

**International Sunday School Lesson  
Study Notes  
August 7, 2016**

**Lesson Text: Romans 8:28-39  
Lesson Title: Safe in God's Love**

**Introduction**

In Romans chapters 1, 2, and 3, Paul declares the whole world to be guilty, condemned, and lost in sin. In chapters 3, 4, and 5, Paul presents the good news of the justifying work of Jesus Christ in declaring sinners righteous. Then, in chapters 6 and 7, Paul explains the method of sanctification and how the believer is to live the new life received in Jesus Christ.

There remains one more important question to be addressed: will this justification and sanctification last? Paul writes the eighth chapter of Romans to answer that question, and the answer is: if you are in Christ Jesus, you are safe!

**Safe in the Knowledge God Gives (Romans 8:28-31a)**

Verse 28

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

Romans 8:28 is one of the most quoted and misquoted verses in the Bible. We often hear the first part quoted by itself without regard to the conditions mentioned in the latter part. This verse is not a crutch or a feel good wall to lean on when things get tough. This is a promise from God to the believer and should always be approached in that light.

Life can be difficult to understand because our knowledge of the future is limited (Romans 8:25-27). We may attempt to do our best to seek God's will and try to understand what is happening in life, but the truth is we often ask for the opposite of what we need.

Romans 8:28 begins with three promising words, “And we know.” “We” is speaking about Christians, the family of God. In the family of God there are some wonderful things “we know” that the unsaved do not know! The lost man may read this verse. The lost man may claim this verse. But this is not a promise to the lost man. It is for God's family!

“Know” is the Greek word *oida*, and implies “knowledge deriving from what we perceive with our eyes or discover by our senses.” Paul's point in using this

verb is “knowing all things work together for good” is not something we know by instinct. Rather, it is something we understand from observation. It is a well-known fact that we observe. Just as there are 12 inches in a foot, or 60 seconds in a minute, “we know that all things work together.”

“We know” does not mean every Christian absolutely knows this. It means “it can be known.” Tragically, many Christians refuse to believe God guarantees the believer's eternal security and the working out of His eternal purposes.

“All things” include bad, evil, unfair, difficult, and everything else that come our way in life. This verse does not mean “all things” are “good” or every detail in your life will eventually turn from bad too good. Paul is saying “all things” are turned by God for “good.” God is the one working and bringing good out of “all things.”

“Work together for good” means nothing happens in the life of the believer because of luck or chance. In the Greek world the word “work together” was used to describe a weaver carefully interlacing strands of colored cloth into a preplanned pattern. There may be times you cannot see a plan or purpose in what God is doing with you, but rest assured He has a plan and everything happening in your life is contributing to that plan.

The promise of “good” in this verse is not your happiness or contentment. “Good” does not mean the trial you are facing today will result in something “good” for you later on. “Good” in this verse refers to that which pleases God.

“To them that love God” refers to believers who want to see God receive His glory. Those who do not “love God” do not know Him. If you treasure Him, desire Him, and admire Him beyond what He does for you and gives you, then you “love” Him (Deuteronomy 30:6).

“To them who are called” is speaking of believers. Believers are referred to as “the called” throughout Paul’s epistles. “Called” refers to those who have heard the call to salvation and responded by faith. If you have been saved you are one of “the called.”

“According to his purpose” means God has His own high and holy purposes which govern the lives of those “called” to salvation. Believers may not understand God’s actions in their lives, but they should bear in mind that through it all God is working out a great purpose. No matter what the circumstances, that purpose will not be overthrown, and it culminates in final glory.”

Whatever you may be facing today or going through as a child of God, you are safe. There is no purposeless experience in the totality of your life. Every single isolated event, God in His wisdom uses to bring about His “purpose” for “good.”

## Verse 29-30

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

Romans 8:29-30, contain five important biblical words relating to the believer’s future based on the works of God in the past. Commenting on these five words, Doctor Woodrow Kroll writes, “Notice these are all past tense verbs, but their impact is not locked into the past. Actually, two of these works of God occurred in eternity past, foreknowledge and predestination; two occur in the present, calling and justification; and one will occur in eternity future, glorification.” (*Woodrow Kroll, The Book of Romans, Chattanooga, Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 2002, p.140-141*).

“Foreknow” means “to know beforehand.” But to use this definition alone in the context of Romans 8:28-30, would mean God knew before what our response to the gospel would be then acted accordingly. If that is all “foreknow” means in verse 29, that would make sinful man sovereign over the Creator. When Paul said, “For whom he did foreknow,” he is speaking about the intimate knowledge God has of His people. Referencing God’s “knowledge” of His people, the prophet Amos writes, “*You only have I known of all the families of the earth...*” (Amos 3:2). This does not mean God did not know about or have knowledge of other nations. It means Israel was known by Him in an intimate loving way that other nations were not known. Certainly God knows what every man will do in life because He is the all-knowing God. But His “foreknowledge” of His own is an intimate knowledge, which results in an abiding love that draws us to salvation.

