

All for Good

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.
(Romans 8:28)

As we begin our study of this powerful passage, we should observe that Paul does not say that God is the cause of all things. He states, rather, “*that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*” A great disparity exists between God causing all things (an idea found nowhere in Scripture) and God causing “*all things to work together for good*” for the New Testament believer. Yet, several individuals are accepting as truth the falsehood that God must cause all things to foreknow all things—foreknow meaning “to know beforehand.” We will address this error in more depth when we arrive at Romans 8:29-30.

What if we believed (were fully convinced) that God is capable of using everything that crosses our path, in fact, everything that occurs in space and time, “*for [our] good*”? Paul teaches this wonderful truth in Romans 8:28, truth relating to “*...those who are called according to His purpose.*” Would worry or anxiety hold a place in our lives should we adopt such a mindset? No way! We would perceive God as totally sovereign, freeing us to live and relax in a state of “*rest*” (Hebrews 4:9). Can you imagine the world’s perception of believers should the body of Christ fully embrace this truth? It would be amazingly different from its view of today!

Interestingly, the Revised Standard Version (the RSV) renders the verse:

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28 RSV)

This rendering communicates that God energizes “*those who love him,*” which lines up perfectly with passages such as 1Corinthians 3:9, 1Corinthians 15:10, and 2Corinthians 5:20. Either translation, therefore, is tremendous news for the passionate believer.

Note: As we continue, realize that Reformed theologians (extreme and hyper-Calvinists) conclude that Romans 8:28 validates their theological position—that God’s calling brings His elect to salvation (refer to the portion of the Reference Section that describes Reformed Theology, Diagrams 11, 13-15). According to this view, God not only determines (chooses/elects) from eternity past who will be justified/saved but calls them to Himself when He deems it time for them to be justified/saved—never calling the non-elect. The error of this theology will become obvious as we continue.

The word “*called*” in Romans 8:28 is the same Greek word (2822 in Strong’s Greek Dictionary) used in Matthew 22:14:

“For many are called [2822], but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:14)

Jesus’ words, when interpreted in the context of Matthew 22:1-13, confirm that more people are “*called*” (invited) than are “*chosen*” (elected)—verifying that some are

“called” (invited) who are not “chosen” (elected). Thus, should “called” point to God’s calling of the elect (and only the elect) to salvation (the Reformed view), Matthew 22:14 would teach that some of the elect of Reformed Theology whom God calls are never saved. Such an arrangement would dismantle their view of sovereignty, and in the process, negate their entire system of thought. Yet, this arrangement is demonstrated (and substantiated) in Matthew 22:14—verifying the inaccuracy of the Reformed view.

God calls (invites) individuals to be saved. In fact, He draws all people to Himself (John 12:32), not willing that any perish (1Timothy 2:4; 2Peter 3:9). They must, however, choose to accept Christ in the midst of their depravity before God bestows salvation. Let’s consider some Scriptures that seem to address this type of calling. We will label this “Calling #1”:

God is faithful, through whom you were called [2564 in Strong’s Greek Dictionary] into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1Corinthians 1:9)

And it was for this He called [2564] you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2Thessalonians 2:14)

Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called [2564], and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (1Timothy 6:12)

But the God of all grace, who hath called [2564] us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. (1Peter 5:10 KJV)

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called [2564] you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1Peter 2:9)

We, as New Testament believers, were “called” [invited] to be saved (1Corinthians 1:9; 2Thessalonians 2:14; 1Timothy 6:12; 1Peter 5:10; 1Peter 2:9)—pointing to “Calling #1.” However, these passages do not teach, especially when coupled with Matthew 22:1-14, that only the elect are called (invited). A person can be “called into fellowship with” Christ (1Corinthians 1:9), reject that offer, and never be chosen (elected). It takes repentance and faith on the part of the depraved, all of whom are called, before election results. Thus, the depraved who reject Christ are called (invited) to be saved but not elected (chosen).

Be aware that the word “called” in Scripture can mean: (1) “Invited” (invited to be saved), as has been confirmed, or (2) “Named” (named to an office or position that can be appreciated or ignored). “Calling #2” seems to be the prevalent usage in the Scriptures. John 1:42 is such an example:

He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called [2564] Cephas" (which is translated Peter). (John 1:42)

Jesus changed Peter's name from "*Simon*" to "*Cephas*," an Aramaic surname whose Greek equivalent is *Petros*, or Peter, meaning "a rock" or "stone." This name speaks volumes regarding Peter's office (position) to which he was "*called*" by the Messiah. The bestowal of this special office had nothing to do with Peter's destiny. He could either function in the office or live as though he had never been called to this privileged position.

Election transpires when the Holy Spirit places New Testament believers in Christ once they repent and exercise faith while depraved (1Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:4)—Christ being God's "*chosen [elect] one*" (Isaiah 42:1), Who was chosen (elected) to the office of Messiah—not chosen (or elected) to salvation. The depraved who exercise repentance and faith during the church age are "*crucified*" (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20) and made "*new*" (2Corinthians 5:17) in conjunction with being placed "*in Christ*." They are also endowed with a special office, or position, or gifting (1Peter 4:10) due to being part of Christ's body—Christ having been chosen to office rather than destiny. The Scriptures teach that all individuals are called to be saved (many of whom reject God's offer of salvation and remain lost). God's Word teaches as well that New Testament believers are "*called*" to an office, or purpose, or position, once they are placed in Christ subsequent to exercising personal repentance and faith while depraved—just as Jesus serves in the special office of Messiah. Let's take what we have gleaned (regarding "Calling #2") and apply it to specific men addressed in New Testament Scripture:

