

Predestination

Romans 8:30a

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I would thank God for every one of you in the body who has made the body more beautiful by the harmony of your own life. Because the harmony of the music comes from the harmony of your life, you know. And thank God for every one of you whether you make music or not, you make music with the obedience of your life and that's what makes the body what Jesus has made it among us.

Would you like, loved ones, to turn to last Sunday's verse and we could start at that point, Romans 8:29. I think that some of the questions that you would ask in a question time I got last Sunday and I would like to try to speak to those questions today. Romans 8:29, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren." For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined.

You remember how we explain that loved ones? If you just look at Isaiah 46, you'd see it there. Isaiah 46:9-10, "Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'" So you remember we said, "Whom God foreknows he predestines because in fact, God knows all things. He knows the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done." And so we said, you remember, "That God is able to do far more than our computers are able to do. He is able to conceive what is going to happen throughout the whole age and lifetime of the world because he has a great and a perfect mind."

And you remember we said that, "God sees that all as one great moment. It is as if he is on a very high building when a parade is passing by. We are down here on street level and all we can do is see what is passing in front of our eyes, but from a high building he is able to see not only what is passing but what has already passed and is going on and what is coming next. And so God in eternity can see everything in one great moment." And we shared, remember, that eternity is not endless time but is timelessness. And that is, of course, all that the old spaceship novelists are after and space fiction people are after, that somehow it is possible to break out of time into a timeless world. And that's the world that God dwells in and he is able to see everything in one great moment.

But, you remember, we said for our finite little sakes, he is prepared to show things in sequence. Now, he doesn't really himself operate in sequence, but he is prepared for our miserable little finite minds to reveal him in sequence and so I ask you to play the game with me too and to look at eternity, you remember. And it was that I did not remember to point out that eternity is a green Irish land. (I'll suffer from my wife for that silly joke.)

Loved ones, do you remember what I said, that if we could imagine precreation eternity then this verse means that God first of all, exists in love with his Son and the Holy Spirit. That's the situation. If there was any beginning to eternity, at that point God exists in love with his Son and his Holy Spirit. Then, if you could think of sequence at all in an infinite mind which is really silly to think of, but, if you think of it that way just so that we can grasp it; at this point in precreation eternity God conceives his plan to share that loving fellowship. The loving

fellowship that he has with his Son and the Holy Spirit with other beings who will be free like him and to whom he will offer the Holy Spirit, his own life.

God conceives the possibility of a beautiful family that would share the love of the trinity family. Then at this point -- and I just remind you for the sake of being philosophically correct that it's silly to talk about points and eternities -- but, at this point, he conceives they will be capable of refusing the Holy Spirit and rebelling against him. He's made them free like himself. And so he conceives, they will be capable of refusing the Holy Spirit and rebelling against him. At this point, he conceives the need to do something about that, to put the rebellious hearts in his son Jesus and destroy them there. And at that same point, his Son once accepts the cross in his Father's heart. And I have put here some scripture references that otherwise are difficult to interpret if you don't see this truth. But at that point God conceives the need to do something about these rebellious hearts. And he conceives the need to put them in his son Jesus, and destroy them there, and his son Jesus accepts immediately that cross.

At this point, God conceives that he can give the Holy Spirit only to those who accept their position in his Son. So he conceives only those who accept what I have done to them in my Son, for them, will I be able to give the Holy Spirit because they're the only people who will be safe to possess the Holy Spirit. At this point, he conceives that he must withdraw the grace of light and a penitent heart from those who refuse his son's spirit. In other words, God begins to conceive, to whom can I give the Holy Spirit and from whom must I withdraw even the grace of penitence and a soft heart? And it's to the people who refused his son's spirit.

At this point, he conceives the plan for the first two free moral agents, Adam and Eve. He knows them better than they know themselves, foreknows what decisions they will make -- but refuses to compromise their free wills by preventing those decisions. So, God conceives the first two free moral agents, the first two particular people. And he conceives and he knows them better than they know themselves so that he is able to foreknow what they will do. But he refuses to prevent their action. Even though it is against him, he refuses to prevent it because he wants to preserve free will. Because eventually he wants a group of people who want to love him. Not who have had to love him or be forced to love him. At this point, he foreknows all the people that will be born, how they will bring up their children, and how they will all respond to his spirit.

