

GOLDEN CHAIN or IRON PADLOCK?

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Romans 8:28-30 traces God's realized purpose through the order in which it was accomplished. Each verb in this order of salvation is in the aorist tense, which refers to completed action. Yet God's plan may be aborted at any point, just as the six steps of human responsibility in Romans 10:14-17 or the sequence of Romans 5:3-5.

We have a choice and we must continually submit to his purpose. Paul "speaks as one looking back from the goal, upon the race of faith," wrote Wesley. Final salvation is reviewed from finish to start, as seen from God's perspective.

While the plan of salvation is certain, the security of the believer is conditional. It cannot be inferred that all who start will finish. Rather, those who do finish will go through this sequence. Wesley explained that Paul "does not affirm, either here or in any other part of his writings, that precisely the same number of persons are called, justified, and glorified. He does not deny that a believer may fall away and be cut off, between his special calling and his glorification. Neither does he deny that many are called who are never justified. He only affirms that this is the method whereby God leads us, step by step, toward heaven."

Yet from the time of Theodore Beza, Calvin's son-in-law, these five verbs of Romans 8:28-30 were considered to be an unbreakable chain. God foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. In 1591 William Perkins wrote *A Golden Chain*, which was dedicated to Theodore Beza and which contained "the order of the causes of Salvation and Damnation." This book traced the order of salvation from the eternal decrees to the final consummation of all things. The doctrine of double predestination was central. Perkins claimed to defend the Calvinist doctrine that "he hath ordained all men to a certain and everlasting estate: that is, either to salvation or condemnation, for his own glory."

As early as 1612 Arminius rebutted this logical chain of Perkins. Perkins had claimed that the failure of the believer to persevere meant his faith was only temporary and therefore he was not elect. Arminius argued that his own doctrine was effectively no different from Perkins; that the believer can really "fall from that very grace wherewith God embraces him unto life eternal" [*Works of Arminius*, 3:460]. According to both Perkins and Arminius, if the believer does not persevere, such a person proves to be non-elect. The difference is that Perkins taught that believers persevere because they were elected.

Arminius taught that God elects believers whom he foresees will persevere. Thus, the logical chain is not deterministic.

Colin Williams wrote that Wesley's emphasis on the doctrine of prevenient grace broke "the chain of logical necessity" which seemed to be the inevitable consequence of the doctrine of original sin. In his debates with unconditional predestination, Wesley most often employed this concept of preliminary, enabling grace.

Yet while Calvinists have continued to teach that Romans 8:28-30 constitutes a golden chain, which cannot be broken, by their own definition the chain actually has only one link.

First, they conflate foreknowledge with predestination. Fredrick Godet explained that if "foreknowledge" meant to destine beforehand, then foreknowledge would have the same meaning as "predestinate" in v 30. The particle "also" would not then carry the implication of a gradation from one level to the next.

John Murray attempted to salvage the Calvinistic presupposition by declaring that there was a distinction between the two words. Murray said that while foreknowledge means to choose, "it does not inform us of the destination to which those thus chosen are appointed." According to Murray, *predestined* supplies this lacking information. Yet it is preposterous to advocate that God would choose without any purpose in mind. Murray has not avoided the conclusion that both words amount to the same thing, if the Calvinistic definition is accepted.

Second, James Montgomery Boice declared that God's call is an irrevocable covenant. In his commentary on Romans 11:29, Boice wrote that "call" is synonymous with predestination or election. The third link in the golden chain was God's calling. Now it is also conflated, so that whether the word used is foreknowledge, predestination, election, or calling, the meaning is still deterministic.

Third, John Murray wrote in *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* that it makes little difference whether the effectual call or regeneration comes first. Logically, the elect were saved when in the counsel of God he decreed their selection. Faith, then is the revelation of that election and it comes *after* regeneration. Thus, the third and fourth links, calling and justification, are conflated. J. Agar Beet raised a valid question when he asked if salvation was by faith or by decree. He wrote,

Some have supposed that, although salvation is proclaimed for all who believe, God has secretly resolved to bestow only upon a portion of the race selected by Himself those influences without which repentance and faith are impossible. If so, salvation is limited, not really by man's unbelief, but by God's eternal purpose.

Finally, since the Calvinistic teaching on the perseverance of the saints affirms that final salvation or glorification, the fifth link, is unconditionally assured for those who are justified, the fourth and fifth links are conflated.

Thus, in reality, for Calvinists the golden chain has only one link. Salvation is by decree; predestined for the elect. Nor is there any golden chain of salvation for the reprobate. Only an iron padlock.