

Romans

Romans Chapter Eight

Romans 8:28 {1}

January 16, 2011

This is lesson number 73 in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

The Theme of the Letter

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God** is **revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ” Romans 1:16-17

“All Things Work Together For Good”

Romans 8:28-30

28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

We have been looking at the assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Romans Chapter Eight gives to the church its basis for the absolute assurance that the person who is justified {5:1; declared not guilty}, by the blood of Jesus {3:25; propitiation}, faces no condemnation {8:1}; and will be finally glorified {8:30}.

Paul’s argument runs from God’s sovereign choice of His people from before the foundation of the world, to their calling, justification, and regeneration in this present time, through any and all possible sufferings.

Even death does not make void God’s promise that His children will be raised from the dead in a new body and that they will be glorified and live forever as joint-heirs with Christ.

Paul is building to a crescendo of praise to God at the end of Chapter Eight.

It is Jesus Christ who makes intercession for us:
“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

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Let's see what **Romans 8:28** says to and about the child of God.

Verse 28 serves as a summary of verses 1-27. In fact, you cannot correctly understand Romans 8:28 unless you have a correct knowledge of what verses 1-27 teach.

And so the Holy Spirit gives a comforting summary of verses 1-27.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

You have, no doubt, heard ignorant people quote the first part of this verse and try to make it apply to every kind of situation for all kinds of people, no matter whether the person involved is saved or lost.

E.g., a heathen loses his job and some well-meaning but ignorant person says, "Don't worry, the Bible says 'All things work together for good.' "

But dear soul, if that man who lost his job is not a Christian, all things are working together for his condemnation in hell and that will not be 'good!'

There are only **two classes** of people in the world: those **who love God**, and those **who hate God**. The unsaved person still has a carnal mind, he still minds things of the sinful nature, and he hates God {8:7}.

It is important to note that Paul **does not say**, "**And we know that all things work together for good to those who** 'claim to be believers and have their name on a church membership list.' "

No, it is to those who love God! Those who love God are the children of God. And 'those who love God' have been defined in verses 1-27.

We have explained how Paul defines the Christian in Chapter Eight and so we need to move on now with verse 28.

Some commentaries discuss whether the correct translation of this first phrase should be, "All things work together for good?"
Or is it, "God works in all things for good?"

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It doesn't seem to make any difference because God controls the circumstances of 'all things'. Changing the translation only makes a difference if you believe that God does not control everything.

Also, there are commentaries, which make a distinction between 'all things are working,' and 'all things work **together**.'

The distinction they try to make seems to be that in the context of the promised glorification that it is the **final end** that is in view and not **every detail** of the believer's life. There are some things, they say, that God doesn't care to control.

But Jesus says that '**the very hairs of our head are all numbered**,' meaning that there is no detail of our life that is not under God's control, I accept the view that 'all things work together,' that **every detail** of the believer's life **work together for good**.

'All things' includes not only what we consider 'good' but also especially the adversities and the afflictions are somehow working for the good of God's dear children according to His purpose.

The Amplified Bible is a good translation with some enhancement:

28 We are assured and know that [God being a partner in their labor] all things work together and are [fitting into a plan] for good to and for those who love God and are called according to [His] design and purpose.

And we know that all things work together for good

Now "All things" are not **inherently good**.

Don't fall into the false notion that suffering itself is 'good.'

Neither is a sinful act 'good'; sinful acts are sin!

That kind of thinking can lead to the idea that we should enjoy and desire suffering in a 'martyr complex,' or that somehow we can continue in sin; 'antinomianism', and it will be 'good.'

Lloyd-Jones relates an illustration that helps us to think correctly about how **good** things and **bad** things can work together.

Imagine that you open the back of a watchcase. This is an old windup watch that has escape wheels and gears and springs and a big hand and a little hand, and it doesn't need a battery.

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What you will see are some wheels and cogs that turn in one direction and other wheels and cogs that turn in the opposite direction. How can this confusion of motion result in any good? The person who made this thing must be insane!

But the man who made the watch had a **design** for it and he put a mainspring in it that guides what seems to be contradictory motion to a good result. You can tell time with this thing. "All things do work together for good."

So sin itself is not a 'good' thing. And we dare not presume on the grace of God or we will be found out at the Last Day to be a hypocrite and deceived.

There was a lot of ignorant religious talk immediately after the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and at the Pentagon and in that field in Pennsylvania that said that God had nothing to do with it.

A 'good God,' they said, would not cause such a terrible thing.

But God can and does bring about bad things.

Isaiah 45:6-7

6 That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting
That there is none besides Me.

I am the LORD, and there is no other;

7 I form the light and create darkness, [was it dark before God created light?]

I make peace and create calamity;

I, the LORD, do all these things.' NKJV

I make peace and create evil; KJV

I bring prosperity and create disaster; NIV

I make weal and create woe; RSV

I am the one who sends good times and bad times; NLT

God creates the evil consequences of sin but He controls the evil and uses the bad to promote the final glory and good of His people.

Would God use a terrorist attack to get the attention of a nation that kills babies for convenience? I believe that God is calling America to repentance.

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Now approaching ten years America has not changed toward God; rather she has moved further away.

REPENT AMERICA! TURN from evil!
Stop trying to deny God in every aspect of public life!