The word “predestinate” means “to pre-determine, to mark out beforehand.” The word “predestinate” must not be confused with a random choice on God’s part alone for man to go to heaven or hell. “Predestination” is not favoritism. It is about holiness and Christ-likeness. In eternity past, God pre-determined those who are saved will one day be “conformed to the image of his son. Those the Lord “foreknew,” knew intimately, He appointed in advance to become like Jesus in their character. REMEMBER: Paul is teaching believers; he is not talking about the lost at this point. He is not talking about pre-determining some people to be lost.

God has planned for us a complete “conformity” to Jesus Christ, for He is “the firstborn among many brethren.” “Firstborn” implies a position of supremacy. It is the eternal purpose of God for believers to become increasingly more like Jesus Christ who is the Supreme Being in the universe.

“Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called...” moves us from eternity past to the present. As believers, we were foreknown and predestinated prior to our birth. Yet God does not manipulate us like puppets. Rather, He “called us.” God “called” us through the preaching of the Gospel. God “called” us through the work of the Holy Spirit. God “called us” through personal witness and a host of other ways. He “called us” in order that we might respond in faith and be saved.

*Teachers note: I am not saved because I was foreknown or predestined. I am foreknown and predestined because I was called and said “yes” to the Gospel by faith.*

“And whom he called, them he also justified...” means God treats repentant sinners as “righteous.” There is coming a future day when every believer will be “righteous,” but for now, God considers us “righteous” because of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Along with “called,” being “justified” is the present work of God to secure our future!

“And whom he justified, them he also glorified” moves us from the present to eternity future. The final step in the purpose of God for believers is the glorification of His people. The Apostle John said, “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure*” (1 John 3:2-3).

*Teachers note: Look carefully at the words “whom” and “he” in verses 29-30. “Whom” is a reference to believers. “He” is a reference to the Lord. Do I need to elaborate?*

### Verse 31a

“What shall we then say to these things...?”

“What shall we then say to these things...” is another of Paul’s rhetorical questions. “These things” could be a reference to the five previous truths of foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. However, it is more likely a reference to the summation of Paul’s teaching in Romans to this point: the depravity of man (Romans 1:19-3:20), justification by faith (Romans 3:21-5:21), and sanctification by the Holy Spirit (Romans 6:1-8:30). As the believer considers his condition prior to salvation, the change in salvation, and the course of salvation, he cannot miss the role of God in bringing him or her along this path. For all of this, every believer ought to be thankful and know we are forever safe.

## **Safe in the Assurance God Gives (Romans 8:31b-39)**

Paul asks four questions in verse 31b through verse 35, which relate directly to the security of the believer. There is nothing unspiritual about asking, “How can I be sure?” Paul realizes some believers will have doubts about their security and there will be false preachers and false prophets ready to take advantage of those doubts. As always, the answer to doubt and those who exploit it is the word of God.

### Verse 31b-32

“...If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

The first question is, “...If God be for us, who can be against us?” The emphasis here is not “who can be against you” but rather “if God be for us.” The word “if” translates in the Greek as “because God is for us.” “Who can be against us” does not mean we have no adversaries. Verses 35 and 36 list a great number of adversaries and things against us. But by this Paul means there is no adversary so great as to be able to stop the eternal purpose of God.

God has done everything “for us.” He came to us; He convicted us; He called us; He saved us; He justified us; He placed us in His family and on and on the story goes. It is one thing to know “God so loved the world” (John 3:16) and another to know God loved “me” (Galatians 2:20).

The psalmist said, “...*This I know; for God is for me*” (Psalm 56:9). Psalm 56 is a psalm in which the Psalmist expresses the fact he is surrounded by his enemies, taunted by his accusers, and then he remembers, “...*God is for me.*”

“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things” is Paul’s way of answering his first question. Paul says three things in his answer and it begins from the perspective of God the Father.

First, God did not spare His own son. Could it be Paul was thinking about the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22? God “spared” Isaac, but He did not “spare” His own Son. You must go to the Garden of Gethsemane, Pilate’s Hall, and the cross to understand the depth of love in the words, “spared not his own Son.”

Second, God “delivered Him up for us all.” “Delivered” is a legal word used to describe handing someone over to be judged and punished. “Delivered” is a word woven throughout the trials and crucifixion of our Lord (Matthew 27:2, 18, 26, 58). Judas “delivered” Jesus up. The priests “delivered” Jesus up. The

Jews “delivered” Jesus up. But the salvation and security of the believer rests entirely on the fact God the Father “delivered Him up for us all.” There again are the words “for us.” “For” is the Greek word *huper* (hoop-er) meaning “in behalf of, for the sake of.” The Gospel hangs on this little word “for.”

### Verse 33

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.”

The second question, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect?” is asked in courtroom terminology about charges being leveled against believers after God has declared them righteous. Those who are saved by grace are called many beautiful and purposeful names throughout Scripture. Here and in Colossians 3:2; Titus 1:1; and 1 Peter 1:2, Paul calls us the “elect.” Do not be ashamed of the word “elect.” It refers to those whom Christ has called and “chosen” to salvation. It is a beautiful word of security for the believer.

The “elect” are “God’s elect.” Paul’s question is, “If God justifies a sinner and frees him from the guilt of condemnation (Romans 3:19), “who” is going to “lay” or bring a “charge” against the one God has “justified?” What person or being in the universe greater than God is going to reintroduce this “charge?”