And that's the difficult one for most of us. But, God foreknows all the people that will be born, how they will bring up their children, and how they will all respond to his spirit. Which is reasonable, in a way. If his great mind is able to conceive this complex world, surely his great mind does not need to play out the act; his great mind is able to foreknow. And whom he foreknows, he predestines to be conformed to the image of his Son. And then at that point time begins, in Genesis 1:1 he creates the heavens and the earth.

Now loved ones, one of the questions that one person shared with me last Sunday is one that probably a lot of you won't have trouble with but I'll repeat it, as some of you may. He said, "Does God not foreknow us all?" And, I'd like to point out to you how that question became real in his mind. You see, if you go back to Romans 8:29, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." And so this brother was asking, "Well, those he foreknew he predestines, well what about the rest? I mean, does he not foreknow them too?" Well, you see what this verse really means, whom he foreknows will receive his Son's spirit, them he predestines to be conformed to his Son's image. That's really what that verse means.

God does foreknow everybody but he foreknows who of us will respond to his spirit, who will be willing to receive his spirit, and those he predestines to be conformed to the image of his Son. The others he can't touch because they don't want to be conformed to the image of his Son because they don't want to receive the spirit and God is able to foreknow that. And so the ones he foresees will receive his spirit, he predestines them to be conformed to the image of his Son. Maybe it's good to make the point that "pre" means "before" and he predestines them in the sense that he destines them for conformity to his Son's image before creation, not before foreknowledge, you see that? Meaning, it's because he foreknows them and foresees, "Ah, that person will receive my spirit. Alright now I destine him to be conformed to my Son's image."

So, it's really the fact that God looks at us all, can conceive of all of us as being alive today, foreknows the decisions that we will make, the contingent decisions we will make, foreknows how we will respond to his spirit and then he destines us to be conformed to his Son's image. A better translation of "proorizo", the Greek word for "predestined", a better translation is "he designs", he designs us. So, God foreknows how we'll respond to his Son's spirit, that's our free will response. But he is able to read our free will and he designs us to be conformed to his Son's image.

That's a great encouragement for those of us here who have many rough situations in our lives. Many of us here have rough marriage situations and many of us have very difficult and trying career situations. Many of us here are having hard times in our own lives. Loved ones, do you see that God foreknew that you would receive his Son's spirit and those things that are happening to you are not chance. God designed your life to make you like his Son, because he knew you would be willing to receive his spirit. Those things in your life, those hard things, are not things that have slipped through while God wasn't looking. Those are things that the Father has lovingly filtered through his hands and his fingers. And he's allowing to come upon you only the things you are able to bear. And those are carefully designed. Loved ones, there is no place for us thanking God for all the good things that he is giving us and then putting up with the others or resenting them. Those have been carefully allowed and in a detailed way God has designed them to conform you to his Son's image. So that's part of the truth of that verse.

Now, another brother last Sunday said, "But I have a person, I have a friend, who uses that very argument of God's foreknowledge to excuse his own passivity. Because he says to me, 'Well, listen, if God knows everything why should I bother doing anything, I mean, it's going to happen anyway.'" And I think loved ones, that's the kind of trick position many of us find ourselves in from the point of view of the dialectic, of the truth. Well if God knows everything why should I bother to do anything because it's going to happen anyway? Now do you see, that that is confusing foreknowledge with foreordination? Foreknowledge is the ability to read a person's mind and to read a person's character and then to project that 10, 70 years hence -- so that you know what they'll do. But foreordination is making them do it irrespective of whether they want to or not.

