

Romans: The Good News of God

Five Unshakeable Convictions

Romans 8:28

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October 26, 2008

Five Unshakeable Convictions

Scripture

The first verse of the greatest chapter in the Bible—Romans 8:1—says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Everything else that follows in the rest of Romans 8 tells us *why* there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

There are a number of reasons why there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. First, because there is *no condemnation from the law* (8:1-4); second, because *we have been delivered from the flesh* (8:5-11); third, because *we are now the children of God* (8:12-17); fourth, because we have *the hope of future glory* (8:18-25); and fifth, because of *the intercession of the Holy Spirit* (8:26-27).

Today, we see a sixth reason why there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and it is because of *five unshakeable convictions*. We see this in Romans 8:28.

Now, if you have the *English Standard Version* of the Bible, you will notice at the bottom of the page a footnote that says, “Some manuscripts *God works all things together for good, or God works in all things for the good.*” I believe that this is a preferable translation for the reason I will explain shortly. The *New International Version* of the Bible captures this preferred translation:

²⁸ 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)

Introduction

“Freddy, I just need you to pray.”

These are the words from the trembling, tearful voice that re-

turned my greeting on a Wednesday afternoon as I answered my telephone. And then Ann, a member of our church family in State College, PA, said, “Dr. Streit just died!”

I was shocked. No words seemed appropriate. After learning some of the sketchy details that were available at that time, I prayed with Ann, hung up the phone, and just sat in my chair gazing into space—stunned by the news.

In the hours that followed word got out and our church family was surprised and shocked by the sudden death of Don Streit. Don was on the Engineering Faculty at Penn State University, an elder in his church, and extremely active in the community. He died instantly of a heart attack at the age of 46, leaving behind a wife and eight children between the ages of 6 and 16.

Many of you have received a similar phone call with the unexpected news of the death of a loved one. Just two weeks ago someone in our church family received news of a child’s suicide.

When news like that comes our way, we are often surprised and shocked. We cannot believe what we are hearing. And it is at times like these that we need our attention drawn to today’s text.

I want to focus your attention on one of the best-known texts in the entire Bible. I want you to be assured of the steadfastness of God’s love by reminding you of Romans 8:28 this morning.

Before I proceed, I should mention to you that over the years I have occasionally encountered Christians who have been critical of me for using this text as a comfort in a time of sorrow. I have come to believe that they are profoundly mistaken, because Romans 8:28 is in fact one of the greatest texts to assure us of God’s love and promise in the midst of the most difficult of providences.

We live in a world in which things go wrong. Pick up the newspaper any day of the week, and you will read of tragic accidents, deaths, murders, suicides, and so on. And, frankly, it so often seems to be about someone else. But, occasionally, that tragedy strikes close to home.

Where do you go when tragedy strikes? Where do you find comfort when difficulty comes? Where do you find hope in the

midst of trial?

For us as Christians, the answer is in God himself as he has revealed himself to us in his Word. And one of the most precious of all comforts is found in this text. Romans 8:28 can shelter our souls in the midst of a violent storm. It is a text that can give comfort and hope in the midst of *any* difficulty or trial. I love what Bible commentator John Stott says about Romans 8:28. He says that Romans 8:28 is “like a pillow on which to rest our weary heads.”

Romans 8:28 begins with the words, “**And we know.**” Verse 22 also begins with the words, “For we know.” In the space of seven verses Paul makes two assertions about what **we know** as Christians. Verse 22 is about the groaning of creation, and verse 28 is about God’s providential love and care for his own.

Yet there are many other things we do not know. For example, in the middle of these two assertions of Christian knowledge Paul says in verse 26b, “For we do *not* know what to pray for.”

In fact, we are caught in a continuous tension between what **we know** and what we do not know. There are some things about which we have clear knowledge, and yet there are also things about which we have no knowledge. And sometimes, we confuse the two!

Lesson

Nevertheless, in Romans 8:28 Paul lists five truths about God’s providence that **we know**. So, let us observe five unshakeable convictions that **we know** concerning God’s providence.

I. We Know That God Works (8:28c)

The first unshakeable conviction we know concerning God’s providence is that God works. Paul says, “And we know that in all things **God works. . .**” (8:28c). That is, God is at work in our lives.

The *English Standard Version* of Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that for those who love God *all things work together for*

good. . . .” This translation should be rejected, since all things do not automatically work themselves for our good. However, we could accept this translation if, as commentator Doug Moo says, “it is the sovereign guidance of God that is presumed as the undergirding and directing force behind all the events of life.”

William Carey, often called the Father of Modern Missions, faced a ministry disappointment of overwhelming proportions. Carey began his missionary career to India in 1793. He labored in that country for 40 continuous years, never once returning to his native England. Carey was a prodigious translator, translating portions of Scripture into over a dozen Indian languages.

