

Romans 5:1-11

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

As we continue to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the recognized beginning of the Reformation, we are moving this morning from Martin Luther to John Calvin who was born eight years before Martin Luther posted the 95 theses on the doors of the cathedral in Wittenberg. Calvin originally trained for the priesthood, but as legend has it his father moved him to law school, believing he could make more money as a lawyer.

This move in schools also ended up giving Calvin more time in a academic setting and while in school he was influenced by Humanism, a European intellectual movement. At the age of 24, John Calvin experienced what he described as a religious conversion that caused him to break from the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1536, at the age of 27, he published the first edition of *The Institutes of Christian Religion* which was a defense of his faith and a statement of the doctrines understood to be true by the reformers. His final version was published in Latin in 1559 and consisted of 4 books and 104 chapters. It was from Calvin that John Knox gained the knowledge of Reformed theology and polity that he used as the basis for forming the Presbyterian denomination in Scotland.

John Calvin had a brilliant mind that was able to take a systematic approach to Scripture, interpreting it into reformed theology. Two of the theological concepts he is most famous for are predestination and election. The strongest case in Scripture for Calvin's understanding of predestination and unconditional election can be found in:

Romans 8:28-30

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

This is the Word of the Lord...

The fancy Latin term is: *ordo salutis* – the order of salvation.

This text is used as the best example of something called “the golden chain of salvation” where God’s divine foreknowledge links with God’s predestination. Verse 30 then carries this predestination through calling, justification, and glorification.

The question, of course, is: does predestination and foreordination come before foreknowledge and election? Does God look down the halls of time to see who believes in God for eternal life, and then choose those people to be the objects of grace and love? And if so, does that make God subject to the free will of humans?

The answer, of course, is that it depends on what time the train leaves the station. Mine left right after “this is the Word of the Lord.”

Predestination is a theological concept that Calvin was pushed to expound upon. Martin Luther also found great relief in predestination, but when he was asked to explain more about why God works this way, he simply said: it is a mystery that God has not yet revealed (try putting that on your final exam).

Both Calvin and Luther saw predestination as good news. For them they saw it as a relief from the late medieval anxiety over whether or not one would achieve salvation. They didn’t expect people to be overly troubled by it.

The first time I ever took Will to the eye doctor, I was so proud of myself for getting him in there early. I’m from a long line of “can’t see a darn thing” so I made sure I had Will in there at a relatively young age.

This is quite a few years ago now, we sat in the waiting room and I told him about some of the things they were going to do – reading letters and numbers on the wall, looking through a cool machine that had dials on it – trying to keep things upbeat.

But I noticed he was getting more and more nervous sitting in his seat, which isn’t really like him. I tried to assure him that everything would be okay, there was nothing to be

nervous about, but I could tell it wasn't working. I couldn't figure out why my good news of getting him in to see the eye doctor was such bad news for him.

Then I realized he was looking up at something, and when I turned and looked there was a monitor above my head giving a vivid description of how they do cataract surgery. It showed an image of an eye ball, and then the cloudy lens inside the eye being pulled off and replaced by an artificial lens.

The poor kid thought that any minute they were going to call him back to peel part of his eyeball off! Definitely bad news! (Unless you need cataract surgery)

Those who don't see predestination as good news, worry about who has not been chosen by God. That is not a part of the doctrine that Augustine, Luther, or Calvin ever wanted to get caught up in.

Simply put, predestination is a good thing.

The doctrine of predestination functions for us today, as well as it did for Luther and Calvin, to safeguard the doctrine of justification by grace. We are justified by our faith which comes as a gift from God; we understand that God comes to us with God's grace—to which we can only respond with gratitude.

Here's what we need to know:

- God is the author of our salvation.
 - There is nothing we can do to win our salvation.
 - There is nothing we can do to lose our salvation.
- We are still to do good works, but out of gratitude, not compulsion.

A pastor I know tells a story about learning to use a crosscut saw with his father. As Bryan and his father were sawing through a log that had a rotten core, a piece of wood sheared off that looked just like a horse's head. So Bryan took it home and then later on gave it to his dad as a present. He continues:

I attached a length of two-by-four board to that log head, attached a rope tail, and stuck on some sticks to act as legs. Then I halfway hammered in a dozen or so nails down the two-by-four body of that "horse," wrapped the whole thing in butcher block paper, put a bow on it, and presented it to my father. When he took off the wrapping, he smiled and said, "Thank you, it's wonderful ... what is it?"

"It's a tie rack, Dad," I said. "See, you can put your ties on those nails going down the side of the horse's body." My father smiled again and thanked me. Then he leaned the horse against his closet wall (because the stick legs could not keep it standing upright), and for years he used it as a tie rack.

Now, when I first gave my father that rotten-log-horse-head tie rack, I really thought it was "good." In my childish mind this creation was a work of art ready for the Metropolitan Museum. But as I matured, I realized that my work was not nearly as good as I had once thought. In fact, I understood ultimately that my father had received and used my gift not because of its goodness but out of his goodness.ⁱ

The Gospel lesson this morning is from the 22nd chapter of Matthew when the Pharisees question Jesus about money. "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the Emperor, or not?" Jesus tells them to "give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (22:15-22).

How do we determine what is God's?

What do you give to the father who keeps your rotten-log-horse-tie rack?
What do you give back to the source of everything you have, including salvation?

Legendary theologian, Mark Allio, answered the question of how to respond to God's love and grace last week.

Invest your time in the church.
Invest your money in the church.
Invest yourself in the church.ⁱⁱ

It is worth it. God is worth it. You are worth it.

Predestination. Justification. Foreordination. Election.
104 chapters of systematic theology.
95 theses.

And still it's the Apostle Paul that gives us all that we need to know:

*Who will separate us from the love of Christ?
Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ⁱ <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2013/november/3112513.html>

ⁱⁱ The Reverend Mark A. Allio. *Reformation 500: Priests Without Robes*, Mechanicsburg Presbyterian Church, October 5, 2017.