

Christian Doctrine

All Things Work Together for Good

Rom. 8:28

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INTRODUCTION:

One of the most important lessons that you can learn with regard to your Christian life is how to handle the trials that inevitably will come your way because of your faith. Jesus explained in His parable of the sower that there are some who receive the word with joy, but their faith is only temporary. When affliction or persecution, because of the word, hits them, immediately they fall away.

Matthew 13:20-21 (NASB95)

²⁰ The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.

They did not expect affliction or understand how to handle it. They signed up for success, not suffering. They wanted prosperity, not persecution. So they fell away when the trials hit. It is during this time of suffering, that Satan, whom Peter describes as a roaring lion, seeks to devour you.

1 Peter 5:8-10 (NASB95)

⁸ Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. ¹⁰ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

So it is essential for your spiritual survival that you know and apply what the Bible teaches about trials.

Our passage of scripture this morning is a portion of one of the most quoted and claimed verses in the New Testament. It tells us that "**All things work together for good to those who love God**".

All Stand and Read Scripture

Romans 8:28 (NASB95)

²⁸ 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.

Prayer

What does it mean that all things work together for good?

Romans 8:28 is a source of great comfort when it is properly understood, but it is often misunderstood and misapplied. Some think that it teaches a positive outlook on our earthly life, that everything will turn out for our happiness in this life. But this denies or greatly minimizes the reality of suffering and evil. Romans 8:28 does not take an insensitive approach to our sufferings by saying: "Don't worry, be happy, your loss is not really so bad." That is because we **will** feel the pain of our sufferings. What it is saying is that we can know that God is in control and in the end we will experience the "good".

In the first part of chapter 8 Paul contrasts a life lived in selfish pursuits (which he refers to as the flesh) and one lived in accordance with God (which is the Spirit within us).

Romans 8:12-14 (NASB95)

¹² So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— ¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the **Spirit** you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, **these** are sons of God.

He impresses upon his readers that our sovereign God is all-knowing, all-wise, and all-powerful. Those who love God can trust His goodness, His power, and His will to work out all things for His good and for our good. We journey together with Him.

The promise that God works all things together for good does **not** mean that all things, taken by themselves, are good. Some things and events are decidedly bad. But God is able to work them **together** for good. He sees the big picture. He has a master plan.

Neither does the promise that God "**works all things together for good**" mean we will acquire all that **we** want or desire. Our passage in Romans 8:28 is about God's goodness and our confidence that His plan will work out as He sees fit. Since His plan is always good, Christians can take confidence that, no matter our circumstances or environments, God is active and will conclude things according to His good and wise design.

The fact that God works all things together for good means God's plan will not be derailed. In fact, we are part of His plan, having been "**called according to his purpose**".

To understand and apply this verse, we need to understand three truths:

BODY:

I. God is Able to Accomplish His Divine Purpose.

First, God **is** able to accomplish His divine purpose. This truth is foundational to the truth of Romans 8:28. If God does not have a purpose, then He could not work all things according to that purpose.

Some try to argue that God is not sovereign over the terrible things that happen in the world. So they try to get God off the hook for the evils in this world. When they do, they rob Romans 8:28 of its comfort for us in times of suffering.

ILLUSTRATION:

If a man is going to do anything of significance—build a house, found a company, or take a trip—he has a purpose and a plan to accomplish that purpose.

Likewise, it is unthinkable that the Sovereign God created the universe with no purpose or no plan to achieve His purpose. In fact, the Bible often affirms that God **does** have a purpose and it **cannot** be derailed.

In the oldest book of the Bible, after all his suffering, Job replies to the Lord:

Job 42:2 (NASB95)

² “I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.

Later, regarding God’s purpose to raise up Cyrus to free Israel from captivity, Isaiah cites the Lord as saying...

Isaiah 46:9b-11 (NASB95)

...For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, ¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’; ¹¹ Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country.

Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned *it*, *surely* I will do it.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:5 and 11 that God "**chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world**" and predestined us "**according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will**".

Thus God has an eternal purpose to glorify Himself by saving a people through His grace, so that **Christ** would be **preeminent** in all things. And nothing can derail His purpose.

This also means that sinful people are not able to derail God's purpose. So, rather than sinful people frustrating God’s purpose, God frustrates their purpose! This truth is all through the Bible, but let me give you two examples.

Consider the Old Testament account of **Joseph’s life**. Jacob favored Joseph, which caused his brothers to be jealous of him and hate him. They sold him into slavery in Egypt and lied to their father that a wild beast had killed him. Throughout his life, Joseph trusted God regardless of his circumstances. Joseph experienced plenty of bad things: kidnapping, slavery, false accusations, wrongful imprisonment, rejection, and famine. Despite all of the setbacks, Joseph continued to trust in God. While in Egypt, Joseph rose to a position of power but then he was unjustly imprisoned. While in prison, God gave him the ability to interpret dreams, and through that ability Joseph was once again raised to the position of second in command to Pharaoh. In that role, he was able to save his extended family during a long famine. He later explained to them...

Genesis 50:20 (NASB95)

²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

The sin of Joseph’s brothers did not derail God’s greater purpose for His people, but rather, allowed God's purpose to be fulfilled.

The **New Testament** tells of the greatest evil that has ever been committed, when sinful men **crucified** the sinless Son of God! But did these evil men, acting under Satan's influence, derail God's plan? No! The wicked men were responsible for their sin, but their sin **fulfilled** rather than **derail** God's plan. This means that no sinful person can alter God's purpose or plan for your life when you love the Lord.

