

Our Eternal Comfort in Christ

✦ **bad turned to blessing (v.28)**

✦ **chosen by God for glory (vv.29,30)**

In the Name of Christ Jesus our living Hope, dearly redeemed brothers and sisters:

Years ago a skeleton was found chained to a wall in dungeon. During the Spanish Inquisition, you had to swear allegiance to the pope or lose everything. In spite of wrongful imprisonment this Christian did not die without hope. Scratched on the wall was a simple cross with the words: *“wide and long, high and deep”* – remembering Paul’s prayer for us: *“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”* (Ephesians 3:16–19 NIV84) Jesus was there in His brother / sister’s dying hour – alone, but not alone.

Look back over your life. Ever notice how God comforts you the most in the worst tragedies? He lights up His power and love during the darkest days. **Our Eternal Comfort in Christ** shines with...

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Worse than wrongful imprisonment by church and government would be if your family did it. You might remember a teenager in the Bible wrongfully imprisoned for attempted rape. His master’s wife had tried to seduce him, but the young man asked, *“How can I do this wicked thing and sin against God?”* He ran away, leaving his coat behind. He was there because his brothers had sold him into slavery. Remember his name? They knew him in Egypt because miraculously God enabled him to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams. His brothers had to travel to Egypt for food, but did not recognize him until he said, *“My name is Joseph.”* He took care of them. Years later after their father Jacob died, the brothers feared vengeance. *But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.”* (Genesis 50:19–21 NIV84) God *“saved [our] lives”* – physically, emotionally, spiritually by keeping His promise of a Savior alive through Jacob. **Bad turned to blessing** for us too!

What is your worst heartache? Greatest loss? Deepest sorrow? Maybe you’ve already seen how God **turned bad to blessing**. Maybe you need to ask God to open your eyes and heal your heart with this, the second most favorite Bible passage: *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* (Romans 8:28 NIV84)

When God says, *“all,”* He means *all*. No exceptions here. *God works* with infinite power and love as He did in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Without exception *“God works for the good”* – not always pretty, but infinitely practical, useful goodness as He frees you from guilt and shame. What could be more *“good”* than *“a harvest of righteousness and peace”* (Hebrews 12:11) as God plows and plants His Word into our hearts and lives? *“God works for the good of those love him.”* *“We love him because he first loved us.”* (1 John 4:19 KJV) We have been *“called according to his purpose,”* His plan. Some want to limit God’s plan to earthly success and money. But how quickly riches *“sprout wings and fly away.”* (Proverbs 23:5) **Our Eternal Comfort in Christ** is so much better. We are...

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Predestination in the Bible is always taught in context of comfort – spoken to Christians. Do you care whether this is true for you? Then God has already turned you around, i.e., converted you, **“for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”** (Philippians 2:13 NIV84) Paul could tell who were God’s elect, chosen ones, by how they accepted God’s Word. In another letter: **“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.”** (1 Thessalonians 1:4f NIV84) Even wanting to believe shows God is working on you. Stay focused on God’s Word, and He will build the conviction in you to know **“how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.”**

If you ask, “Why am I a believer?” God has a very comforting answer here that takes you back to before time began. He says, “In eternity, before I created time, I knew you by name and loved you.” Not because God saw anything good in us, for **“all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”** (Isaiah 64:6) But purely out of His goodness and grace God chose to make you the special object of His love. Literally, God **“foreknew”** you in the intimate knowledge Adam had of his wife Eve which produced children.

“Those God foreknew he also predestined....” He mapped out your life by setting boundaries and parameters to bring you to faith. Was it Christian parents or grandparents who brought you to the Word-powered water of Baptism? Was it Christian friends? Remember how some determined friends carried an invalid to Jesus? They dug through the roof of a crowded house to lower his mat in front of his Savior. Somehow God got you within earshot of His Word to hear the upward call of God to heaven.

“Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that [Jesus] might be the firstborn among many brothers.” God wants to change you in His family to be more and more like Jesus. So He adopted you in Baptism and then went to work on your heart and life. Gradually God is teaching you to live up to what you have already attained. He gave you full rights as sons in His family; now he wants you to act like it. This is the image of God restored. With Adam’s fall we lost God’s holiness, but it is regained by faith as we grow with Jesus. In our emotions – we feel as Jesus feels: anger at sin, compassion toward sinners, merciful, gracious, kind. In our intellect – we learn what Jesus learned: the truths of God’s Word and how to apply them to real life. In our will – we desire what God wants: “Thy will be done.” “What pleases God, that pleases me.”

Maybe it’s scary to hear that. Holy? My emotions, intellect and will are messed up. I still fall short. But again, **Our Eternal Comfort in Christ** is God’s work: **“And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified.”** God justified all people universally and objectively when He raised Jesus from the dead. (Romans 4:25) It’s as if He wrote out a check for everyone and signed it with the blood of Christ. Faith cashes that check for personal, subjective justification just for you. First, God removed your sin: **“You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”** (1 Corinthians 6:11 NIV84) Secondly, God credited you with Christ in a bank account He set up for you in heaven at your Baptism. All the holiness you need to get into heaven is yours. You are **“justified”** by God. Cash in on that blessing and live a life of hope in Him.

One remaining **Comfort** is in the past tense. Because God promised, it’s as good as done: **“Those he justified, he also glorified.”** This is the bottom line for God. He **foreknew, predestined, called and justified** you for one purpose: to bring you to glory. Exact details are still hidden: **“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”** (1 John 3:2 NIV84) Today it is enough to grow in your knowledge of **“how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.”** Our hope in good times and bad is based on the most favorite passage of the Bible. But that’s next week. Until then **Our Eternal Comfort** is all **in Christ** – from grace to glory. Amen.

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