Now loved ones, we're not used to making these distinctions, I think, because we don't use these terms often in everyday life but foreknowledge is not foreordination. In other words, in planning a shopping mall, foreknowledge is needed. You have to do polls of some kind to find out how many other shops there are in that area, to find out how many residents there are that will use this shopping mall, to find out how accessible that shopping mall is to the rest of the cities. You need to use foreknowledge. And then you plan the shopping mall in the light of that foreknowledge, but that does not mean that you made every person who came through those doors, come through those doors. You didn't. They came through of their own free will.

Every one of us has used foreknowledge in planning the educational program for someone else -- either advising them or if we have children in actually planning for them or if we're counselors and actually counseling the mentored. And we've used foreknowledge, we've said, "Ah, that person has that kind of ability and has that kind of talent. Now, they should have this kind of training." But, loved ones, that does not mean that we made them study five hours a day or fail to study five hours a day. We used our foreknowledge to design a course that would be suitable for them but, that does not mean we made them do it. In planning a vacation, you use foreknowledge, you don't just wait until the boss says, "You're free," and then you go out and say, "I'm free." You don't -- it's a wasted two weeks. You use foreknowledge to plan your vacation and you use foreknowledge to plan somebody else's vacation, but that does not mean you made them lie on a beach in Acapulco and sun themselves all day. In other words, foreknowledge is different from foreordination.

Now, it is important, I think loved ones to keep that distinction clear. Now, I think where we get into difficulties is we see that in regard to ourselves because our foreknowledge is so imperfect that it is often wrong. And so, we can see how our foreknowledge is not foreordination, but it's when we transfer that over to the Father because he has an infinite mind, his foreknowledge is absolutely perfect and so we have a tendency then to say, "Ah, his foreknowledge is foreordination." But loved ones, it isn't. Foreknowledge, however perfect it may become, is still foreknowledge. It is not foreordination. It is not making a person do what they don't want to do. It is foreknowing what they will do.

Now, it might be good loved ones, to just look at two issues then involved in that. You know fine well, as I do, that the human mind rebels against being a creature, it hates that idea. The human mind hates the idea of its creatureliness and it rebels against the idea that anybody but it could know all that's going to happen in its life. And the human mind rebels in a creaturely way against the possibility of the Creator possibly knowing what decisions we're going to make next year. And so the human mind rejects the idea of that and it very plausibly argues, wouldn't it be far freer if the Creator didn't know what decisions we were going to make and as if this were just a great free wheeling, absolutely unknown universe where we would just make our decisions, nobody would know what was going to happen and we just play the game like that until it turns out at the end. And we'd play a great dualistic game and who knows who would win? Maybe evil would win, maybe good would win.

Well, do you see loved ones, that it's really a rebellious attitude to the way the Creator has arranged the world? He has not arranged it to be a chance kind of game like that whereby maybe the good ones might win and maybe the bad ones might win. The Father has foreknown the thing, has seen the way we would act and has brought in various corrections so that the thing would not be utterly and absolutely destroyed and yet so that those of us who want our own way will be able to get our own way, but so that his final plan for the universe will still be sure. And you see that we cannot make reality what our imperfect self-willed little minds want it to be. We can only make reality what God has revealed himself to be and he has revealed himself to be someone who knows the end from the beginning and who can foreknow.

Just one other side that I think we should notice, that attitude of passivity, that says, "Well God knows what I'm going to do, so what's the point of doing it? Just sit down here. It'll happen anyway." That kind of attitude, you can see is really a God defying attitude, isn't it? It's really a God defying attitude. It's an attitude that challenges the wisdom of God. It's an attitude that accuses him of not doing it the right way and I'm going to beat you anyway. It's not

an attitude of trust in the Father.