The prophet Isaiah wrote, *“He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up”* (Isaiah 50:8-9).

### Verse 34

“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

The third question, “Who is he that condemneth” is directed toward anyone who would have the audacity to think he could “condemn” one whom God has justified. God is actually the One Who has the right to “condemn” sinners. However, He will not do it where believers are concerned.

“Condemneth” in secular Greek was a legal term for pronouncing a sentence after reaching a verdict or decision against someone. Paul’s question, “Who is he that condemneth” means God’s children are not subject to “condemnation” because our sins, past, present, and future have been cleansed and forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, if someone were to object to God justifying us when we were yet sinful, it could not be a sinful person himself. Why? Because a sinful person has no ground upon which to object to God.

There is great security in knowing no one can legitimately object to God's method of justifying us.

"Who is even at the right hand of God" speaks of the sovereignty and dominion of Christ. The believer never need fear "condemnation" because the One in whom we have placed our trust was raised from the dead and "is even at the right hand of God making intercession for us." "At the right hand of God" means Christ power, authority, and dominion cannot be questioned.

"Who also maketh intercession for us" is a powerful truth for the believer. Jesus Christ is not sitting at the "right hand of God" to judge or condemn believers. He is there "interceding," praying for us. The One who should be condemning us and judging us is praying for us. He intercedes for believers, serving as our Advocate in the royal court of heaven (1 John 2:1-2).

### Verse 35

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

The fourth question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" seems to be the pinnacle of Paul's questions. Paul knew there may come a time in the life of the believer when we might wonder if anything could "separate us from the love of Christ?" If the believer could ever be "separated from the love of Christ" it would be death. So the question is, "Is there any force, anywhere, that can come between the believer and Christ?"

Paul lists seven enemies that have been the common foe, more or less, of Christians from the earliest days of Christianity. In fact, Paul himself had faced them all and knew from personal experience none of them had power to separate a soul from Christ.

"Tribulation" means "squeezed or placed under pressure." The word is used 45 times in the New Testament. It refers to the pressures from without. "Distress" means "confinement, a tight place, hemmed in." "Persecution" is any form of harassment. It basically speaks of suffering for the sake of Christ. "Famine" refers to "things withheld from you because you are a believer." While primarily referring to the withholding of food, it can apply to other things such as position, recognition, etc. "Nakedness" refers to "vulnerability, unprotected." It relates to exposure to the world around us. "Peril" is "danger from mistreatment." "Sword" is "a large knife used for killing animals." Here it used as being the "victim of a murderous plot."

### Verse 36

“As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

Before Paul answers his question about any of these things having the ability to “separate us from the love of Christ,” he quotes Psalm 44:22 in verse 36. Paul quoted this verse to magnify how God’s people shall endure affliction even as the faithful did in the Old Testament. However, the troubles and designs of our enemy and life itself is not sufficient to “separate us” from God’s love demonstrated at the cross of Christ.

The early Christians were in jeopardy of losing their lives day after day. Many were marked for death and were martyred for their faith. Believers today, in America and around the world, live in a culture which is becoming increasingly intolerant of Christianity. That intolerance will certainly result in mistreatment, prejudice, suffering, persecution, and eventual martyrdom.

### Verse 37

“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”

In the midst of a Christ rejecting culture and intolerance for Christianity, the child of God can take courage in the fact “we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” The word Paul chose to portray the idea of “more than conquerors” is the Greek word *hupernikao*, {hoop-er-nik-ah-o}. It means “to vanquish beyond, gain a decisive victory.” Paul’s point is we do not merely hold our own in the face of “all these things,” but “through him that loved us” we are drawn closer to Christ and become more conformed to His image.

### Verse 38-39

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul’s words in these two verses are a great doxology of praise to God for the security of his salvation. Paul has a firm conviction that no created thing whether it is present or future, close or distant, can “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The contrasts in words and worlds in this verse is amazing. Paul goes from “life” to “death” and from “height” to “depth.” When he runs out of words he simply says, “...nor any other creature.” No spiritual or supernatural reality of the visible or invisible world can “separate” us from God.

Remember, this “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” is more than taking us away from the fact that God loves us. This phrase “love of God, which is in Christ Jesus” refers to God’s justifying work done for you and me through Jesus Christ on the cross.

### **Conclusion**

No one but the Lord knows what challenge you are facing today or what grief weighs heavy on your heart. Chances are good that few, if any, know about your struggle. To say, “God knows” about your life is a biblical fact. God is omniscient and He knows everything. But sometimes we need to know more than simply, “God knows.”

Romans 8 is part of the more we need to know when life is challenging. We need to know He knew us before we knew Him. We need to know He had a plan for our lives when we had no idea why we were here or where we were headed. We need to know Someone has called us to salvation and Someone can change our life. We need to know once Christ has saved us, we need to never fear being lost again.

Take time and read Romans 8 again. Look at the key words carefully and prayerfully. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you and teach you to trust the purposes and promises of God. Do not attempt to figure out how things will unfold for you. But know this, you are safe in God’s love.

Amen.