mind are not truths that divides fellowship. They should not. It is very possible to be on either side of these doctrines and still have fellowship with each other. Most importantly we need to have a humble heart and spirit if we do find ourselves at a point of disagreement with each other. And lastly, as I have said at other times, I promise in heaven I will not come up you would say .... I can't finish it because that not be a humble heart.

At the heart of Christianity is the good news of what God has done for us through Christ and it is amazing. Let's step into this salvation truth that comes to us at the end of this 8<sup>th</sup> chapter. I want to try to help us understand what I think are the issues that are

involved or at least some of the core things that are part of this. At the heart of this matter it seems to me we can start off and say a number of things.

First of all, we have to begin with an understanding of our condition. Our condition. If we are going to grasp what that is, there's one short little word that pretty much does it for us and it's the word "sin". that is what the Bible says is our greatest problem. We are born into this world separated from God and that sin has touched every aspect of our being. Every part of us has been impacted and touched by sin. Sometimes theologians reference this as total depravity. What they mean by that is that we are beyond self-help. They mean that we are as bad off as we can be. They don't mean that we're as bad as we can be because unfortunately we can always get worse. But it means we're as bad off as we can be. It means that there isn't anything that we can do of our own apart from the Holy Spirit. There's nothing that we can do of our own initiative that is pleasing to God. It's just not possible in our own human efforts to do that. Sin has touched us at the point of our emotions, of our will ,of our intellect. All of us has been affected by it.

On the other side of that then, there is the character of God. God's character. If I were to think of one word to describe God's character it might very well be the word "holy". It is the only description of the character and the attribute of God that is given in the superlative that when Isaiah in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter saw the revelation of God cried out holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. Shai Linne is a musician, a rapper. He is a pastor. He's written a book called *The New Reformation*. I read that this past week. This statement jumped off of one of the pages. "An over estimation of our spiritual ability has always led to an underestimation of God's holiness." When we overestimate who we are and the relative impact of sin on our life, then we end up diminishing the holiness of God. I really think when we think of the attribute of the holiness of God it is one of those attributes that I think we have the hardest time wrapping our minds around in terms of the absolute holiness of our God. That's why often times when I'm reading my Bible I'm like I can't quite understand that. Sometimes it is in the context of this expression of this attribute of the holiness of God. Our condition is one of being caught and bound by sin. God on the other hand is as far away is that you can get from that in that he is absolutely holy.

Then, because of that, the only solution of course is an outside rescue. Somebody has to come and save us. That's the glory of the gospel. That's what the solution is. We have a Savior. That's why Jesus came. When we think of that, we think of the fact that we have good news and we have bad news. That's what the gospel is. The gospel is a picture of bad news countered by good news. That's this salvation that we look at and we marvel at in terms of what God has done. Down through the centuries, as different people have grappled with these issues, they have come to some very different conclusions, as I said at the outset.

There are two schools of thought in particular that we need to talk about for a few minutes. From those two schools of thought, many debates have occurred down through the centuries of time. I want to give you this morning a 30,000 foot look at what I think of in terms of these two schools of thought. There's two principal people that I want to introduce you to. The first one is a man named Pelagius. The second is a man named Augustine. These men lived about 300 years after Paul wrote the book of Romans. Some 300 years after Romans, we had these two men in great theological debate and disagreement.

Pelagius was a British monk who basically believed in human ability. He was convinced that we could save ourselves, so we didn't need outside help. He taught salvation by works. Augustine was known as the teacher of grace and that was the moniker by which he became known. Pelagius, as he thought about Adam, said that Adam was born a mortal, that is, he would die whether he sinned or not. Adam was not created perfect. He was born as a mortal man. Pelagius said death is just a natural part of life. If you ever hear that statement, that is just absolutely, totally, completely false. Death is not a natural part of life. Augustine, on the other hand, said no, Adam was created perfect by God and Adam, if he had not sinned, would have been immortal. He would've lived on without interruption.

Pelagius said between us and Adam there is no connection. That's a rather startling thing and we will make some conclusions of the end of this, but he said there's really no connection between us and Adam. We are born without sin. We were born with a blank slate, and if we sin, it's because we've learned to. It's because of our environment. There's nothing in us that moves us that way. Well, of course Augustine

had read the book of Romans. In Romans chapter 5 and verse 12 Augustine said no, we sinned in Adam. Therefore, as by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, so death is passed upon all men, for all have sinned. That was Augustine seeing the necessary connection.

