

Losing your way as a Christian?

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[0 : 0 0] I want to show you a picture. That's it. It's not very clear. Can we switch off the lights just so you can appreciate this picture a little bit? Okay, this is a picture of a guy called Alex Honnold.

Anybody heard of Alex Honnold? Okay, he's one of the world's most famous free climbers. He's climbing on a 2,500-foot cliff in the Yosemite National Park without ropes.

He scaled that cliff with no ropes, no assistance, just his hands and his feet. Now, that is actually a sport. It's a thing. It's a recognized sport. It's called free climbing or solo climbing.

I needn't say that it's a risky sport, and I don't recommend that you take it up. Lots of people have died in attempting this. So, yeah, I don't recommend it as a hobby.

I'd much rather you take up the guitar or the piano, in fact, if you want a hobby. We could use that much more than free climbing. You can switch the lights on now. Thanks.

[1 : 0 1] But anyway, the reason I mention this crazy sport of free climbing is that I think it illustrates how many people consider the Christian life a slow climb up to heaven that at any moment could fall apart if you just put one foot wrong.

I wonder if that's how you feel in your Christian walk, if you're a Christian this morning. I wonder if your relationship with God at times feels like a free climb. You're making maybe some kind of progress, but you could so easily slip and fall if you just didn't concentrate.

And you could lose all that you've gained. Have you ever thought that? Have you ever wondered that? Have you ever felt that anxiety? I see some people nodding their heads. I think it's a common feeling amongst Christians, that anxiety, that I need to keep climbing.

I need to keep going. I could so easily slip and fall. You see, many people, even Christians, live with this anxiety regarding their relationship with God and regarding their eternal future.

And that's why this morning I want us to consider just two verses in Romans, which Paul writes, to take away any anxiety that a Christian may feel about their future.

[2 : 0 8] And so if you're not sure this morning about your standing with God or your future, I want you to listen very carefully to these verses, which are possibly some of the greatest verses that you'll ever hear in Scripture.

Romans 8 from verse 29. For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

And those he predestined, he also called. And those he called, he also justified. Those he justified, he also glorified.

Okay, so that's all I want to look at this morning. And I want us to see this morning five fundamental truths from these verses, things that God has done for the Christian that serve to guarantee their future beyond any doubt.

All right, so let's have a look at them. First of all, it starts with the words, God foreknew. He foreknew. Those he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

[3 : 15] God foreknew. He knew beforehand. That's what it means. Before what? Before what did he know? Well, before creation, before the world was ever made, before the universe existed, in eternity past, further back and we can even think, God knew who he was going to save.

That's what the Bible says. Now, right at the outset, when we look at this word foreknew, I need to clear up a common misconception that people often have about this word.

In the language of Scripture, to know someone isn't so much to know information about them, but rather it means to have a relationship with them, to know them intimately.

That's really what the biblical word know implies. And so this phrase, those God foreknew, he predestined, it doesn't mean that God predestined people because he knew something about them which caused him to want to save them.

No, rather it means before they were born, before they even had a choice, God chose to enter into a relationship with them. You see, he sets his love on them before they had any say in the matter.

[4 : 27] That's what the word foreknew means. I hope you see the difference here because that's the way God's love works.

He sets his saving love upon particular people before they've had any chance to earn it. And it's always worked that way. For example, in his relationship with the nation of Israel in Deuteronomy 7, you can turn there if you keep your finger in Romans, turn to Deuteronomy 7.

But we see this love of God, this foreknowing of God, this choosing beforehand right here in Deuteronomy with the nation of Israel.

Turn there to Deuteronomy 7. From chapter 7, verse 6. This is what God says.

This is him talking to Israel, right? For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples of the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

[5 : 37] The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you.

That's the reason. And just stop there. Because the Lord loved you. That's why he chose them. Notice, not because of anything special about them. There was nothing at all special about Israel.

They were just a bunch of people, right? They had nothing special about them. They were a bunch of people. Same as any other bunch of people. In fact, they were less than the same. They had less going for them than any other nation or group of people at the time.

But God didn't choose them because of who they were. No, he chose them purely because he had set his love on that group of people for no other reason than that he wanted to.

That's how his love works. God didn't, notice this, God didn't love them because of who they were. They became who they were because God first loved them. And that's how it works.

[6 : 35] God doesn't love people because of who they are. They become who they are because of discovering God's love for them. And we've got to understand that this morning about how God's love works.

Because that's also the way his love works today. It's always the way his love has worked. God's people. Today, the people who are in a real, living, active, vital relationship with their creator were loved by him before they were born.

Before they could do anything to earn it. And that, you see, that is the only place that we will ever see true unconditional love. In the very true sense of the word unconditional.