It's like being in a huge maze, you're in the center of it and you have to find your way out. And there's an infinite mind that knows which corners you're going to turn and so you sit there and you say, "Well, he knows. He knows anyway what I'm going to do, so I'm just going to sit here." Then the infinite mind says, "I knew you'd do that." And then you sit there for awhile and you say, "Oh well, I'm tired of sitting here. So, I'm going to — well, I'm going to turn a few corners." And you've just turned the same corner and the infinite mind says, "I knew you'd do that." And then you say, "Well, then I'm going to just sit down if you know it anyway, I'm going to sit down." And then the infinite mind says, "I knew you'd do that." And then eventually however dumb we may be, eventually, we look up and we see this is dumb. My job is to get out of this maze and the only way the plan for my life is going to come about is me doing what I've to do. And it's the job of the infinite mind to foreknow. It's not my job to try to second guess him, or to try to argue with him that he hasn't the right to foreknow, or to try to challenge him that he's predisposing me one way or the other. I have to believe what he says, that he is a free loving Father, that he is not predisposing me, that the reason why Jesus had to come at all was because he had given me free will to do what I want and that all he does is, he is able to read me better than I am able to read myself.

But loved ones, finally, I think you have to come to that position. It is very difficult to argue yourself into any position but one of challenging God, if you start trying to make foreknowledge foreordination, which it really isn't. One brother last Sunday said, "Well, why would God want to know all that?" Well I am sure that the Father doesn't sit brooding upon it all and I'm sure he's working with us with all his heart so that the whole thing will come about in a real way that has integrity in it. But one of the reasons the Father knows it all is because that's his nature. He's omniscient. He is just a God who is able to conceive of everything at once. The real miracle is that he has made free willed, independent people. People who could have free wills, people who can exercise their free wills independent of him, that's the real miracle. It's no amazing miracle that he's able to read us and foresee what we'll decide.

Loved ones, really, the truth probably is this: that those of us who are responding to his Spirit find tremendous stability and reassurance in the fact that he knew we would do that and that he has carefully designed every event and circumstance in our lives to make us like his son Jesus. And the truth probably on the other hand is, those of us who are not responding to his Spirit are rebelling against his right to foreknow and his right to rule the world. And we're rebelling against our creatureliness. And that's really our situation, it's one of rebellion. Is there any way of knowing what you're doing, because at this moment the Father foreknows what you are going to do in the rest of your life. Is there any way of knowing what you are foreknown as doing? Are you foreknown as one who will receive Jesus' spirit and will be conformed to his image or at this moment in eternity has God foreknown you as someone who will reject that Spirit and who will go on your own way and destroy your own life forever? Because that's really -- it's us that does it.

Well loved ones, there is. There are certain works God does in a man or a woman's heart, that show that that person is heading either toward life or towards death. In other words, is there any way of knowing whether the Creator of the universe has foreknown that you will go to New York this coming week, or this afternoon? Well, if you were on a bus going to the airport there's a much greater chance that you are foreknown as somebody who's going to New York than if you were sitting at home. In other words, if you're on the journey somewhere there's more of a chance that you are in fact known as one who is going to receive his Spirit.

Now, God has outlined some of those works and that's the next verse, loved ones, if you'd look at it. Romans 8:30, "And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified." So, those whom God foreknows he predestines and then between the foreknowing and the predestining are these three experiences at least: you're called; you're justified; and you're glorified. First of all, if you are foreknown by God as one who will receive his Spirit, he has looked into your will and he knows the way your will is going to decide, you'll have experienced being called by God.

Now, what is God's call? First of all, it might be good to see that it comes to everybody. And those who are foreknown as receiving his Spirit are those who have responded to his call, but the call itself comes to everybody. You remember, you could look it up maybe afterwards, but Matthew 22 is a chapter where Jesus talks about the king, you remember, the marriage feast and he went out and invited everyone to it. And they refused. And then he sent the servants out into the highways and the byways and told him to invite the poor and the downtrodden and invite them. And then Jesus finished the parable by saying, "Many are called but few are chosen."

So, loved ones, all people throughout the whole universe receive this call, so that we do not have specifically ourselves. That is something that all of those who are foreknown as responding to God's spirit share with everybody else -- even those who are foreknown as rejecting his spirit. So, everybody receives his call. There is no one that doesn't receive it. What is his call? His call is this, "Stop living your life for yourself. That physical and mental life that you have is only temporary. Start living your life for me and for my purpose in the world and I will give you my own life, the Holy Spirit, so that you and I can live forever together." That's the call.