Pelagius said we are born with a human will that is totally and absolutely free. Now I'll say this because we'll step into this issue in later lessons, but this whole idea of free will between Pelagius and Augustine is very different than the debate that goes on today. Pelagius said we are born with a free will because obviously we are untouched by sin and so we can choose whatever it is that we want. Augustine, again having read Romans, said no, the human will is in bondage to sin. It is what we began with when we talked about the fact that we're as bad off as we can be. We're as bad off as we can be because we sinned in Adam and that carried over in the bondage of our will to sin.

Pelagius said grace is nice. It assists us if we need it. Since he was teaching salvation by human effort and self-reform, he didn't think we needed a lot of help from God, but if God gave it that was okay. Augustine said grace is essential. For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, but the free gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast. Look at that and you have two very different ways and two very different conclusions with regard to our condition before God and to what it is that we need. Here's the key. Pelagius and Pelagianism was not simply viewed by the early church as an error. It was viewed by the early church, rightfully so, as being heresy. There's a big difference between slipping into error and falling into heresy. The Council of Carthage, the Council of Ephesus, and the Council of Orange all condemned Pelagianism as being a heresy, as being something that was contrary totally to Scripture.

But here's the thing. This is what I want you to see. This is what I want you to hear. Pelagianism is alive and well. It's alive and well in America today. It is alive and well in churches today. There are pastors in pulpits this morning who are teaching Pelagianism. Anywhere that they're teaching salvation by self-effort, salvation by self-improvement, any efforts that are being lifted up as human potential to bring about change apart from God and His Spirit, that's all Pelagianism. It is alive and well in America today. Its statement might be like this. I'm okay, you're okay, let's not worry

about what the Bible says. It is a lot of negativity anyway. I'm okay, you're okay, and everything else is going to be all right too.

From that point on 300 years after Paul wrote Romans, you have this massive debate going on within the context of the church, if you will, between Pelagian and Augustine. Down through the many centuries, those debates in various forms continued. Erasmus and Luther got into this whole discussion. Then you had Jacob Arminius and John Calvin get into some of these issues. Not in the same way but there were some of these issues that carried over. Wesley and Whitfield debated this and it has gone on to where you probably at some point if you've delved into these truths have had a discussion or maybe even a debate with somebody about these things as well. As you look at your outline there, I simply said that today in the evangelical church you basically have denominations who have chosen to go one of two ways with this. To be more in line with the teaching of Arminius. Hear me clearly. Arminianism and Pelagianism are not one of the same, so don't misunderstand that. If you are Arminian this morning I'm not labeling you a heretic. I am absolutely not. But there are things that were part of that debate and that discussion that took place in those events times as well. so I just listed some of the places where these ideas are taught. "A" obviously stands for Arminian, Arminianism, Jacob Arminius. (Listed: Methodist, Nazarene, Assembly of God, Pentecostal, Church of Christ) The "C" in your outline stands for Calvin, Calvinism, Reformed theology. (Listed: Presbyterian, Reformed) And then "E" could be either. (Listed: Baptist, Lutheran, Evangelist Free, Episcopal) If you're from a tradition and you said well, I don't fit that, that's right. No church tradition ultimately fits necessarily strictly into every one of these. There are exceptions to all of these. Whichever side of this debate you end up on, as I think of these things much of it comes from where we put the emphasis. Where do we put the emphasis when we think in terms of the work of salvation that God has done?

I want to put before you 3 questions. How you answer these questions, it seems to me, determines much of your theology with regard to the doctrine of salvation. Is God the initiator, or is man? Is God the initiator of our salvation, or is that something that we initiate ourselves? It would seem to me that if you have been with us when we were in Romans 3, Paul made it pretty clear when he said there is none who seek after God,

no, not one. In the very first book of the Bible in Genesis, what happens when Adam and Eve sin? Did they go running after God to confess and say we've messed up? Please help us. No, they run and hide. What does God do? God is the one who initiates. God is the one who pursues. God is the one who goes and seeks after them, doesn't He? So, question number one: Is God the initiator or is man?

Question two. Did you choose God, or did He choose you? Did you choose God, or did He choose you? We will step into more of that, Lord willing, next week as we go deeper into Romans 8.

Third question. Free grace, or free will? As you process what the Bible teaches about these matters, do you find that your emphasis is more on the free grace of God, or do you find that your emphasis is more on the free will of man? These differences again do not need to be divisive within the body of Christ. Our unity is not based on our agreeing on every one of these points of discussion.

Here's what we're going to do for the next few weeks. We're going to, by God's grace and the Spirit's help, dive in and open the Word of God. We're going to dive into this Romans discussion especially verses 29 and 30. We'll just start this morning and we're just going to see what the Bible teaches about these things. If we come to a similar agreement, that is fine. If we come to a different point of agreement, that's fine. As long as we agree on what is the gospel and what it is that is necessary to be saved. Those are essentials.