I mean, we often talk about unconditional love, don't we? We often talk about a very strong human love as unconditional. But the truth is, no human love is truly, truly, truly unconditional.

Is it? I mean, all human love, even the best love, even the most permanent and loyal love, still was inspired because of something in the beloved that caused them to be loved.

[7 : 44] It was conditional on that, at least that initial thing, that initial characteristic. But that's not God's love. See, God's love is not the same as human love. God's love is truly, purely unconditional.

Unconditional. And we know this because he loves his people before there's anything about them to love. And so that is the only place. If you ever want to experience or find unconditional love, that is the only place you can find it.

God's love for his people. Unconditional completely because he set his love on them before they were even a people. People who come into a relationship with God did nothing to earn that relationship.

And secondly, so that's the first thing, foreknew. Secondly, we see in consequence that they can actually do nothing to ruin that relationship after they've got it.

Because look at what the verse goes on to say, right? Verse 29. For those God foreknew, he also predestined. Predestined. Now, people often see these words and either think they're the same thing or get them confused or don't quite know the difference between what it means to foreknow and predestine.

[8 : 50] But really, you can think of it like this. Foreknowing refers to the motivation, the grounds of God's choice of his people, while predestination refers to the ultimate destiny.

I mean, that's what predestination means. It means exactly that. Destined in advance. The people God chose to set his love upon in eternity past, he foreknew.

He also, those people at that moment that he chose to set his love on them, he also decided and sealed their destiny in the future. God covered the whole spectrum of time in one moment for his people.

It's not like God chooses to love particular people and set his love upon them in eternity past, but then he has to kind of wait and hope that they eventually choose to come to him.

No. God's love for his people is such that he's not going to give us a chance to mess up our salvation. And so he predestines his people.

[9 : 52] He seals their eternal destiny before they're even born, before they have any chance to spoil it. Because let's be honest, if we could spoil our salvation, we would, wouldn't we?

If we could mess up our standing with God, we would. We wouldn't need an hour to do that. And what's more, think about this, if we could mess up our salvation, then our salvation wouldn't really be in God's hands at all.

It would be in our hands. But praise be to God that it's not. Praise and thanks be to God that he has already ensured the salvation of everyone that he has chosen.

Now I want you to think about, just think about, just two words we've looked at, which are life-changing if you understand them, aren't they? For new and predestined. For new, God loved his people before they were born, without them having to earn it, without them doing anything to earn it.

And predestined, God has already established their destiny so that there's nothing that they can do to mess it up. For new and predestined. Probably the two greatest words that we could ever hear.

[11 : 04] And it is those two words together that really give us the greatest truth that a human can ever know in this life. It does change everything.

The truth, the knowledge that not only were you known and loved and chosen by your creator and loved passionately, not just arbitrarily, but personally and passionately loved by your creator.

But also, not only are you loved by the creator of this world and the person who is in charge of it all, but he's already secured your ultimate destiny.

It's already sorted. It's already stamped, sealed, and approved. And nothing you can do can change that. If you know that, if you understand these two words, for, no, and predestined, and you understand that they apply to you, if you know that, it changes everything in your life.

It changes how you live day to day. It changes what you live for, and it changes how you relate to God. But I need to ask you this morning, do you know that for yourself?

[12 : 08] Is that a knowledge that you possess this morning? Ask yourself honestly. Maybe it's a knowledge you would like to possess, but you don't, or you don't know if you do. But do you know whether you are one of the people that this passage is talking about?

Because if you are, if you know that you're one of those people, then the rest of your life is set, and your heart is completely transformed. That is really the depth of the gospel message, and the heart of it, that if you grasp that, if you know that you're one of those people, as I said, everything changes.

But are you? Are you one of the people that is being spoken about in this passage? Because either you are or you aren't. And that's the most important question you could ever ask.

Well, there is a way that you can know if you're one of those people. And it's right here in this passage. We find it, in fact, in the very next phrase of the verse.

Have a look. For those God foreknew, He also predestined, and then He continues the sequence in verse 30, and those He predestined, He also called.

[13 : 21] So not only did God foreknow His people in eternity past, and predestined them for a definite future, but those same people are the ones that He calls in the present.

In history. In fact, right now, as the Word is preached in millions of churches and millions of pulpits, just like this one, around the world, and as the Gospel this week goes out into communities and into workplaces and into offices and into schools through the people that God has put there to share that message to the people around them, right now, through all of that, God is calling.