How does the call come? Well, in various ways, but one way is, sooner or later the truth dawns upon you that there must be an intelligent mind somewhere behind the order and design in this universe. That's often the way the call first comes to us. You're walking along the street or you're driving along and suddenly it dawns on you, "Yeah, this all can't have come about by chance. Even if evolution is true somebody must have made the thing that evolved." And suddenly it dawns upon you that there must be an intelligent mind behind the order and design of this universe. For many of us, the next step in the call is a sense that we should be living our lives differently from what we're doing but we can't seem to do anything about it. Just a growing sense that we should be living our lives differently from what we are but we can't seem to do anything about it.

For many of us, another step in the call is a growing conviction that Jesus Christ probably is the Son of the Creator of the universe. And that he obviously believed that some evil part inside us was destroyed with him on the cross. That begins to grow inside us as a deep conviction. We begin to sense, "Yeah, this Jesus Christ is different from Buddha and Muhammad. He seems to be what I would imagine the Son of the Creator of the universe would be. And he obviously senses very strongly that his death is some way connected with me. And in fact, that there's some evil part of me that is preventing me living life the way I should that was destroyed with him on the cross." For many of us, that's a further step in the call.

For many of us then, there's a sense inside us that unless we do receive some supernatural power such as the Bible seems to describe the Holy Spirit to be, unless we receive some supernatural power like that, we cannot possibly be like God. And we cannot possibly please him. For many of us, loved ones, those convictions and those vague sensings inside us have been the call of God.

Loved ones, if you've had as much as that, do not expect some other supernatural event or voice. That is part of the call of God to you. And now the decision is yours. And that's it, loved ones. If you've received as much of a call as that, then the ball is now in your court. And if you ask me, "Well, Pastor, can you tell me how I can know if I'm foreknown as one who will receive Jesus' spirit and be conformed to his image or not or go into eternal hell and into either darkness or loneliness forever, how can I tell that?" Loved ones, I have to throw it back to you. The only way to tell it is, what have you done with the call so far? Really, really, that's all I can suggest. It's the same as the trip to New York; how can you tell you're going to be in New York or not? Well, how have you responded to the bus coming by your door, or how have you responded to the fellow who has come over to check in your bags? How have you responded to the first few moves towards you, that the Creator has made? And really that's it, loved ones, because the Father said this, just very plainly, loved ones, "Behold, I have set before you life and death; choose life that you may live." And he just made it dead plain, loved ones, that it's our choice.

He can foreknow, it's his job to foreknow, just as it's the job of a father to foresee how the children are going to behave, it's the job of a director to foresee how a business is going to go, so it's the job of the Father to foresee and foreknow, but loved ones, the decision is yours, really. And I would just encourage you to be real about it.

You can say, "Well brother, I haven't made many moves towards it so far but I'm going to." But that's just silly, it's silly. Well, you can see it's meaningless, it's meaningless. I refuse to check in my bags, but I'm going to get to New York. I haven't stepped on the bus yet. I've let it go by. But, no, I intend to get to New York. It's not possible. In fact, dear ones, it is a great existential moment in your life. That's it. It is your decision. God sets it before you. Of course, I have to be just honest with you that here we've had a unique opportunity, I think you agree. We've had a unique opportunity. We'll look back - do you realize? We'll look back on these days. Now some of the older people here will agree with this. But we kind of think it will never end. But we'll look back on these days, and we'll think of these as remarkable days, incredible days of opportunity. Some of you loved ones will go off to other towns and other cities. You'll marry and get jobs elsewhere, and will look back to these days as golden days. Incredible days when we saw one body of Christ that seemed to look like the body of Christ and some fellow talked to us about Christ in a way that we could kind of understand. And loved ones, these are unique days during which you have received God's call. So I would encourage you to be real, just real, don't be fear ridden, just be real about your response. But what you're choosing today, governs what you will be tomorrow. You know that, just in a temporal way. But you can see how true it is in an eternal way. Let us pray.