

Shaped to the Image of Jesus

Thomas Robinson, *Embraced by a God of Love 6*, November 8, 2015

Romans 8:28-30

²⁸ And **we know** that

with those who love God,

he **works together** in all things **for good,**

with those who are called in accord with God's intention.

²⁹ For **from the start he knew** what they would be

and he **marked out** their profile **in advance**

that they would be **shaped like the image of his Son,**

in order that he might be **firstborn among many brothers and sisters.**

³⁰ And those whom he **marked out** he also **called,**

and those whom he **called** he also **justified,**

and those whom he **justified** he also **glorified.**

Romans 8:38-39

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Messiah Jesus our Lord.

Mark 12:29-30 Jesus quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

²⁹ Jesus answered, "The most important commandment is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'" [Deut 6:4-5]

1 Timothy 2:3b-4

³ ... God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Ephesians 3:8-11

⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to announce as good news for the (non-Jewish) nations the unsearchable riches of the Messiah (of Israel), ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰ in order that there might now be made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places through the church the manifold wisdom of God ¹¹ according to a purpose for the ages that he accomplished in the Messiah Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through his faithfulness.

Colossians 1:18

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

2 Corinthians 3:18

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

John 17:22-23

²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

The Great Vision of God's Grace

In these verses Rom 8 comes to a climax, leading to the great final exclamation of God's love.

Paul has led us from the distress of human weakness, delusion, and enslavement by sin through God's astonishing intervention not to condemn us but to destroy sin's power and free us from its deluding slavery. In Jesus and all he did and in the Spirit living in us, God has opened a way back to reality: Not humans on their own with little self-made gods but rather in close relationship with their creator and all the created world. Living freely in full humanity even now in a broken and frustrated world. Living with hope of God's life-giving renewal of his whole creation in which they share the glory God always intended for them.

This text is about God's grace and faithfulness and the astonishing creativity and commitment by which he brings freedom, reconciliation and life to his enslaved, deluded, rebellious human creatures when they had no power to save themselves. It's not about arbitrary power to control and determine things. Often it has been read that way (see the Puritan Westminster Confession 3:3-7, 1648). God certainly has power to control if he wants, but he chooses to give authentic freedom to us, calling us to freely given faith and love.

God's Intention, God's Love Across Ages

Thus Paul starts from loving God, the heart of God's ancient Torah, Jesus' greatest command.

It is that loving relationship that opens the process of God in everything working together with us, not against us or apart from us, but with us for what is genuinely good in our lives. Paul says *"those who love God"* are *"those who are called in accord with God's intention."* This has always been God's purpose, seen in the Torah for Israel, but open now to Gentiles in Rome. God has always wanted the love that is God's nature to be experienced and expressed by his creatures. But how do you do that for weak creatures slaves to delusion.

You can't force real love. But real love can be a response to love and shaped by example.

God's love is overflowing, self-giving, creative. He must show that love. It begins with Abraham and Israel (Exodus). But from the start God knew that God himself must give it shape and definition in his Son Jesus. The verb *pro-horizein*, often translated "predestine" has the basic meaning of drawing a defining line or shape in advance. That shape is Jesus.

He sends his unique Son, who teaches, serves, challenges, suffers, dies for us, and conquers death in resurrection life. Jesus shows God's image, so defaced in us. He woos us to God.

The aim is not power and control, but the creation of a great family of brothers and sisters, who share in Jesus' life, in all that Jesus has done, even in his conquest over death. At the same time the shape of Jesus is a challenge. To come to God, Jesus' shape marks the path.

The Path of Grace

But just as God does not choose power and control, so also Paul wants us to see clearly that we are not in control. We receive God's amazing love and grace. We respond with trust, but there is no part of this whole enterprise that we could have initiated or controlled.

The climax comes in the series of loaded words. Each tells a whole story of what God has done. God marks out the identity of this family by the shape of Jesus, God's own shape.

God calls people by the proclamation of what Jesus has done, what he means, what he gives.

God justifies people by drawing them into Jesus' own life, where no condemnation can stand.

God even glorifies them because they are in Jesus. Jesus is raised and we share in his glory.

It's God's work from start to finish. We are loved, reconciled, freed to be our true selves again.