God is calling His chosen people who He predestined in eternity. And that's what the church is for, by the way. That's why God hasn't taken us home yet, because God uses the church on earth to call all those people that He predestined, and He won't rest until He's gathered every last one of them into His kingdom, and that is the moment that this phase in the world's history will end, when all of God's people have been gathered in, the people that He foreknew in eternity past.

God will not rest. He is working every single day. He will not rest until He's brought those people into His fold, into His kingdom, until He's gathered every last one of the people that He's set His love upon.

And He's doing that, as I say, every day through His Word being proclaimed and through His Spirit causing people to believe that Word, because you could have someone who hears the Gospel, who hears these amazing truths, and it means nothing to them, and that's because God's Spirit isn't working in them.

[14 : 53] You need both. You need God's Word and God's Holy Spirit. And through that, every day, God is waking people up from death to life. I was doing some chemistry research on the internet, because I've always wondered.

You see in the movies, often there's someone who's unconscious, and they need to wake him up. And so they put this chemical on a handkerchief or something, and they wave it in front of their nose, and suddenly the person wakes up.

So our only qualified chemist in the audience is shaking his head. But I read it was an ammonium nitrate. Possibly it doesn't work like that. Anyway, I'm going to go with it, because Wikipedia said it's true.

So ammonium nitrate apparently has this very, very strong odor. Is that right? Yes. Okay. I got something right. Well done, Wikipedia. It's got a very strong vapor, and if you put it on a piece of fabric, no one can ignore it, and apparently it's used to wake people up, and they just come out of their stupor, just like that, when they smell just the slightest vapor of this.

And it's just an illustration, but it's kind of the way God does things spiritually. And even if ammonium nitrate doesn't do it in reality, God certainly does it in reality, spiritually, with His Word and His Spirit.

[16 : 13] He wakes people up suddenly to eternal life. When those two things are combined, when God's Word is combined with God's Spirit, and they come into contact with one of God's elect who is still spiritually dead, at that moment, their spiritual senses are awakened, and they move from a state of death to life.

Jesus calls that being born again. And that is something that all true Christians can testify to, a time when God woke them up. Maybe when they were sitting in church, and suddenly it's as if the preacher's words were the very words of God speaking right into their soul.

It wasn't the preacher speaking anymore. And they heard the call of God on their life. And for some, they might not be able to put a finger on exactly when that was, but they know that they've been woken.

They are awake, spiritually. And they've moved from a state of death to a state of life. They've heard God's call, and they've responded. That is a Christian.

That is one of God's people. And in fact, they couldn't but respond when they heard God's call. Dr. David Seccom, in his commentary on Romans, writes this. It's a very, very interesting and very true verse.

[17 : 27] Christians are those who have heard the call of Christ to follow Him and have been unable not to respond. That's a great definition of a Christian.

I'll say it again. Christians are those who have heard the call of Christ to follow Him and have been unable not to respond. And so, in other words, the way that you know whether you are one of the people God has chosen is have you responded to the gospel call?

Not just have you heard it, but have you responded in faith and repentance? Have you believed it and have you decided to follow the risen Jesus as your Savior and your King? That is how you know.

And let me tell you, it is impossible for you to do that. It is impossible for you to respond in faith and repentance unless God has first woken you up. And if He has, if you've heard His call and you've responded to it, the reason why you have is not because of you, it's because God chose you to hear and respond before you were born.

Those He foreknew, He predestined, and those He predestined, He called. And when they respond, at that moment, we see next, He does something else. He justifies them, we're told.

[18 : 45] And that's the fourth truth I want us to see, justified. Now, the word justify literally means to line up to a standard, if you like.

So, you see it, the strangest place I've seen the word justify is not in a theological textbook or the Bible, it's in Microsoft Word. You know, you justify your text, right justified, left justified, center justified.

You know what I'm talking about if you use Word? Why is it using a theological word in a word processor? Well, it's not really a theological word, it actually just means to line up. It's become a theological word because in the Bible it means much more.

It means in the Bible not just to line up to the side of the page, it means to line up to God's law, to God's standard of right and wrong. And that's why it's a very deep and important word.

But really, it just means to line up. But you see, to be justified in God's eyes, to be justified, to line up to God's standard is absolutely essential to having a right relationship with Him and being part of His kingdom.

[19 : 51] Nobody who doesn't line up to the Creator's rule and standard will ever be part of His kingdom. And so justification in God's sight is really humanity's greatest need.

It's funny, one of my favorite stories in the Bible is when that cripple guy gets lowered in a roof to Jesus. You know the story? It's not a story, it's a true story. It really happened.

He got lowered and he knew Jesus could heal him. The first thing Jesus says is your sins are forgiven. Which isn't what this guy came for. He came to get his legs healed, but Jesus is trying to make a point.