Apart from the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus, there is perhaps no better example in the Bible of how God brings good out of evil than the story of Joseph and his wicked brothers. You all know the story of how Joseph's brothers were jealous of him because he was a dreamer and he was Jacob's favorite son. They plotted to kill him but instead they sold him into slavery. Joseph, in God's providence, became the ruler of Egypt, second only to the pharaoh. When the famine was at its worst Jacob sent Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy grain. You know the story. When Joseph's brothers learned that this powerful ruler was the brother they had sold into slavery they were terrified that he would take revenge on them. What did Joseph say?

Genesis 50:15-21

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." 16 So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, 17' Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you." Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

18 Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants."

19 Joseph said to them, " Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. 21 Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph understood the providence of God: **for am I in the place of God?**
And he {Joseph} comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Are you comforted by the knowledge that God is in control of everything?

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God,

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There is a connection between verse 28 and verse 26 that should comfort us.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God,

26 ... For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought,

We know the final outcome but we do not know the details. We know that all things work together for good but we do not know how to pray, as we ought, because we do not know the details.

That gets at the very heart of the real problem that most people have in dealing with suffering and tragedy. They want to know the WHY of the matter right NOW! They want to know right NOW what God is doing!

That was the problem with Job and his friends. They believed in immediate cause and effect. They believed in what is called 'retribution theology.' Job, his friends said, was suffering because he had sinned. Job knew that he had not sinned and he complained to God. Job and his friends did not know that God had allowed Satan to attack Job and his family in order to make Job curse God. Job did not understand the 'why,' but he never quit God.

So child of God, in our ignorance we groan. But the Holy Spirit is with us and He helps us carry the burden.

The Holy Spirit gives us this comfort.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God,

Our Lord Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, said:

Matthew 6:25-27

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? NIV

Now I am not saying that suffering is to be enjoyed.

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The Bible tells the believer that he will suffer and to not be surprised by suffering. The Spirit of God assures the child of God that God can be trusted.

We **don't need to know** the WHY right NOW because God is taking care of that for us. Only God knows the end from the beginning

Isaiah 46:8-11

**8 "Remember this, and show yourselves men;
Recall to mind, O you transgressors.
9 Remember the former things of old,
For I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like Me,
10 Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things that are not yet done,
Saying, ' My counsel shall stand,
And I will do all My pleasure,'
11 Calling a bird of prey from the east,
The man who executes My counsel, from a far country.
Indeed I have spoken it;
I will also bring it to pass.
I have purposed it;
I will also do it.**

NKJV

There are a couple of lines in Psalm 119 that instruct us on how to think of suffering.

**Psalm 119:67
Before I was afflicted I went astray,
But now I keep Your word.**

Sometimes God uses suffering and affliction to get our attention.

**Psalm 119:71
It is good for me that I have been afflicted,
That I may learn Your statutes.**

Are we learning anything?

So far we have only looked at the first part of verse 28.

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This well-known and often misapplied verse has **two important qualifying phrases**:

“to those who love God, [defined as] to those who are the called”

and “according to His purpose.”

The first qualifying phrase:

Those who love God? Who loves God?

No one can truly love God but those who are the called.

to those who are the called ; we love Him because He first loved us...

We need to understand how the word ‘called’ and ‘calling’ is used in NT.

There is a General calling; that is a general call of the Gospel.

We are commanded to preach the Gospel to every creature.

“Many are called but few are chosen.” Matthew 20:16; 22:14

But there is the effectual call:

This effectual call is illustrated in:

Acts 18:7-11

7 And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.8 Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

9 Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; 10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city."11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

All the other uses of ‘call’ and ‘calling’ refer to an effectual call. God calls and men respond because the Holy Spirit has made them alive.

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Some examples:

Rom 1:1-6

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God ² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, ³ concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴ *and* declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. ⁵ Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, ⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

Rom 9:22-24

²² *What* if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴ *even* us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Rev 17:14

These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those *who are* with Him *are* called, chosen, and faithful."

The second qualifying phrase is: "... according to His purpose."

I plan to deal more fully with God's purpose in another lesson but I will leave you with this today.

In July 2002 at the Southern Baptist Founders Conference at Samford University in Birmingham, Erroll Hulse related an incident that happened at a Bible Conference in Ashland, KY over forty years ago.

As the account goes, Rolfe Barnard who was a visiting evangelist asked a young preacher to stand up and quote Romans 8:28. So this young preacher stood up and quoted, "**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God,**" and he sat down.

Brother Barnard then asked the young preacher if he knew the rest of that verse. Well he did, and so he stood up again and quoted the entire verse. **And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**

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Brother Barnard told that young preacher that he should never enter a pulpit to preach again until he learned what 'purpose' means.

After Brother Hulse finished his message, and during the break, I got to where he was seated and asked him if he knew Henry Mahan. He slapped his thigh and shouted, "You knew who I was talking about!"

That's a true story and it makes a very necessary point.

What the evangelist was saying to that young preacher is that you don't know the gospel or how God saves sinners until you understand that God is a God of purpose.

How can anyone study the Book of Romans, or Ephesians, or the rest of the Bible for that matter and not see that God is sovereign over His creation, especially in the salvation of sinners?

A man may be full of sinful pride and hate the doctrine of election but an honest reading of Romans says that salvation is entirely of God's mercy and grace and salvation {justification} has absolutely nothing to do with man's so-called 'free-will.'

A man may not believe in election and predestination and that 'salvation is of the Lord' but he cannot honestly say that Romans does not teach that.

That's coming up in Chapter Nine.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Do you love God?

Do you love the God who does everything "according to His purpose"?

He is the God with whom we have to do!

Sinner, come to Jesus!