Let's look at this understanding of the foundation of our faith. The foundation of our faith. We had already looked last week at that 28<sup>th</sup> verse, so I'm just going to comment just very briefly by way of review on this amazing promise of verse 28. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose." As we looked at that last week, we noted very simply that all of these things that are going on in our life, Paul's promise by the Spirit is that they're all working for good. Whatever it is that is happening in our life, we have a sovereign God who is providentially at work in all of these things. The ultimate promise is that it's for our good. It is the most comprehensive promise that we have in Scripture telling us that God leaves nothing to chance. He is working in all of these things. We have to remember and we have to step back and willingly say we don't always see what

that is at the moment. We don't have the answers that we would love to have in time, but all of those I believe will be given to us at one point in eternity. Just as Job walked through, as we commented last week, a horrible experience. His mind was filled with questions. God didn't answer all those questions by any means. In fact, God came back and asked him about 40 questions of His own. So we have this assurance, this promise that all of these things are working together for good.

Then that 29<sup>th</sup> verse we talked about the fact that this ultimate good and purpose is in view. "For 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." Here is God's master plan. Here is what God has said He is doing. This is the divine design that He has set forward and that is that we would be conformed to the image of His Son. But that does not mean that we're just kind of similarly like Jesus. That promise is not that there's going to be some kind of superficial makeover and when people first glance at us they're going to think we look a lot like Christ. No, we are going to be conformed to the image of Christ. This is going to occur from the inside out. This is the radical transformation that God has promised.

Paul speaks of at least a part of the process in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 18 "And we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." He's talking here about the process of sanctification in time. He's saying as we look into this Word, we're being transformed every day as this truth brings us closer and closer into a likeness of Christ. He is talking in 2 Corinthians 3 about this process that will ultimately lead to our being conformed to Christ. Peter says the same thing when he says in 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 3 "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence." Listen to verse 4: "by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desires." Think about what Peter just said. Peter just said that you and I are going to become partakers of the divine nature.

Now we need to be careful when we read that that we don't read into that that God is making us into little gods. He's not making us into little gods. Emphatically not. He's not populating heaven with little gods. Then what does he mean when he says we're becoming partakers of the divine nature? I think he's reflecting on the very thing Paul is talking about in Romans 8:29 that there's going to be ultimately this conforming of us into the image of Christ. We're never going to be omniscient. We're never going to be omnipresent. We're never going to be transcendent or eternal. There's all kinds of noncommunicable attributes that God has that we're never going to have. We're not going to be little gods, but we are going to be brought into conformity to Christ. There is always going to be a creature. There is always going to be a Creator. But listen. In the glory of heaven, the promise of verse 29 is that we are going to be without sin. We're going to be conformed to the image of Christ. We are for the first time in absolute purity of devotion and motivation going to love Christ. We're going to love God with all of our heart, with all of our minds, with all of our soul, with all of our strength. We've never done that obviously this side of glory. So that's what he is saying to us.

Look again at that 29<sup>th</sup> verse. He says so that ... in order that ... for the purpose of... that He (Jesus) might be the firstborn among many brothers. Firstborn is not a term of chronology. It's a term that speaks of His position of preeminence. Look at what he says. Jesus is our brother. Jesus our brother. Let that sink in. Jesus, our brother, is going to be lifted up as the preeminent one. We're all there because of Him. We're all there by His grace.

So now, look with me at this process. The process is given in verses 29 and 30. We're just going to give a very quick overview because we're going to jump into this in the weeks to come. Verse 29 again. "For those whom who 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." Before we're done, we'll all have memorized Romans 8:28-30 because we're going to be looking at these amazing truths for these next couple of weeks.

How is God doing this? How is God conforming us into the image of His Son? Look again and notice there are five active verbs that all go together. In that description



that we have in 29 and 30, five active verbs that go together. This is what God is doing in our salvation. It is not the only thing that He's doing in our salvation, but this is what He's doing. We know that there are other things. We've studied them in the book of Romans. You've seen them in other places in the New Testament. There is the work of conviction. There's the work of regeneration. There is the whole matter of redemption and reconciliation, propitiation. We have seen already in Romans other works of God in regard to our salvation. But here he is saying here are these five descriptive verbs that all go together that speak of what God is doing with regard to our salvation.