The point is that this man's greatest need, he doesn't even know, this man's greatest need is to be justified more than to be healed. Your greatest need more than comfort, more than financial security, more than retirement security, more than anything, more than health is justification to line up to God's standard, to be right in His sight.

and human religion is really all built around trying to fulfill that need because I think every human being has that need deep down inside whether or not they know it.

[21 : 02] World religions are mankind's attempts throughout history to try to justify themselves, to try to line up to some kind of standard to please God and they set themselves laws to keep that they believe will line them up to God's standard.

That is religion in a nutshell. but the problem with this of course is how do you ever know that you've lined up correctly? How do you ever know that you've done enough? Because really human religion is just man's best guess as to what God's standard is.

And even if we know God's standard like the Jews of the Old Testament did, the problem is we've already broken it. And that's why nothing we do can actually justify us.

Nothing we do can line us up to God's standard because it's too late for that. That horse has already bolted. We've already broken God's law. Which means that if we're going to be justified, it can't come from us.

It's got to come from God. It's got to be given to us from outside of ourselves. You see, justification can't come from within ourselves. And that's what justification through Jesus is all about.

[22 : 10] That's why everything we do in this church is around Jesus. That's why we love to talk about Jesus. That's why we're excited about Jesus and not only Jesus as a person but what he did when he went and died on a cross totally intentionally which was a death which was a one-of-a-kind death because he was the son of God.

It was a death that paid for other sins, sins that he didn't commit, sins that other people have committed, namely God's people, the people that God has chosen before the beginning of time.

That's the only way we could ever be justified through what happened on the cross. Not by us trying to be righteous. You know, there's some theological words that people use called the difference between justification being infused and imputed.

You may have heard that before. But basically, what that means is that you can go to churches that believe, like I will say, the Roman Catholic Church which gets this wrong, quite horrendously wrong, which believes that God gives you some kind of righteousness and then your responsibility is to then use that righteousness to please him and to earn favor with him.

But that's not how justification is given. The Bible clearly shows that justification is imputed to us. In other words, it's credited to our account without us ever doing anything for it.

[23 : 33] It's already given to us because it's not even ours. It's the justification of Jesus given to us as a total undeserved gift. That's what justification is. And that's what God does for his people because he doesn't want you to live your life thinking you have to earn his acceptance by trying to justify yourself.

He wants you to know that you've already been accepted and justified already in the past because you've trusted in Jesus. Your justification is already done and dusted.

It's already secure. And that is the source of real, true, loving relationship with God. I mean, it's even the case in a human relationship.

Imagine you've got a husband and wife, say. And imagine, and sadly, this is the case in lots of human relationships where the wife feels that she needs to keep on earning the husband's love.

She needs to keep on doing the right thing. And only then, if she does it, the husband will love her or vice versa. The husband feels he needs to keep on earning the wife's love. That's a terrible way to have a relationship.

[24 : 36] No, a true loving relationship is when the person serves the other one because they know they already are loved and accepted by them. Not to earn love and acceptance.

You see the difference? And that's the kind of relationship God wants to have with his people and that's why he sends Jesus to give us a total guarantee that we are already accepted in his sight.

And there's nothing we can do to earn that and nothing we can do to mess that up. That's justification. And when you know that, which I hope you do if you're a Christian, when you know that you're justified, it's only then that you can know that your future is secure and you can start living for that future.

And which leads us to the final phrase in this verse, in verse 30. Those he predestined, he called. Those he called, he justified. And those he justified, he also glorified.

Glorified. Glorified. So here, at the end of this little chain of salvation that Paul writes down for us, we see the reason that God has done all that he's done.

[25 : 45] The reason God sent his son to die and earn our justification. The reason God predestined and called and justified people is because his ultimate goal is to glorify them.

To glorify them. Which is quite unexpected because often we turn the Bibles open, we read about us glorifying God and that's the reason we exist. To glorify God and enjoy him forever.

And of course, God deserves all the glory. That's right. But then we suddenly see that God wants to glorify us as well. Which is unexpected. But you know what? The word glorify, what it means, is very interesting.

If you look back at the original and the definition, it means to invest with dignity and worth. Or to beautify or to make valuable. So, us glorifying God means to realize, recognize the worth that he already has and to recognize the beauty and the glory and the value that he already has and live according to that and give him all the praise that he deserves.

But to glorify us means that he will invest us with dignity and worth and beauty and value. Now, where does human value come from? You know, why can we go kill a cow and that's okay and we can eat it but we can't do that to a human being?

[26 : 59] What's the difference? Why does the human being have value that an animal doesn't have? Well, the Bible is quite clear in that. It's because humans are made in the image of God and that's what gives us our value. We're made in God's image.