ILLUSTRATION:

The person at work who lied about you and got you wrongfully fired may have altered **your** plans for the future, but it did not divert **God's** purpose for your life. The sinful mate who destroyed your marriage may have set you on a new course in life, but it did not ruin God's plan for your life. The drunk driver that injured **you** for life did not alter **God's** purpose for your life.

But this invokes the question, "If God is absolutely sovereign and our will is not totally free, then are we puppets or robots? Aren't we free to make choices for which we are responsible?" The Bible is clear that God is sovereign **and** people make choices for which they are responsible. We must affirm both. But the point is, no choice of the worst sinner, even of a man like Hitler, can derail God's purpose to save and glorify His people. Romans 8:28 only works if God has an eternal purpose that He is able to accomplish in spite of sinful people and their so-called "free will".

II. We are Called to Salvation by God Himself.

The second truth that we need to understand is that we are called to salvation by God Himself.

In our text, Paul describes those for whom God works all things together for good as "**those who love God, who are called according to His purpose.**"

Listen to how Paul explained it to Timothy.

2 Timothy 1:9 (NASB95)

9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,

Note that Romans 8:28 does **not** promise that all things work together for good for **all** people. It is not a verse for universal optimism. For those who hate God and are not called according to His purpose, the future holds condemnation and eternal punishment, if they do not repent. So the promise that God will work all things together for good is only for His elect, whom He purposes to save. Paul describes them in two ways:

A. The Promise is for Those Who Love God.

This is the human side of things, although God is behind it. None of us would love God if He had not first loved us. But when we heard the gospel, that, in love, God gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him has eternal life, we responded in faith so that **now** we love Him. He changed our hearts from being hostile toward God to wanting to please Him because we love Him.

Also, loving God in Rom. 8:28 is not a condition, but a description. In other words, Paul is not saying that as long as you really love God, He will work everything together for good for you, but if your love for God grows cold, He will not work everything for good. That would not be much comfort! Although at times our love for God may need reviving, it can still be said of every true Christian that we **do** love God. He is our chief treasure.

In a time of persecution, love for God (and His love for us) is the one thing that cannot be taken from us. This evil world can deprive us of our possessions. It can torture us and kill our bodies. But it cannot take our chief treasure.

B. The Promise is for Those Who are Called According to God's Purpose.

The promise is for those who love God and, secondly, also for those who are called according to God's purpose. This is the same group that loves God, but described from God's point of view. Paul adds this description so that no one will mistakenly think that his own love for God is the primary thing. Rather, our love for God stems from His sovereign calling of us.

How can you know whether God has called you? When you heard the gospel, that Christ died for sinners and that God offers forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who believe in Christ, did you believe? Did you come to Jesus? Did God change your heart? Did you change your heart to love God? Did you change from not caring about the Bible to treasuring it as God's very word? Did you forsake your sin and the excuses that you made for it, to now hating it and fighting against it? If so, then be assured that God is working all things together for good for you.

But, what does that mean? Are we supposed to view tragedies in our lives as good?

III. Salvation is Our Ultimate, Eternal Good.

"All things" includes the good things that God gives us, but it also includes "the sufferings of this present time" as found in verse 18 as well as "tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword" as found in verse 35.

It includes big catastrophes—tornadoes, tsunamis, wars, plane crashes, and terrible accidents. But it also includes the relatively minor frustrations of life—daily hassles, problems at work, car trouble, traffic jams, relational problems, and discouraging situations.

Does it include our sins? **Hear me carefully:** "Yes, in the sense that our sins cannot derail God's ultimate purpose of being glorified in our salvation and sanctification." But, we should **never** sin intentionally with the thought, "God will work it together for good for me." As **David's sin with Bathsheba** shows, sin **always** results in terrible consequences for us and for others. But if we have sinned and we repent and submit to God's loving discipline, He can use our sin to teach us not to trust in ourselves, as He did with Peter after his three denials of Christ.

We need to be clear that the bad things that happen to us are not good in and of themselves. We should not call them good or pretend that they are good. They are difficult to experience. If someone sinned against us, he has done us evil. The death of a loved one is hard. But in His gracious providence, God will work these terrible things together for our good as we submit to Him and trust in Him. He uses them to show us His grace and love in ways that we otherwise would not have known. He deepens our faith in

ways that we never would have learned, except for the trial. In all of it, He is working for our ultimate good, to conform us to the image of His Son (Jesus), who also learned obedience through the things that **He** suffered.

CONCLUSION:

Though we may carry heartaches to our graves, we know that an incomparable glory awaits us for all eternity. The bottom line is we can receive great comfort in the midst of trials.

Paul does not say, “and we **feel**,” or, “and we **hope**,” in the sense of uncertainty, but rather, “**and we know**” that God is working all things together for our good! Because He has an eternal purpose that includes our **salvation** and He will accomplish that purpose. He has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son, and nothing can change His sovereign will.

Paul’s life is another testament to how God works all things together for good. Paul suffered shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonment, murder attempts, temporary blindness, and more—all within God’s plan to spread the gospel. Through it all, God was steadfastly working to bring about good and glorious results through his life.

Philippians 4:11-13 (NASB95)

¹¹ Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹² I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. ¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

There is no comfort in the view that God is not sovereign over the terrible things that happen to us and the world around us. But there is great comfort in knowing that the sovereign God is working all things together for the good of His people. God always has the winning hand in everything that comes against Him and those who belong to Him. The Christian is assured that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love:

One final verse...

Romans 8:35-39 (NASB95)

³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written, “For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God will work all things together for the good of those who love Him. **Rest in that promise! Trust** that your current circumstances, whether comfortable or uncomfortable, are by God's will and in the end, if you remain faithful and love God, you will be rewarded.

What a Day That Will Be.