Paul was "*called as an apostle*," an office (position) he could welcome or disregard:

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called [2822] as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, (Romans 1:1)

Paul, called [2822] as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, (1Corinthians 1:1)

Paul was "*set...apart*" as an apostle from his "*mother's womb*" to receive this calling:

But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called [2564] me through His grace,... (Galatians 1:15—2564)

Keep in mind that Paul was "*set apart*" and "*called*" as an apostle, an office he could welcome or disregard. Hence, his calling had nothing to do with his eternal destiny. His destiny was determined when he exercised repentance and faith while depraved and was placed "*in Christ*" (2Corinthians 5:17) through the power of the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 12:13).

among whom you also are the called [2822] of Jesus Christ; (Romans 1:6)

If you are a believer, you were “called” to a unique office (position) as a result of being placed in Jesus, who received the greatest office of all—that of Messiah.

Luke 6:13 reveals the close connection between “called” and “named.” Judas, being one of the “twelve,” was “called” and “named” yet died void of salvation—confirming that the apostles were “called” (also “named”) to office rather than to destiny. They each had the option of either pursuing their calling or throwing it away:

And when day came, He called [4377] His disciples to Him; and chose twelve of them, whom He also named [3687] as apostles: (Luke 6:13)

Thus, Paul was “called [named] an apostle”:

For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called [2564] an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (1Corinthians 15:9)

1Corinthians 7:17 relates to this subject matter:

Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called [2564] each, in this manner let him walk. And thus I direct in all the churches. (1Corinthians 7:17)

This calling (in 1Corinthians 7:17) is the call to office (position), as verified by verses 20 and 24 as well:

Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called [2564]. (1Corinthians 7:20)

Brethren, let each man remain with God in that condition in which he was called [2564]. (1Corinthians 7:24)

Ephesians 4:1 provides insight and validation to our findings:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling [2821] with which you have been called [2564], (Ephesians 4:1)

The King James’ rendering of this verse greatly illuminates the legitimacy of our conclusions:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation [2821] wherewith ye are called [2564], (Ephesians 4:1 KJV—emphasis added)

The word “*calling*” in the NASB is rendered “*vocation*” in the KJV, again confirming that “*calling*” and “*vocation*” in this case are synonymous.

Colossians 3:15 defines “when” we were “*called*” to our special office, which lines up perfectly with our previous analysis:

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called [2564] in one body; and be thankful. (Colossians 3:15)

We, as New Testament believers, “*were called in one body*”—meaning that we were not “*called*” to our particular office (position) until we were placed into Christ’s “*body*” subsequent to exercising repentance and faith while depraved. This truth does not invalidate God’s call on our lives prior to salvation, for He calls all mankind to be saved, not desiring that any perish (1Timothy 2:4; 2Peter 3:9)—even though most reject His offer. Paul uses the pronoun “*you*” in Colossians 3:15 instead of “*we*” because the believers at Colosse were “*called*” to office once placed in Christ (after repenting and believing while depraved). Paul, on the other hand, was “*called*” to office from his “*mother’s womb*” according to Galatians 1:15—prior to being born. The exactness of the Scriptures is amazing!

Paul was “*set...apart*” to his office (of apostle) from his “*mother’s womb*” (Galatians 1:15)—prior to being saved. We, on the other hand, were “*called*” to our office once we were placed in Christ subsequent to repenting and believing while depraved. Paul’s experience, being quite unusual, does not violate the Scriptures, for Jeremiah was also uniquely called:

*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”
(Jeremiah 1:5)*

Jeremiah was “*consecrated*” as “*a prophet*” from his mother’s “*womb*”—an office (appointment) he could fulfill or disregard. Hence, his calling had nothing to do with where he would spend eternity. His destiny (like Paul’s) was determined by his own choice subsequent to physical birth and while depraved—not a choice God made from eternity past. (Our study, *God’s Heart as it Relates to Foreknowledge - Predestination*, addresses Jeremiah 1:5 in much greater depth—proving that Jeremiah’s call to office while in his mother’s womb in no way confirms Calvinism’s view of election to salvation from eternity past.)

That “*called*” can point to being “*called*” to an office is also verified by Hebrews 5:4:

And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called [2564] by God, even as Aaron was. (Hebrews 5:4)

The calling addressed here is Aaron’s call to the office of high priest—which, by no means, dictated where he would spend eternity. Hebrews 5:1 proves this fact by providing proper context:

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; (Hebrews 5:1)

Aaron was “*called*” (Hebrews 5:4), “*appointed*” (Hebrews 5:1), to the office of “*high priest*”—an office he could have welcomed or disregarded. This same truth applies to Abraham’s call:

By faith Abraham, when he was called [2564], obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. (Hebrews 11:8)

These events regarding Abraham occurred in Genesis 11-12. He was “*called*” to obey God by leaving his homeland, a calling he was free to ignore.

Additional passages could be cited, but ample Scriptural evidence has proven that the term “*called*” can mean “invited” as well as “named.” Interestingly, “named” (“named” to office) seems to be the more predominant usage in Scripture.

Yes, all people are “*called*” (invited) by God to become part of His family, but His invitation is rejected by the majority. However, once we repented and believed while depraved, the Holy Spirit placed us in Christ; and we were “*called*” (named) to a special office (position) within Christ’s body—an office we can welcome or disregard. An incredible journey awaits us as we function in the unique office He has bestowed!