But unfortunately, we've fallen short of that image through sin and we've failed to bear that image. We've failed to reflect God's glory. And thus, we've made ourselves worthless, literally, is what the Bible says because we're not who we're meant to be.

We've lost our value and our purpose. When we're not reflecting God's image there's really no reason for us to exist. We're worthless. That's what the Bible says. It's hard, but it's true. But look again at what God has predestined His people for in verse 29.

For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. See, Jesus is the image of God.

Jesus, the Bible tells us, is the image of the invisible God. Jesus is all of God's attributes made flesh for us to experience and see and hear from. He is the human being that all human beings should have been and failed to be.

[28 : 06] Jesus is the human being that God made you to be and you failed to be. But God's plan of salvation is that His people come back to their original purpose by becoming like Jesus.

In other words, becoming what humans were meant to be. That's God's goal for His people. And you see, when we are what we're meant to be, then we will be fit for God's eternal kingdom in perfect bodies and in a perfect world.

And so you see the two sides of this. We've looked at justification, which means God already counts you as righteous, but then glorification means God is actually going to make you completely righteous and perfect and sinless in a perfect body, in a perfect world.

But more than this, more than this, this is an amazing thing we see in this passage, more than just being fit for God's new creation which works properly and for eternity, we'll be fit to be members of God's very own family.

We will be accepted into His home as brothers and sisters of Jesus. Verse 29, For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.

[29 : 26] All the more modern translation brothers and sisters because the original Greek word means both brothers and sisters. And you see that has always been God's ultimate goal for His people to include them into His very own family to not just look at God and praise Him in eternity but to experience first hand the relationship that exists within the perfect community which is God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

He wants us to experience nothing less than being part of that. Being part of that family and that is what it means to be glorified. But you know what the best part of this word in Romans 30 glorified?

You know what the best part of it is? I wonder if you spotted it. Glorified is it's tense. It's in the past tense. That's weird because it's referring to a future event.

But it's deliberate because it's so certain that in God's mind it's already happened. If you're His child because you can't mess up your future you've already been glorified in God's mind.

Because He exists outside of time He already considers His people as glorified. And so should you if you have trusted in Jesus if you've responded to the gospel call.

[30 : 51] You should see yourself as God sees you. Not as you see yourself when you look in the mirror. Not as you consider yourself but as God as you know God considers you if you're His child.

And you should live your life now as the person God has destined you to be in the future. Imagine you did that. Imagine how your life would be different. Think about how tomorrow this week would be different if you started living as the person you know God is going to ultimately make you to be.

Because you see in God's mind it's so guaranteed that it's as well as has happened already. Imagine you resolve this week with God's help to reflect the image of Christ in your life in your relationships in your office.

Because that is starting to be who you know you ultimately will be and that's what God's people are called to do. To live who we already are in God's sight. Because as Paul says in Ephesians God has already raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms.

And that is true reality for a Christian. That is where your life belongs. in Colossians it says you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

[32 : 11] And so set your mind there not here. Set your heart there. Focus your energies there. Pin your hopes and dreams and joys there.

But you can only do that. You can only truly pin everything in your life there if you absolutely are convinced that that is a guarantee. and that is exactly what you can be convinced of if you've been called by God if you put your faith in the gospel.

It's a guarantee. It's already done. And so I hope you see this morning that life for a Christian is no risky free climb up a cliff.

If you've responded to the gospel Jesus has already made that climb for you. He's already sitting at the top of the cliff and you are there with Him. And nothing nothing that you do can change that.

If you've responded to the gospel. But maybe you haven't. Maybe you haven't responded to the gospel. And if that's you this morning don't despair.

[33 : 13] It doesn't mean that God hasn't loved you and chosen you. I suspect in fact that the very reason you're here this morning is for God to challenge you to do now what you haven't yet done which is to respond to His call.

And so if you have heard God's voice this morning now is the time to respond. He's calling you to respond. And I invite you to pray a prayer in your heart after me which will be your response to the gospel if that is you this morning.

So let's bow our heads and spend a few moments in silence considering what we've heard from God this morning. Don't think about what you've heard from me. Think about what God has told you in His word.

And then after a few moments I'm going to pray a prayer that I invite you to follow along in your heart. I invite you now to pray with me.

Father God I come to you now and I thank you for calling me through the gospel of Jesus. I want to respond to that call now.

[34 : 25] I repent of my sins and I put my trust in Jesus. Transform me from this moment on by your spirit to be conformed to the image of Christ and give me the assurance of knowing your love today and forevermore.

In Jesus name. Amen.