One afternoon, after 20 years of plodding labor in that country, a fire raged through his printing plant and warehouse. All of his printing equipment was destroyed, but most tragically, many of his precious manuscripts were completely consumed by the fire. Of course, Carey had no computer back-up files or Xerox masters. Twenty years of nonstop labor were gone within a few hours.

How would he respond to this crushing devastation? William Carey wrote to his friend, Andrew Murray, in England:

The ground must be labored over again, but we are not discouraged. . . . We have all been supported under the affliction, and preserved from discouragement. To me the consideration of the divine sovereignty and wisdom has been very supporting. . . . I endeavored to improve this our affliction last Lord’s day, from Psalm 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God.” I principally dwelt upon two ideas: God has a sovereign right to dispose of us as he pleases. We ought to acquiesce in all that God does with us and to us.

Carey understood that it is not *all things* but rather **God** who is at work in our lives. God is, as John Stott observes, “ceaselessly, energetically and purposefully active on our behalf.”

The first unshakeable truth that we should know is that God is at work in this world. It is his world. He is the Creator. He is the Sustainer. He is in providential control of all things.

If you are a Christian, you must not have a fatalistic view of

the world. You must know that God is at work in this world—even when it doesn't seem as if he is.

II. We Know That God Works for the Good of His People (8:28d)

The second unshakeable conviction we know concerning God's providence is that God works for the good of his people. Paul says, "And we know that in all things God works **for the good** of those who love him. . . ." (8:28d).

The Bible teaches us that God is good, and that all his works are expressions of his goodness that are intended to promote his people's good (2 Chronicles 7:3; Psalm 25:8).

The famous blind songwriter Fanny Crosby wrote more than 8,000 hymns. Warren Wiersbe revealed this and other interesting facts of the life of Fanny Crosby in one of his books.

Wiersbe wrote that when Fanny Crosby was only 6 weeks old a minor eye inflammation developed. The doctor who treated her was careless though, and she became totally and permanently blind. Fanny Crosby harbored no bitterness against the physician, however. In fact, she once said of him, "If I could meet him now, I would say thank you, over and over again for making me blind."

She felt that her blindness was a good gift from God to help her write the hymns that flowed from her pen. According to those who knew her, Fanny Crosby probably would have refused treatment even if it could have assured the restoration of her sight.

Fanny Crosby understood that God works for the good of his people. She understood that he allowed her to go blind for her good, to make her *better* instead of *bitter*.

This does not mean that God's good is what we think is our good. We may think that it would be good, for example, if we had certain material things, and they may perhaps be good in and of themselves. But God's good, which is the purpose of all his providential dealings with us, is for our ultimate well-being.

We must believe that God is at work for our good. We may

not understand how things will work for our good, but we must believe that God is, according to this text, at work for our good.

III. We Know That God Works for the Good of His People in All Things (8:28b)

The third unshakeable conviction we know concerning God's providence is that God works for the good of his people in all things. Paul says, "And we know that **in all things** God works for the good of those who love him. . . ." (8:28b).

God works for the good of his people not merely in the good things or the indifferent things but **in all things**. That includes the sufferings of verse 17 as well as the groanings of verse 23. And so, as commentator Anders Nygren says, "Thus all that is negative in this life is seen to have a positive purpose in the execution of God's eternal plan." There is *nothing* that is beyond the scope of his sovereign decrees.

A group of men were carrying on a conversation. One of them remarked that he had learned to recognize that God works for the good of his people **in all things**.

"Would you believe," he said, "that a little thing like a pair of socks changed the entire course of my life?"

"I can hardly believe that," replied another man.

"Well, it's true! Once I planned to take a trip with some of my friends on a canal boat, but two days before we intended to leave, I injured my foot while chopping wood. It was only a small cut, but the blue dye in the homemade socks I wore poisoned the wound, and I was compelled to stay at home. While my friends were on their journey, a powerful preacher came to our town to hold evangelistic meetings. Since I didn't have anything else to do, I decided to attend. The message touched me deeply, and as a result, I was converted to Christ. Afterward I saw that I needed to change my life in many ways. New desires and purposes took hold of me. I determined also to seek an education, for I trusted that this would enable me to live more usefully for my Lord."

The man who made these comments was none other than the former President of the United States—James A. Garfield!

We often do not *understand* what God is doing **in all the things** that happen to us. A spouse dies. A loved one is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. A parent gets cancer. A child is discovered using drugs. A friend turns against us. A car breaks down.

While we often do not *understand* how God is working for our good **in all things**, we must *believe* that God *is* working for our good **in all things**. That is what it means to trust God.

IV. We Know That God Works for the Good of Those Who Love Him (8:28e)

The fourth unshakeable conviction we know concerning God's providence is that God works for the good of those who love him. Paul says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good **of those who love him**. . ." (8:28e).