Notice secondly all of these verbs speak of the same people. This is very important. All of them speak of the same people. In other words, there is continuity from the beginning of verse 29 to the end of verse 30. There's absolute unity. There is this unbroken sequence. That's why this is sometimes called the Golden Chain. You start on one end of the chain and you get to the other end of the chain and it is connected all the way, not to be broken. The same ones that He foreknew at the beginning of the verse are the same ones that He's going to glorify at the end of the verse. It isn't some of the ones who were foreknown are glorified. Almost everybody who was foreknown, almost everybody made it to glorification. That's not what he says. He said it is everybody that He foreknew is also there at the end to be glorified. That should be incredibly encouraging. That's why oftentimes this Romans 8 has as one of its most descriptive words the word "security". He is talking about in essence the security of the believer. Those whom God has foreknown He's going to alternately bring to glorification. There are no drop offs. There's nobody bailing out. There isn't anybody lost along the way. He speaks to all of them.

Thirdly, this description covers the past, the present, and the future. The past, present, and the future. Look at the five verbs again. The two in the past of course are foreknowledge and predestination. Foreknowledge and predestination happened in eternity past. We'll look at this issue of foreknowledge and predestination. They happened in eternity past. Then you step into the present moment. You step in to space, time, history and you have calling and justification. So those happen in real time in our lives. If you're a follower of Christ this morning, there was a point in time in which you heard and responded to the call of Christ and were justified by faith in Christ alone.

That happened in time. Then the last one. Glorification. You step into eternity future and you look at what is to come in this completion of God's redemptive work.

Lastly, notice that it starts in heaven, it comes to earth, and then we're back to heaven. This golden chain, if you will, literally has its beginning in eternity past and it has its conclusion in eternity future and it covers all of time. What you have in Romans 8:29:30 is probably the most comprehensive statement in all of Scripture about what God is doing to accomplish our great salvation.

Look at what God is doing. These five verbs. I'm just going to comment very briefly on them. Foreknowledge. Predestination. Eternity past. That's what we'll look at, Lord willing, next Sunday. Predestination. another word that is nearly synonymous with it, is the word "election". We'll look next Sunday, Lord willing, at the mystery of election and see what it is that God says that He has done in eternity past.

Then you have the word "calling" which is more than just announcing of the gospel. Every Sunday at Covenant, there is a calling that is extended to anybody that is here, to anybody that is listening online. There is a presentation of the gospel, maybe more than once throughout our morning in which there is in that sense a calling to respond to this gospel. But this is not just a general presentation of the gospel. As we'll see, this calling that he is talking about is the calling of the Spirit of God when He opens our heart to the gospel and we believe. This is a calling that is more specific than just the general presentation of the gospel.

The fourth word is "justification". The entire book of Romans is about justification. We've been talking about justification at various points along the way. The book centers around the theme of being declared righteous – not made righteous, but declared righteous. This act by which God puts into our account the very righteousness of His Son.

Then finally glorification, which brings this glorious plan of salvation to completion. As Paul says in Ephesians 1, all of this is to the praise of His glory. All of it is to the praise of His glory. We take no credit for any of it. It's all because of the grace of God and it's all to the praise of His glory.

We're where we started. At the heart of Christianity is the good news of what God has done for us through Christ, and it is nothing less than amazing. What do we

take away from this? As hard as these truths are sometimes to step into, and as much as sometimes we may say I don't want to deal with that, the Spirit of God has seen fit to give us these truths. We may not fully understand or grasp them, which we will admit many times along the way, but there is here for us, I believe a word that calls us to be encouraged, to be encouraged that God is at work. It's by grace that we're saved. It's His promise to complete what it is that He has begun, what it is that He has started.

If you're a Christ follower this morning, if you've put your faith and trust in Christ already, then what you have here is a declaration of praise and thanksgiving and worship from your heart to God for what He has done for you. If you have not ever put your trust in Christ as your Savior, if you've never simply acknowledged before God that you're a sinner and that you can earn your way to heaven, because that's what the gospel tells us. Remember the gospel is bad news and the gospel is good news. The bad news is we've all sinned and sin brings death and separation. The good news of the gospel is Jesus came and He died for our sin. All we have to do is believe that what He did was enough. That's the gospel. Bad news. Good news. If you've never trusted Christ as your Savior before this moment, we extend the invitation, the call if you will, right now for you to trust Jesus and Jesus alone for the forgiveness of sin and for the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Father, we have this glorious privilege of stepping into Your Word and seeing the heart of our God on our behalf. Father, we want to be deeply impacted and changed by that. We want to be moved by Your Spirit to lift our voices in praise, to have hearts of adoration and thanksgiving, to have a heart for people around us who do not yet know Christ, a world that is broken and in pain that desperately needs to hear of the love of the Savior. Father, we're trusting You. We're asking You in these weeks to come as we look into these truths of Your heart for people who are lost just as we were, that You will do a great and powerful work in our lives and in the life of this church. We pray this in Jesus's name, amen.