This is a necessary limitation. Paul is not expressing a general, superficial optimism that everything tends to everybody's good in the end. No, if the good, which is God's purpose, is our completed salvation, then its beneficiaries are his people who are described as **those who love him**. In other words, Paul is limiting the truth of this verse to Christians *only*.

We are reminded here of something that is emphasized everywhere in the Bible. There is only one real division of humanity ultimately. We are on one side or the other of this dividing line, and all other divisions and distinctions are finally irrelevant. This statement is true only of **those who love** God, that is, for Christians.

As for those who are not Christians the Bible tells us plainly that all things do not work for the good of them. They, the Bible tells us, are under "the wrath of God" (1:18). Paul has already warned us in Romans 1:18 that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." That is the present

position of non-Christians before God. Whatever else may be true of those who do not love God, however happy and prosperous they may be, however much the sun may seem to be shining on their heads, the terrible fact remains that they are all presently under the wrath of Almighty God.

Until the Lord returns, all of us will die. A sudden death, like Don Streit's death, must be a sober reminder to all of us to examine our position before God. Don had no history of illness. He had absolutely no idea that when he went to his Department's picnic that instead of going to his earthly home with his wife and children after the picnic he would instead go to his heavenly home with God before the day was done. It was so quick. It was so unexpected. It was so unplanned.

But despite his death, the good news is that Don was ready. Don loved God. He had a clear and compelling testimony before the watching world that Jesus Christ was his Lord and Savior. And while we grieved that he was so suddenly and tragically struck down in death, we nevertheless had confidence that he was now in the presence of God because he loved God. God's good purposes for Don's life had now been brought to fruition in bringing him home to heaven.

You must ask yourself today: "Am I ready to die? Is God working for my good because I love him? Or, am I presently under the wrath of God? Where would I go if I were to die?"

Children, do you love God? Don't say that you have a long life ahead of you and that you will make up your mind about God later in life. You don't know when you will die.

Few people plan to die. Most of us do not know the time when we will die. I urge to be ready for death when it strikes.

And the only way to be ready for death is to respond to God's grace and love in faith and repentance. You must turn from your sin in repentance. You must put your faith in Jesus Christ alone. And then, and only then, can you be assured of God's steadfast love for you.

V. We Know That God Works for the Good of Those Who Have Been Called According to His Purpose (8:28f)

The fifth and final unshakeable conviction we know concerning God's providence is that God works for the good of those who have been called according to his purpose. Paul says, "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**" (8:28f).

Our love for God is in fact a sign of God's prior love for us. The reason we love God is because he first loved us (1 John 4:10). Because he first loved us, we **have been called according to his purpose**. And we then responded in love to his love and calling. But it first begins with God's love and calling to us.

Garrison Keilor, of *Prairie Home Companion* renown, recalls the childhood pain of being chosen last for the baseball team in his account of Lake Wobegon:

The captains are down to their last grudging choices: a slow kid for catcher, someone to stick out in right field where nobody hits it. They choose the last ones two at a time—"you and you"—because it makes no difference. And the remaining kids—the scrubs, the excess—they deal for us as handicaps. "If I take him, then you gotta take him," they say.

Sometimes I go as high as sixth, usually lower. But just once I'd like Darrel to pick me first and say, "Him! I want him! The skinny kid with the glasses and the black shoes. You, c'mon!" But I've never been chosen with much enthusiasm.

Do you ever think about the fact that God chose you early—and with enthusiasm! Paul says in Ephesians 1:4: ". . . even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him."

God has loved you and called you from before the foundation of the world. God has a redemptive purpose in all that he does. And everything that then happens in this life is working out **according to his purpose**. Therefore, we should, with John Stott, be

convinced as Christians that “life is not the random mess which it may sometimes appear.”

Conclusion

These are the five unshakeable convictions about God which, Paul writes, **we know**. We do not always understand what God is doing, let alone welcome it. Nor are we told that he is at work for our comfort. But we know that in all things he is working towards our supreme good. And one of the reasons we know this is that we are given many examples of it in Scripture.

For example, Joseph was cruelly sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. But, this was Joseph’s conviction which he said to his brothers after many years of hardship and suffering: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20).

Similarly, God said through the prophet Jeremiah to the Jews in Babylon after the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

And finally, the most significant expression of God’s sovereign providence in our human affairs occurs in Jesus’ death on the cross. The sinless Son of God went to the cross according to “the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23) in order that he might save his people for their sins (Matthew 1:21). God used the most heinous, tragic act in human history for our good.

And if God did that for us in the death of his Son, then we can cling to these five unshakeable convictions **we know** concerning God’s providence in Romans 8:28: “**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.**” Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAAYER:

O Lord our God, we thank you for these five unshakeable convictions.

We know that in all things you work for the good of those who love you, who have been called according to your purpose.

Help us to cling to these precious words in a time of unexpected sorrow. May these words be to us like a pillow on which to rest our weary heads.

And in all circumstances may we grow in trust and dependence upon you.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.